

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
10<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2007**

**MINUTES  
(18.00 – 19.50)**

**PRESENT** Councillor Mrs Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Coleman, Mrs Franklin, Miss Hall, Mrs Holliday, Webster Mr Boyes, Mrs Kitchin, Mrs Steers and Mrs Wheeler (as substitute for Mrs Sallis)

**APOLOGIES** Councillors Nicholson and Seacome and Mrs Sallis

**RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:**

Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development  
Cabinet Member Stronger and Safer Communities

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**2. MINUTES**

The Chairman requested that the minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> November relating to St Pauls Estate be amended to emphasise the following points which had been raised during the discussion:-

- Residents should be offered the same type of accommodation when they go back if they so wish eg house for a house
- Where the disabled and elderly have adapted their houses for their disabilities they should have equivalent adaptations in the houses they are decanted to and that equivalent adaptations are put into their new homes

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2006 be approved as a correct record, as amended.

**3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions or petitions had been received.

**4. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE**

**(a) By Council** – None

**(b) By Cabinet** – None

**(c) Other Committees** – None

**5. PRESENTATION BY MR D PHELPS - SHOPMOBILITY (Agenda item 6)**

Mr Phelps provided an overview of Shopmobility covering the following key areas:-

- What and where is Shopmobility?
- How does it function (including details of the registration scheme)?
- Meeting the demand and raising the profile
- Improvements undertaken as a result of the review by the Environment O & S Committee and Access Working Group.
- Proposed building alterations and refurbishment in response to the Access Audit (subject to securing funding from Beechwood Centre Management and CBC)
- Volunteers and staffing
- The range of equipment available to users and maintenance

Mr Phelps (Shopmobility Manager) explained that in the environment in which Shopmobility operates, the equipment needs to be replaced on a rotational basis every five years due to constant use and the hard wear and tear placed upon it. However, this cannot be financed within the existing budget. Having carried out a survey of other Shopmobility schemes, Mr Phelps informed the Committee that many of them make a small charge for the use of their equipment whereas at present Cheltenham Shopmobility only charge for the weekly hire of wheelchairs, with all other daily usage being provided free of charge.

In view of the circumstances, Mr Phelps asked the committee to consider supporting the following proposal which will enable Cheltenham Shopmobility to provide a high quality reliable service whilst keeping within the restraints of the current budget:-

- The introduction of an annual registration fee for the financial year 2007/08 of £15.00 for frequent users, or for those not wishing to pay the annual fee a daily fee of £5.00 for all types of equipment. Based on present usage this would generate £7000 per annum less the loss of donations currently £2500 approx which gives a net additional income of £4500.
- An increase in the weekly hire charge for wheelchairs from £6.00 to £10.00 which is in line with Gloucester Shopmobility. This would generate a further £1500 per annum.

This would result in an additional net income of £6000 which should be 'ring fenced' for new equipment purchases.

Mr Phelps provided the following responses to Members questions and comments:-

- The annual shopmobility budget was £70,000. Therefore based on the number of visits in 2006 (3,500), each visit cost Shopmobility £20. Based on the average number of visits, by paying a £15.00 registration fee each visit would cost the user £1.61 which is far less than they would pay for parking if this was not provided free.
- Shopmobility enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with Beechwood Shopping Centre Management which was unlikely to change in the near future.
- Sponsorship from local traders had been considered but it was thought unlikely to be successful if letters went out in the name of Cheltenham Borough Council. However talks had taken place with officers regarding re-designing the letter head to Cheltenham Shopmobility and this would be explored further.
- The recent replacement of 7 powered scooters had been largely funded from 2006/07 under spend mainly as a result of one-off savings relating to his salary because he had taken up the post later in the financial year.
- He would welcome the opportunity of advertising Shopmobility within the Disability Forum Newsletter

Councillor Webster indicated he could not support the proposals which would impact upon people already coping with mobility problems and felt that this was a decision which should properly be made by the Cabinet.

The Chairman congratulated Mr Phelps for the excellent work undertaken by Shopmobility since his appointment. She suggested that it would be useful if some equipment could be made available from the Municipal Offices for the use of Shopmobility patrons arriving in Cheltenham at the Royal Well bus station. She also suggested that the bus service be used to advertise the facility. The Chairman asked if the annual registration fee had to be paid all at once. In response, Mr Phelps could see no reason why step payments could not be facilitated by Shopmobility. Whilst she felt that the annual registration fee was not unreasonable, the Chairman had concerns about the proposed daily charge of £5. Mr Phelps indicated that the proposals should be considered as a package otherwise it would not be worth charging at all, bearing in mind if a daily charge was to be raised, income from donations for the use of equipment would be lost. He pointed out that 80% of users that benefited from Shopmobility were from outside of Cheltenham.

The Cabinet Member Environment clarified that the Committee was being asked to support the proposal in principle and that the charges would be discussed as part of the wider budget debate.

On a vote being taken, it was RESOLVED that the Committee does not support the proposal.

#### **6. DRUGS STUDY REVIEW UPDATE (Agenda item 7)**

The Community Development Manager introduced this Information/Discussion Paper which had been circulated with the agenda and provided an update on the progress of the drugs study review group.

Councillor Coleman suggested that the Probation Service, Magistrates Court Service and Prison Service be involved in the review.

The Chairman indicated that she was on the working group and had found both meetings productive. She had learnt a lot from the meetings and had received good feedback from the other agencies who had also found the interaction around the table to be useful.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the progress of the drugs study working group.

#### **7. DEVELOPING THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS PLAN 2007- 2010 (Agenda item 8)**

The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development introduced a Information/discussion paper circulated with the agenda. He briefly explained that following a comprehensive programme of consultation to inform the second version of the Community Strategy (2007 -2010), the Council's new Business Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework, a clear steer on which issues people felt were to be most important had emerged as detailed in the report.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development indicated that the results of the consultation had been discussed by Cheltenham Strategic Partnership and informed the production of the vision for Cheltenham supported by four underlying principles that will cut-across all our activities. Seven priority issues have been identified where over the next 20 years partners will take concerted and co-ordinated action in order to turn the vision into a reality.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development explained that the Cabinet was now inviting feedback on the Cheltenham Borough Council priority areas for the next three years from each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees prior to approval of the

Council's Business Plan by Council on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007. Any comments following the meeting should be passed to the Corporate Policy Manager.

The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of the emerging Business Plan which would determine service delivery over the next three years and, probably more importantly, those services that would not be delivered given the estimated budget shortfall over future years. He indicated that the Council has been criticised in the past by the Audit Commission for trying to do much at the expense of possibly not doing some things as well as it could. The council needed to provide a clear focus and make a real difference to the community.

The following comments were made by the Committee:-

- If the council were to take the principle of sustainability as outlined in para 4.2.4 seriously
- then provision needed to be made within the Business Plan for work to be carried out to identify a baseline in order to measure progress towards the goal of a carbon-neutral borough.
- The role of the Festivals within economic development and regeneration needed to be acknowledged within the document because it was very important to the Town
- Whilst it was acknowledged to be aspirational, carbon-neutral homes needed to be considered under Housing Choice.
- The council needed to expand upon what it meant by 'Community regeneration' in 6.2 so everyone was clear about it.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development acknowledged the sensible points raised and thanked the Committee for its contribution which would assist in the formulation of the Business Plan. He indicated that the emerging local development framework provided a significant lever to guide future development and he would be talking to officers as the planning approach is developed.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

## **8. GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL – REVISED BUDGET 2006/07 AND INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS 2007/08 FOR CONSULTATION (Agenda item 9)**

The Chief Finance Officer briefly introduced this report which had been circulated with the Cabinet agenda dated 12<sup>th</sup> December 2006. He explained that targets of 3% cashable savings had been met by officers to help close the budget gap enabling the Cabinet to support a modest level of growth. He pointed out an amendment to the schedule of fees and charges (Appendix I) relating to the Town Hall which did not reflect the recent resurrection of the concessionary rate for hall hire on Friday and Saturday nights. This would be picked up in the final budget proposals.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development indicated that thanks to the hard work of officers the anticipated funding gap had been reduced but given the size of the remaining gap it was the Cabinet's view that the council will need to be radical in its approach to service delivery instead of 'salami slicing' budgets year on year. The budget proposals were out for consultation until 19<sup>th</sup> January 2007 and the Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development indicated that he would be meeting with the Parish Councils and the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees as part of the process. The results from this consultation will be fed back to the Cabinet and taken into account in the formulation of the final budget proposals to Council in February 2007.

In response to a question from Councillor Webster, the Chief Finance Officer indicated that the council tax increase across the County ranged in the main between 2.5% to 3% and as far as he was aware Cheltenham was joint lowest.

Councillor Coleman referred to the schedule of fees and charges (Appendix I) and asked why there was a reduced daily permit rate for staff working at the CPS, Magistrates and Probation Office. In response the Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development indicated that a further review of parking permits will be undertaken over the next few months to ensure consistency.

Councillor Webster welcomed the Council's recent move towards recovering the full costs of providing administrative support for parish council elections within the borough from the start of the financial year. He suggested the Cabinet re-consider cutting core funding in respect of the Vision 21 organisation as it made a significant contribution to environmental work and therefore would be key in helping towards the delivery of one of the council's priorities relating to sustainability.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

**9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) REVISED BUDGET 2006/07 AND INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS 2007/08 FOR CONSULTATION (Agenda item 10)**

The Chief Finance Officer introduced this joint report from himself and the Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development which had been circulated with the Cabinet agenda dated 19<sup>th</sup> December 2006. He explained that the interim budget proposals included a proposed average rent increase of 2.2% and the introduction of service charges for the cost of power supplies to communal areas and grounds maintenance. He pointed out that the fees payable to CBH for managing the Capital Programme will begin to significantly reduce as the expenditure on the stock reduces in line with the near completion of the Decent Homes Work.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development indicated that he had asked to see the Capital Programme in more detail and suggested that this Committee might also be interested in looking at it as part of their future work plan.

The Chairman expressed concern at the introduction of maintenance charges particularly to those tenants not in receipt of benefits. She was aware of a number of problems experienced by leaseholders who were already paying service charges. The Deputy Chief Executive clarified that the service charges proposed for 2007/08 applied to special management services given to some tenants. The arrangements for leaseholders were different as they were required to contribute a fair share of annual maintenance costs which did not apply to tenants.

Councillor Webster commented that as part of rent restructuring which has been imposed by the Government, services charges have to be unpooled from rent. These charges will still qualify for housing benefit but he could envisage problems when applying these arrangements to tenants.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

## 10. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development explained that the budget had taken up most of his time over the past few months but he had recently attended meetings with:-

- the Arts Council to discuss the David Pratley Associates report on the cultural review.
- Avery Associates to discuss the Town Hall scoping project.

At the request of the Chairman, the Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development provided a brief update on the Pittville Pump Room marketing exercise. He re-iterated that the building is not for sale but the council is looking for quality expressions of interest from businesses that are able to invest in its future and make it a commercial success going forward. He indicated that the approach had been supported by the Arts Council and Cheltenham Festivals and progress will be reported to this Committee and Economy and Business Improvement O & S Committee in the future. The Chairman suggested that the private donors who had funded the rebuilding of the Pittville Pump Room after the war be formally recognised in some way. The Cabinet Member Finance and Economic Development agreed to discuss this with the Assistant Director Entertainment and Tourism.

Mrs Kitchin suggested that Cheltenham Arts Council should also be involved in the consultation process regarding the future of the Pittville Pump Room.

The Cabinet Member Stronger and Safer Communities reported on the following:-

- **Festival of Sport** - Plans were underway for the Festival of Sport to take place over the summer. This will incorporate a wide variety of coaching courses, taster sessions and fun days across the Borough. The council's aspiration is to develop an initial programme of events during 2007 which will incrementally develop in subsequent years, culminating in a pinnacle event in 2012 to coincide with the London Olympic Games.
- **Caernarvon Park Dispersal Order** – just before the Christmas holidays consent was given to the police under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act to disperse groups and remove persons under 16 to their place of residence. No problems or incidents had been reported.
- **Peddlers/Street traders**. Following on from concerns raised by the Committee at a previous meeting, the Cabinet Member had spoken with the appropriate officers in Licensing. The matter was being investigated and prosecution for illegal trading in respect of one particular case was already being instigated.

## 11. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- **Boy Racers**  
The Committee considered the request submitted by Councillor Mrs Franklin and circulated separately from the agenda. The officer implications section had been completed by the Community Safety Manager.

RESOLVED that a representative of the Road Policing Unit be invited to attend a future meeting to give a presentation.

- **The Single Advice Agency**

The Committee considered the request submitted by Councillor Webster and circulated separately from the agenda. The Assistant Director Community Services provided a response and outlined the officer implications.

RESOLVED that a working group be set up comprising Councillors Webster, Mrs Driver and Mrs Franklin supported by the Assistant Director Community Services.

Councillor Coleman suggested a review of the Christmas lights in Cheltenham. Following a response from the appropriate officer, the completed scrutiny topic registration form will be circulated with the agenda for consideration by the Committee at the next meeting, as a possible new work plan item.

## **12. COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SESSION**

Members were concerned that the Shopmobility presentation had developed into a request for support and felt that in future such requests should form part of a written report.

## **13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> April**

**Councillor Mrs B Driver**  
**Chair**