

## **SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 20<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2006**

### **MINUTES (17.30 – 20.10 PM )**

**PRESENT** Councillor Mrs Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Allen, Forbes, Mrs Hale, Mrs Holliday, Mrs Ledoux, Nicholson, Mrs Regan and Wheeler Mr Howard, Mrs Kitchin and Mrs Steers

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy)  
Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community)  
Councillor Smith  
12 members of the public (including representatives from the Disabled Forum, Leisure@ Customer Forum and other local sports organisations)

### **1. SELECTIVE GUIDED TOUR OF THE FACILITIES (17.30 pm – 18.30 pm)**

Attendees were split into two groups for the selective guided tour of the recently refurbished facilities at Leisure@. One tour was led by Stephen Petherick, the Commercial Manager and the other by Sonia Phillips, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing). Each tour covered the following areas:-

- Conditioning Suite - smaller than the main gym this is for people suffering from illness, or recovering from an injury or operation, to exercise.
- Teaching Pool
- Health Spa
- Changing Village
- Main swimming pool, diving pool and balcony
- Squash courts, soft play and vending area
- Multi disciplinary sports hall
- Dry changing rooms
- Dance Studio
- Health and Fitness Studio

Some brief information was provided in respect of each area visited and questions and general comments were invited from each group.

### **2. INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly the members of the public in attendance. She introduced Matthew Clapham, the Operations Manager who briefly ran through some general housekeeping information. At the request of the Chairman, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) introduced the rest of the new Leisure@ management team to the Committee as follows:- Stephen Petherick Commercial Manager, Paul Marsh Customer Services and Admin Manager, Mark Garland Fitness Manager, Anne Tranter Community Participation Manager and Laura Halfpenny Events Manager.

### 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

### 4. MINUTES

Councillor Mrs Holliday indicated that she had been present at the last meeting but it had not been recorded.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2006 be approved as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Mrs Holliday as being present.

### 5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

No public questions or petitions had been received.

### 6. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

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

### 7. BRIEFING FROM CABINET DEPUTIES

The Chairman explained that as this meeting was to be themed around the sport and leisure facilities provided by Leisure@, the intention had been not to include this standard item on the agenda. However, she had asked the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) to come along at short notice because she had a specific question to ask him.

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) took the opportunity to provide a brief update on matters relating to his portfolio as follows:

- Citizens Advice Bureau funding – in response to a story in the Echo last week which referred to cuts to the Council's funding of CAB, the Deputy explained that the CAB had expanded beyond Cheltenham to include Tewkesbury and parts of the Cotswold but pointed out that Cheltenham Borough Council still pays the largest amount by far (£96,000). The Council had given 3 years notice of its intention to end the CAB's current lease in April 2008 and withdraw this element of funding worth £39,000.
- Cheltenham Volunteer Centre – in response to a recent press article regarding the potential merger of Cheltenham Community and Voluntary Action and Cheltenham Volunteer Centre or Gloucester CVS, the Deputy indicated that if a merger should take place then one of the conditions would be a presence in Cheltenham.
- St Paul's Regeneration – Consultants are about to begin work visiting every tenant and owner occupier in the St Pauls area. The Council has two strategic objectives which are to improve the homes and to mix up the tenure to make the area more sustainable.

When the options are fully costed and appraised they will be brought back to the Environment and Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

In response to a question from Councillor Allen, the Deputy indicated that mixing up the tenure could include re-planning some parts of the estate so that it is a more balanced community with a mix of private and social housing. This could involve refurbishment of existing properties or substantial redevelopment including part demolition or a mixture of both, the council was working on various themes for consultation. He confirmed that the surrounding areas including Victoria Street were not part of the regeneration proposals.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy for his update and asked him to clarify the position with regard to the £15,000 budget available for community grant-funding which had been discussed at the last Council meeting, in particular the criteria for applications and who was responsible for decision making. She was aware that a briefing note had been issued on the subject that day to all Members but had been at meetings all day, so had not had chance to read it.

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) explained that this was a new grant budget aimed at supporting community regeneration projects and did not replace the annual small grants round. This budget offered one-off grants to support voluntary and community groups that are actively engaged in supporting the long term regeneration of Cheltenham. All grants awarded through this budget are agreed in consultation between the Assistant Director (Community Services) and the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community).

Councillor Mrs Regan asked what types of organisations could apply. In response, the Deputy indicated that these grants were aimed specifically at supporting sustainable groups that are looking to expand from a locality base to provide borough wide services; and at projects which can clearly demonstrate that they:

- support the long-term regeneration of Cheltenham
- address clear and identifiable needs
- support the council's community and corporate plan priorities

In response to a question from Councillor Allen, the Deputy confirmed that they were one-off grants up to a maximum of £5,000 and there was no intention that the council will continue to fund these organisations on an on-going basis.

The Committee was concerned that organisations did not know about this grant as it was not formally advertised and it was also concerned about the criteria used to appraise the bids which were felt to be too restrictive.

## **8. FEEDBACK SESSION – RESPONSE TO TOUR OF LEISURE@ (Agenda item 6)**

Mr J Harmer referred to the Cabinet's decision to reduce subsidy from the Cheltenham and District Sports Association for the Disabled for use of swimming facilities free of charge at Leisure@ and asked whether the Cabinet had re-considered its decision.

The Chairman asked the Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) to provide a response as she happened to be attending the meeting in an observing capacity. The Deputy agreed to provide a response and indicated that the Cabinet had not changed its decision, but the organisation could continue to use the facilities on special terms – ie without paying the usual £50 a week charge for exclusive use and paying only the concessionary charge of £1.80 per user. In response to Mr Harmer's supplementary comments the Deputy re-iterated that it was not about increasing the revenue for Leisure@ but the principle of an equitable pricing structure

for all users. Under the circumstances if the Council continued to give subsidy to CDSAD it would be discriminatory to other disabled users of the facilities.

In response, the Chairman indicated that at the last Council meeting she had asked the Deputy (Exchequer) to clarify his definition of disabled which he had agreed to do following the meeting but she had not yet received a response. The Deputy (Health, Well-being and Economy) indicated that in respect of Leisure@ she believed concessions were available to users who were registered disabled with Social Services, however she agreed to remind the Deputy (Exchequer) to provide a response.

Representatives of the Disabled Forum provided the following feedback in respect of the tour:-

- there was no clear signage as to the location of disabled parking from the main entrance of the car park and there were too few disabled spaces available
- the controls in the disabled lift were awkward and uncomfortable to use
- the internal doors were heavy for disabled users to open
- signs were too high for wheelchair users to see
- no tactile signs for visually impaired users
- no signs for disabled access to the second floor
- a general location map of facilities in the reception area would be useful
- a hoist was required in the changing village

The Commercial Manager thanked the representatives of the Disabled Forum for this useful feedback and for their general comments during the tour. He indicated that a disabled audit had recently been undertaken and a number of the above issues had been highlighted. Work had commenced to address some of these issues and signage and helping disabled people get around the facilities was certainly something the team would be looking at.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) commented that further involvement of the Disability Forum at an early stage would be welcomed.

A member of the public referred to the £6 million refurbishment of Leisure@ and asked whether the contractors had been paid yet? In response, the Acting Managing Director confirmed that stage payments had been made over the period of the work. However, the final payment had been withheld until the rectification work had been completed by the contractors for a number of defects since completion over 12 months ago, in accordance with normal contract procedures.

Councillor Allen referred to the changes proposed to improve disability access and asked whether the council had visited any other facilities. In response, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) indicated that now that the new management were in place they would be able to keep a broader eye on good practice.

Mr Howard commented that the vending machines should provide more 'healthier options' than currently available. In response, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) explained that this was an interim arrangement with the supplier who, based on the current turnover was interested in entering into a longer term contract with the council. Under the circumstances ongoing negotiations would include the provision of healthier options and possibly a new catering site from April 2006.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith, the Commercial Manager confirmed that as part of the disability audit a clear list of improvements had been produced around access and signage, but on the whole Leisure@ had fared well against other council buildings.

Councillor Mrs Hale queried the under-use of the conditioning suite which she was very impressed with. In response, the Commercial Manager indicated that it had been of key

importance to get the conditions right from the outset before extending the hours of operation. However, now that these were in place they were actively targeting recruitment in this specialist area.

Mrs Kitchin suggested that a leaflet which reproduced a location map of facilities available from the reception would be useful as it could easily be referred to by users during the course of their visit. She commented that the vending machine area did not appear to be an attractive area for relaxing in. The Commercial Manager indicated that despite these comments this area was very popular.

Councillor Mrs Regan commented that there was a large amount of unused space outside the crèche which could potentially be used more effectively. In response the Commercial Manager explained that when the café had closed the seating area outside the crèche had not been removed but it was portable and in use today for the Committee meeting. However, this seated area was busy during the day as it was often used by groups eg the Healthy Heart group as a place for drinking hot drinks.

Councillor Mrs Regan referred to her comments at previous meetings regarding the selling of merchandise to promote activities and increase revenue. The Customer Services and Administration Manager explained that small amounts of merchandise such as goggles, arm-bands, balls and rackets were on sale at the front desk but there was currently no display area available. However this was something that the team were currently looking into with a view to possibly extending the range following market testing.

## **7. CUSTOMER FORUM – UPDATE (Agenda item 7)**

Pat Kirycos, a representative of the Customer Forum indicated that she had been a member of the centre for eight years and spoke positively about the service and the staff both past and present. She gave a personal vote of thanks to the GP referral scheme which had supported her back to full health enabling her to participate in the full range of activities now provided by Leisure@ including Body Combat and Spin Cycling amongst others. Pat Kirycos explained that following the refurbishment of the centre the Customer Forum had been reinstated which was a user/officer group that looked at some of the issues raised by customers and tried to come up with solutions. She was of the view that the existence of the forum should be better publicised as it was the correct approach for resolving issues.

In response to comments made by Councillor Mrs Regan, Pat Kirycos indicated that as far as she was aware no member of the forum had mentioned any problems relating to transport to the centre. The Events Manager confirmed that the current catering supplier was able to provide light refreshments, sandwiches etc for events.

## **8. BUSINESS PLAN AND MARKETING STRATEGY**

The Commercial Manager referred Members to the handout which had been circulated at the start of the meeting and went through the summary of the Business Plan and the Marketing Plan for 2006/07.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Hale regarding the promotion of Passport products, the Commercial Manager explained that 'Passport 2 Leisure' was an annual membership available to students, teens, pensioners, the disabled & those on low income to promote social inclusion.

Councillor Allen asked whether any specialised clubs had been identified locally which could be targeted for example climbing groups. In response, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) explained that the management team were focussing on 'quick wins' at the moment and therefore marketing the facilities that were already available on site. However, this was an area of further development in the future and the team were already going out into the market place and building new links.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Regan regarding the issuing of accounts, the Commercial Manager indicated that he was not aware of any general delay but agreed to get specific details from her following the meeting for further investigation.

Mr Howard referred to social inclusion which was one of the target areas in the Marketing Plan for 2006/07. He explained that his 6<sup>th</sup> Form biology group was currently studying fitness and heart rate and suggested it would be useful if they could come along to the Health and Fitness Studio to speak to the qualified instructors and be shown how to use the state of the art equipment. He commented that this might also be a good way of attracting membership in this age group particularly if it was extended to other local schools. He also suggested holding an Open Day and specifically targeting this age group to come along or taking some of the equipment out to the schools for a taster session in the lunch hour or perhaps an exercise class.

The Chairman thanked everyone particularly the public for their participation in the meeting which she had found interesting and productive. She hoped that the Leisure@ management team would take the comments made during the course of the meeting on board. This was the first Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee that had been held out in the community and she welcomed any feedback from Members.

#### **9. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:-**

The Chairman asked Members to let her know of any ideas for future agenda items, particularly if they could be used to strengthen participation by the public.

#### **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> April**

**Councillor Mrs B Driver**  
**Chairman**