

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11TH JANUARY 2006**

**MINUTES
(18.00 – 20.40 PM)**

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

APOLOGIES Councillors Forbes, Mrs Ledeux
Messrs T Sygerycz and G Howard

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Deputy (Performance and Support Services)
Deputy (Exchequer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Hale declared an interest in agenda item 9 Annual Review of the Council's Conditional Offers of Grant 2005/06 as a Director of Everyman Theatre and as a Borough Council representative on the Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors Neighbourhood Project. Councillor Mrs Driver also declared an interest in this item as a Borough Council representative on the Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors Neighbourhood Project and Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project and her involvement with Cheltenham, Cirencester and Tewkesbury Citizens Advice Bureau

2. CO-OPTION (Agenda Item 3)

In introducing this item the Chairman explained that following on from the previous meeting, nominations had been received from the Cheltenham Federation of Tenants for a non-voting co-opted member to the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a substitute.

RESOLVED that the following representatives of the Cheltenham Federation of Tenants and Leaseholders be co-opted onto the Committee:-

- 1) Mrs Lorna Steers – Co-opted Member
- 2) Mr Stephen Packer – Substitute

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 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 7)

The Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection) indicated that he had no specific briefing on this occasion however had attended in case Members had any questions relating to his portfolio.

Councillor Mrs Regan asked the Deputy whether he was aware that following police initiatives to resolve issues regarding youths in Charlton Kings the associated problems had now been transferred to the Warden Hill area. She indicated that she had contacted the local Police Inspector and informed the Council's Community Safety Officer and asked the Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection) whether she could count on his support in helping to resolve this issue. In response the Deputy indicated that both wards came under the same police inspectorate area, therefore the issues were likely to be raised at the next Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. He explained that it would be for the Chief Superintendent to decide whether it was appropriate to move resources. The Deputy noted Councillor Mrs Regan's concerns and undertook to provide as much support as he could within his powers and let her know in due course what the police intended to do about it.

The Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing) referred to an issue raised at the last meeting regarding incorrect forms being sent out by the Licensing Section. She explained that in the last minute flood of applications there had been much confusion about the type of form required for certain licences and in the majority of cases the incorrect form had been requested in the first instance.

The Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing) indicated that following a challenging period dealing with late applications and rolling out the new licensing system, the situation was slowly beginning to settle down and the last Licensing Sub-Committee had been cancelled because the terms to operate had been successfully negotiated with the applicant. Reports from the police indicated that the level of crime was down over the Christmas period in comparison to the same period in the previous year.

The Chairman pointed out that there had been a number of incidents of vandalism over this period in the Montpellier and Bayshill Road area and queried whether this type of crime had been included in the figures. In response the Deputy clarified that the figures related to violent crimes.

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) indicated that he had no specific briefing on this occasion. The Chairman referred to the proposals for regeneration at St Pauls and asked if the Deputy would confirm if and when rebuilding in St Pauls, the land would be given to Housing Associations and taken out of CBH control. In response, the Deputy confirmed that **if** the Council was to work in partnership with the Housing Associations then these properties would be owned by the HAs. However the desired outcome was to achieve a revised tenure mix of private housing and new affordable homes owned by Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations), the Council and private landlords for both rent and shared ownership. He acknowledged that some council tenants were reluctant to transfer to Housing Associations because of concerns regarding tenure transfer and confirmed that these issues and nomination rights would be fully considered and negotiated as part of the next stage of the process. Based on their current good performance the Council was keen to retain Cheltenham Borough Homes as managing agents of HA owned properties as far as was possible.

The Chairman presumed the Committee would be kept informed of progress in due course. In response the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) explained that the intention was for the Environment Overview and Scrutiny to be given an update at its next meeting. He indicated that nothing had been decided yet but any redevelopment would be phased following consultation with local tenants. The Deputy suggested that it may be appropriate to consider holding a joint meeting of the Environment and Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committees to look at the options following the consultation process.

Councillor Allen commented that the Lifeline Service had not been transferred as part of the regeneration scheme which had taken place at Hester Way and asked that this be considered as part of the process. The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) clarified that this was nothing to do with the regeneration scheme but as a result of the reduction in the Supporting People Grant and the subsidy given to the service.

There was some discussion around the student population in the St Paul's area and it was suggested that the University of Gloucestershire should also be involved in the consultation process.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Hale, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) confirmed that the Council had a duty to re-house secure tenants. A number of people had already indicated that they wanted to move elsewhere in the town so it should therefore be possible to re-house residents wishing to remain in the area although this could not be guaranteed.

In response to a question from Mrs Kitchin, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) explained that the desired tenure balance could be made up of social housing and leasehold or freehold private properties depending on negotiations, design and planning permission. Where existing tenants had specific housing needs it would be possible to have houses designed for their needs.

The Chairman indicated that St Paul's Regeneration was a very important issue and of high public interest. She welcomed the concept of a joint meeting with Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, particularly as the previous one had been successful.

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) referred to the question raised by the Chairman at the last meeting relating to the catering contract and the catering needs of minority ethnic

users of Council facilities. She introduced Mr Simon English, the Catering Manager of Redcliffe Caterers for a response.

Simon English explained that company policy was to be as inclusive as possible and Redcliffe were happy to work with the families, drawing in expertise to accommodate the requirements of ethnic minorities, if necessary. However, the company had entered into a 3 – 5 year exclusivity contract with the Council for the provision of catering at the Town Hall and the Pittville Pump Room, which did not provide for the public providing their own food at the venues.

The Chairman commented that surely profits would not be affected if one or two families with specialist requirements provided their own catering? In response, Simon English confirmed that the issue was about food hygiene, not profit and in this scenario if for example there was a case of food poisoning it was the reputation of the company that was at stake as the Council's appointed suppliers even if it had not actually provided the food on that occasion. He reiterated that Redcliffe would, however, be quite happy to talk directly to the families or community representatives with a view to meeting their requirements. In response to a further question from the Chairman, Simon English confirmed that Redcliffe was 18 months into the current contract.

The Chairman thanked Simon English for attending the meeting.

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) referred to the questions raised by the Chairman at the last meeting relating to charges for Cheltenham and District Sports Association for the Disabled for use of swimming facilities at Leisure@ and provided the response outlined in Appendix A.

The Chairman referred to the Deputy's response and her answer to a similar question at the last Council meeting which suggested that the opportunity was available for CDSAD to apply to the Community Services Division for funding and commented that this was simply passing the responsibility from one Division to another. She was concerned that in the last budget round the Council had agreed to delete the annual small grants round thus reducing opportunities for funding and asked for this case to be discussed further.

In response, the Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) pointed out that a subsidy of £50 an hour for exclusive use had already been given to CDSAD by Leisure@.

The Chairman indicated that facilities for the disabled at Leisure@ had again been highlighted at the meeting of the Disability Forum and it was suggested that one of the members who was deaf, blind and in a wheelchair should be taken around the facilities by a member of staff to act in an advisory capacity.

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) reported on the following:-

- Monday was the launch of the Play Policy adopted by Cabinet in December 2005, at the Civil Service Club which was well attended. The purpose was for the partners to discuss the terms of reference for the new Play and Free time Forum and to work up the joint bids for the Big Lottery of which Cheltenham has been allocated £217K for play and free time.
- It was good to see that Leisure@ now had a full senior management team in place. The sport, health and fitness pages of the website had recently been updated and a Newsletter was being issued quarterly.

- Good news - Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum has become one of the first museums in the South West to be awarded Fully Accredited Status under the Museums Libraries and Archives Council's new Accreditation Scheme for Museums.

The Chairman thanked all the Deputies for their attendance at the meeting.

7. PERFORMANCE UPDATE (Agenda item 11)

The Deputy (Performance and Support Services) introduced this report which had been circulated separately from the agenda. The report summarised performance matters relevant to the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period up to mid December 2005 at a time when it was still possible to take remedial action where performance shortfalls were evident. The Deputy (Performance and Support Services) explained that a similar report was due to be considered by both the Environment and Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any feedback on the approach taken to performance reporting would be welcomed from Members.

The Deputy (Performance and Support Services) indicated that the overall picture presented by this report was positive, both for performance indicators and business plan actions. He indicated that whilst some performance matters crossed over the work of the Committees the following were technically within the remit of the Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee and would therefore feature as part of that Committee's performance updates in future:-

- Action 6D2
- Action 6F1
- Action 6A1

In response to a question from Councillor Allen, the Assistant Director (Community Services) clarified that the number of Lifeline customers was the number of people signed up to the scheme as opposed to the number of people using it.

Councillor Mrs Holliday took the opportunity to comment that based on her recent experience, Lifeline was a fantastic service particularly in terms of installation and explanation.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report and the performance levels set out within.

8. INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS 2006/07 (Agenda item 8)

The Deputy (Exchequer) referred Members of the Committee to the Interim Budget Proposals 2006/07, which had been approved by the Cabinet on 20th December 2005 for consultation, and circulated separately. He indicated that the first time he had undertaken this exercise in 2004/05, the council had faced a large budget gap and following a huge amount of hard work and some difficult decision making, savings of £917,000 had been identified whilst largely retaining services. However, this was not good practice and since his appointment he had positively encouraged a culture in which officers do not just aim to hit budget targets but strive to improve on them by actively managing their budgets all year round to maximise income and achieve efficiency savings. Fortunately the budget position for 2006/07 was less difficult than in 2005/06 and part of the reason why the budget gap had now been closed was that the Council has brought base budgets down without cutting services.

The Deputy drew particular attention to the following issues:-

- Savings identified have enabled the Cabinet to hold the recommended council tax increase to 3% without inflationary increases in other fees and charges or cuts in frontline services
- Significant savings included changes in management structure totalling £118,000 and £50,000 on Information Technology by replacing equipment on a four-yearly rather than three-yearly cycle.
- Free off-peak bus fares for older and disabled people, plus an increase in the number of taxi vouchers made available to disabled people from 6 X £2 vouchers to 10 X £2 vouchers a year
- Leisure@ - last year, a thorough review of charges led to some significant increases and a good deal of public concern. This year no further increases are proposed. In addition, the management of the centre has launched a number of new and very attractive membership packages.
- There are demonstrable links between the business planning process and the Medium Term Financial Strategy, through the use of the Priorities Assessment Tool which seeks to measure investment proposals against the Council's Business Plan.

The Deputy (Exchequer) indicated that the budget also delivered a modest growth in services targeted at meeting the Council's highest priorities including tackling crime and disorder, promoting community regeneration and creating a cleaner and greener environment.

The Deputy (Exchequer) introduced Mr Paul Jones, Group Accountant for Social and Community to the Committee and between them they provided the following responses to Members questions:-

- The significant increase in the revised budget for the Festivals & Entertainment Division for 2005/06 ((L24100) was as a result of one-off staffing costs due to the early retirement of a member of the senior management team.
- As part of these budget proposals the Council will continue to maintain the current level of funding to the Young Arts Centre. It was clarified that the staff Member was employed by the County Council and CBC made a contribution under cost code L23500 Arts Grant/Enabling
- There was no budget against Supporting People (H22350) because this initiative was funded by Central Government and administered by the County Council. The only charge to the Council was officer time and in line with the recommendations of the Members Budget Process Working Party all budgets had been shown 'gross' ie cost centres excluded the costs of recharged divisional and support service charges and asset rents
- The income from Community Alarms (H22500) related to private sector customers only. The Housing Revenue Account benefited from income from council tenants and under the circumstances there would be implications for the HRA or individuals if there were further cuts to the Supporting People Grant.
- The significant increase in the revised budget for Arts Grant/Enabling (L23500) included some unspent funds relating to a committed scheme which Members had agreed to carry forward in order to fund this specific project in 2006/07.
- The budget relating to Health Promotion (E61150) was zero because it had been shown 'gross' as explained above and did not include administration costs.
- There were two cost centres in respect of the Art Gallery and Museum because L43100 was for management and backoffice including staff costs, and L41100 was in respect of Front of House operational issues including the Collections.
- The Council on 1st December 2003 had agreed that the capital receipt from the sale of the Axiom building should be ring-fenced for arts uses. The Deputy (Exchequer)

indicated that he was keen to look at ways that this money could start to be used for the benefit of the arts in Cheltenham and may well form part of the final budget proposals

- Funding to organisations such as Cheltenham Community Projects, Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre, Care and Repair and Cheltenham Federation were included in the cost centre Housing Grants (H22300). Organisations such as CAB and Cheltenham Community Support Centre were listed separately because funding included a number of elements of support such as rent, trade refuse collection etc.

The Deputy (Exchequer) agreed to find out the answers to the following questions and let Members know in due course:-

- the reason for the significant increase in the revised budget for Communications Management for 2005/06 (D11900)
- whether, in view of local concerns regarding air pollution associated with waste management the Public Protection Division intended to increase expenditure on air quality monitoring?

Councillor Mrs Regan referred to the meeting of the Committee to discuss the Corporate Business Plan and priorities for 2006/07 and asked why her request for a growth bid in respect of Public Protection for food inspection had not been included in the budget proposals for 2006/07. In response, the Programmed Services Manager explained that following the Hampton Review there were more efficient approaches to regulatory inspection and enforcement including partnership working with the Health and Safety Executive. She indicated that officers were currently well up to date with food inspection and it was difficult to ascertain how much work would be involved for council officers in the Health and Safety inspections, particularly as the team would be adopting a focussed inspection regime prioritising on high risk areas, rather than routine inspections. The Programmed Services Manager confirmed that under the circumstances the priority for the Division at this stage was the Community Safety Officer and a growth bid had been submitted accordingly.

The Chairman commented that whilst she was in favour of the proposal to abolish the existing annual charge for concessionary bus travel she would like to see more done for the disabled particularly in relation to Community Transport which had been another problem highlighted by the Disability Forum recently. The Deputy (Exchequer) pointed out that Community Transport was the responsibility of the County Council.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

9. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CONDITIONAL OFFERS OF GRANT (Agenda item 9)

The Community Development Manager introduced this Information/Discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that the attached draft report for Cabinet on 24th January 2006 outlined the findings and recommendations arising from the first interim review of the council's conditional offers of grant awarded to its voluntary and community sector partners.

The Community Development Manager provided the following responses to Members questions and comments:-

- Cotswold DC and Tewkesbury BC currently provided funding support to Cheltenham, Cirencester and Tewkesbury CAB through SLAs but the individual contributions were not known. However, the Community Development Manager indicated that if Members were further interested he could find out.

- The Council had given the CAB as much notice as possible of its intention to end the CAB's current lease in April 2008 and was providing as much support as it could
- Whilst the work of Cheltenham Community Support Centre was similar to CAB it was deemed CCSC provided specific services for specific clients.
- In view of on-going discussions about potential merger/amalgamation of Cheltenham Community and Voluntary Action with Gloucester CVS the funding review group were going to keep a watching brief on this organisation with regard to future funding.

Councillor Wheeler commented on the significant difference between the Council's grant to the Everyman Theatre and the other organisations such as Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre who provided support to the most vulnerable people and asked what extra value the Everyman provided to deserve so much more. In response, Councillor Mrs Hale indicated that people wanted to live in Cheltenham because of the town's qualities including amongst others, its reputation as a national and international cultural centre. The Everyman was not just about the theatre, it was also about the provision of a fantastic outreach programme of community and educational initiatives which were wide ranging and appealing to all sectors of the community. The Community Development Manager indicated that in response to this year's review process, future proposals for development included a review to ensure that the council adopts a more consistent approach when agreeing to award funding to these organisations and in setting an appropriate funding level.

The Chairman asked why Cheltenham Borough Homes did not provide the funding support to Cheltenham Federation of Tenants and Leaseholders. In response, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) explained that the Council funding came from the Housing Revenue account, and not the general Fund.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

10. PROMOTING DISABILITY EQUALITY IN CHELTENHAM (Agenda item 10)

The Corporate Policy Manager introduced this Information/Discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that the review group had now met three times and the paper summarised the progress to date, which he went through in detail. The Corporate Policy Manager circulated a list of eight council service areas that the review would consider.

The Committee was very interested in the review and the Corporate Policy Manager provided the following responses to Members' questions:-

- whilst funding for community transport came from the County Council, it was felt useful for the Disability Forum to be given the opportunity to hear about the service and understand the decisions made. The review group was not in a position to deliver improvements but could provide some representation of the views given at the meeting to the County Council;
- by networking with the other groups that represent/work with or support disabled people in Cheltenham the promotion of Cheltenham's Disability Forum Awareness Event would be as wide as possible.

The Committee suggested that the review group could also consider the following as part of the review:-

- dropped kerbs and parking enforcement (more liaison with partners)
- disabled bays and access to the back of the vehicle

- narrow pavements in some parts of the town and also uneven pavements caused by protruding tree roots which could be problematic, particularly for the partially sighted
- the role of development control and building control in assessing and promoting accessibility in new developments

The Corporate Policy Manager thanked Members for these suggestions and said that they would be reported back to the next meeting of the review group on 27th January 2006.

The Chairman welcomed the progress made to date and thanked the officers involved in the review for their hard work.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

11. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:-

- Better Government for Older People (BGOP)

Following discussion, it was recognised that this area of work came under the broader remit of Health and Social Care which was a County Council function. Whilst the topic would not be included as an item on the work programme, the Committee agreed to consider the possible engagement of the over 50s in all future areas under review.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 20th February 2006

Members indicated that they do not wish to meet at the Lakeside Suite at Leisure@ because of the size of the room and concerns raised around disabled access. The Committee were asked to think about alternative venues and possible agenda items for the next meeting and get back to the Chairman as soon as possible.

Councillor Mrs B Driver
Chairman