

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
2ND APRIL 2007**

**MINUTES
(18.00 – 20.35)**

PRESENT Councillor Barbara Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Peter Allen, Chris Coleman, Tina Franklin, Penny Hall, Sandra Holliday, Alan Nicholson, Paul McLain and John Webster.

Matthew Upton, Hazel Kitchin, Jackie Sallis and Lorna Steers)

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:

Cabinet Member Stronger and Safer Communities (Councillor Anne Regan)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors Diggory Seacome and Pat Thornton

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hall declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 Second Interim Report of the Drugs Study Review Group as Chair of Naunton Park Youth Project and a personal interest in agenda item 9 Single Advice Contract as she was the council's appointed representative on CAB.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th February 2007 be approved as a correct record.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or petitions had been received.

4. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

(a) By Council – None

(b) By Cabinet – One matter referred under agenda item 7 below

(c) Other Committees – None

5. PRESENTATION ON YOUTH ISSUES (Agenda item 7)

The presentation consisted of four parts and was supported by information/discussion papers which had been circulated with the agenda:-

1) Children and Young People

The Service Manager Community Services provided a brief introduction to a series of Children and Youth Service presentations, setting the strategic context and outlining the progress made in supporting improved outcomes for Children and Young People.

2) Annual Review of the Cheltenham Play and Free Time Strategy

The Community Play Development Worker presented an overview of the initiatives being delivered through the Cheltenham Play and Free Time Strategy which supported the five Every Child Matters Outcomes:-

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Wellbeing

3) Out of School Activities – Annual Report

The Community Play Development Worker presented an overview of the activities and initiatives co-ordinated by the unit to support and encourage play and freetime activities for children and young people.

4) Hear by Right – Children and Young People Engagement

The MAD co-ordinator, together with four representatives of the MAD Young People's Council gave a presentation on recent activity undertaken to evaluate children and youth engagement in Cheltenham and suggested areas for improvement identified for inclusion in the emerging Children and Young People's strategy.

The following comments were made by Members in respect of the presentations:-

- It was important that provision of play and freetime activities is across the whole town and not just the areas associated with the two projects included in the lottery bid.
- MAD were challenged to come up with ideas that will assist the council to engage with young people effectively – how best to communicate with them particularly those not represented by MAD.

The following responses were provided in respect of Members' questions:-

- The Community Play Development unit have arrangements in place to invoice Social Services direct in respect of children and young people who participate in play and freetime activities and live in foster care or children's homes. For children with special needs the key worker or carer can sign in to provide support all day without additional charge.
- Offsted regulations require a level 3 qualification for supervisors and deputies. As this is an accredited qualification mentoring is provided by the trainer in charge and the direct supervisor.

The Chairman commented that some excellent work was being undertaken but more could be done for meeting the needs of children and young people with disabilities for example having signers for the deaf. Also there should be provision of youth shelters for young people who did not want to participate in supervised activities but just 'hang out' with friends. She was aware that young people use places like the Waitrose car park to gather and chat which is not safe for them and does not lead them into productive

participation. Some young people may feel uncomfortable joining in at first, but they may just do so with the lead in.

The Chairman congratulated all those involved in the presentations which she had found very informative and positive, in particular she thanked the young people from MAD for their valuable contribution.

6. SINGLE ADVICE CONTRACT (Agenda item 9)

As the Chairman of the working party established by this Committee to examine the justification for the creation of a single contract for advice services in Cheltenham, Councillor Webster introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He drew particular attention to section four of the executive report and the concerns raised by the working group relating to the original report to Cabinet on 12th December 2006. He explained that all members of the working party agreed with the options looked at and the conclusions drawn but Councillor Driver disagreed with some of the content of the report and recommendation (ii). Councillor Webster indicated that if the Committee referred the matter back to Cabinet and the recommendation was not accepted he would ask the Committee to refer it to Council.

The Chairman explained that whilst she fully supported giving the voluntary sector organisations concerned the opportunity to make proposals as to how the benefits of closer partnership working can deliver improved advisory services for the town, she could not support the recommendation that the original proposal be withdrawn. She suggested it would be better for the results of both exercises to be compared and for the best option to be implemented. She acknowledged that the voluntary organisations concerned provided excellent advice but her concerns were around accessibility, particularly out of office hours or at weekends. It was not acceptable for vulnerable people to be passed from pillar to post in order to receive the specific advice they needed. It was possible that a single housing and benefit advice contract could achieve better co-ordination or a more centralised service and a reduction in duplication of services, however further information from a user perspective was required to inform the way forward.

The Committee made the following comments in support of the recommendations of the working group:

- Expertise could be lost through any restructuring of the services provided.
- It was recognised that the services were not as efficient or effective as they could be but a single contract would be difficult to monitor because the working methods of the individual services were not compatible and if one organisation was set up specialist service providers would lose their individual identity.
- If council funding is withdrawn some of the smaller advice services may not survive.
- Centralising the service could result in reducing accessibility, not everyone can get into town easily. It is better to have services spread out across the whole borough so that they can be accessed locally.
- From experience of client referrals, the advice services provided by the voluntary organisations concerned are excellent, demonstrating in depth knowledge and a wealth of skills. In many cases services are separate and distinct and provided by volunteers for the benefit of the residents of Cheltenham. If the funding to these services is withdrawn it would be a significant loss to the town.

The Committee made the following comments opposing the recommendations of the working group:-

- The Cabinet's principal reason for creating a single advice contract is to seek to improve the overall quality of the service for local residents. It is about creating the opportunity for better partnership working and not about saving money and the Cabinet would welcome proposals from the voluntary sector about working together more closely to deliver better services.
- The Council made a significant contribution to the CAB which also provides services to Cotswold and Tewkesbury. However the other districts did not put in the same level of funding; was this fair on the tax payers of Cheltenham?

Upon a vote being taken the Committee agreed the conclusions in the report and recommended to the Cabinet that it withdraws its original proposals and invites the voluntary sector organisations concerned to make proposals as to how the benefits of closer partnership working can deliver improved advisory services for the town.

Voting

**For 5
Against 0
Abstained 4**

7. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY 2007-10 (Agenda item 7)

The Assistant Director (ICT) introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that the Cabinet had invited all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to comment on the strategy prior to final approval by the Cabinet.

The following comments were made by the Committee:-

- As the Council moves towards good information and communications technology facilities, it needs to ensure that services are still accessible through the traditional channels.
- A reduction in the amount of paperwork circulated to Members would be welcomed both from a practical and sustainable viewpoint.

The Assistant Director (ICT) confirmed there would be no change in direction in the way services are provided eg face to face, telephone etc however the ICT strategy will ensure best value from the services that are delivered electronically. He agreed to feedback comments on 'Report It' and the web page for planning applications.

8. SECOND INTERIM REPORT OF THE DRUGS STUDY REVIEW GROUP (Agenda item 8)

As the Chairman of the review group, Councillor Driver introduced this information/discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. She explained that the group have been reviewing the findings of the University of Gloucestershire's report: Drugs in Cheltenham (April 2006) which looked at national and local drug use and at the perceptions of drug taking with a number of agencies in Cheltenham. She indicated that the review had been very interesting, but that alcohol abuse and the

problems associated with alcohol were more of an issue for Cheltenham than drugs. She explained that following feedback from the Committee on the work undertaken to date, the group will be meeting once more before bringing a final report back to the Committee with draft recommendations to the Cabinet.

The Committee made the following comments:-

- It was important that the multi agency action group, included all agencies and organisations which are actively involved in drugs prevention and support work. All information should be shared and co-ordinated and referrals recorded centrally. The review group should look at how CBC could lead in a multi agency approach to tackle the dealers.
- More could be done through the Licensing system to take positive actions to combat drugs problems and to deal with intoxicated people.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor P Hall, the Chairman issued the following statement:-

“The report reflects the presentations and representations made to the group from the professional on the ground. In the case of cocaine use at Naunton Park this was reported by a representative from the county youth service. This statement has since been questioned by a local councillor in liaison with the local police and the review group wish to record that we have taken on board their concern”

The Chairman particularly thanked the Community Development Manager for his lead on the review and for pulling together an exceptional report.

9. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Stronger and Safer Communities clarified her portfolio following the recent changes in the Cabinet membership indicating that she was responsible for crime and disorder, children and young people, community play development, sport and healthy living and overseeing Leisure@. She reported on the following issues:-

- as demonstrated by the presentations earlier in the evening some excellent work is being undertaken in respect of young people's issues. Income from Second Homes funding is also to be used to support disabled youth sport provision across the borough.
- She had recently attended the Hate Crime Public Forum that was held to seek support from key agencies and the community to form a hate crime incident action group to replace the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury racial incidents group (CTRIG)
- The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership has been restructured from 1st April and has been renamed Cheltenham Community Safety Partnership (CCSP). Andrew North, the Council's Chief Executive is the new Chairman. She asked that the Committee forward its final drugs study report to the CCSP as the conclusions would be very valuable to their work.

10. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that in light of the recently approved Council Business Plan 2007-10, he would be bringing an extract of the plan relating to the Social

and Community Group to the next meeting so that the Committee could decide on which areas of work it would like to focus and include in their workplan for 2007/08.

In response to a question from Councillor Franklin, the Deputy Chief Executive anticipated that an item on Boy Racers would be on the agenda for the next meeting.

11. COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SESSION

Councillor Webster felt that generally there was too much on the agenda to be dealt with at one meeting effectively and the Committee needed to be more selective as to what it agreed to consider in future.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Thursday 7th June

**Councillor Mrs B Driver
Chair**