

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 7TH JUNE 2007

MINUTES (18.00 – 20.35)

PRESENT Councillor Barbara Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Peter Allen, Tina Franklin, Penny Hall, John Morris (substitute for Sandra Holliday) and John Webster.

Hazel Kitchin, Jackie Sallis and Lorna Steers)

APOLOGIES Councillors Chris Coleman, Sandra Holliday, Paul McLain, Alan Nicholson, Matthew Upton (MAD representative)

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:

Leader (Duncan Smith) and Cabinet Member Stronger and Safer Communities (Anne Regan)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting particularly the members of public. She indicated that she had received a request from Councillor Webster to move agenda item 11 – the briefing from Cabinet Members up the agenda so this item could be considered before any public questions. She explained that although the order of business normally provides for other matters, especially those involving presentations to the public, to be dealt with first, she had on this occasion agreed to the request. This would ensure that any questions arising out of the briefing can be dealt with efficiently and be addressed by both the cabinet representatives. She asked that questions be kept as succinct as possible to ensure those members of the public who were present to make representations to the Committee are not kept waiting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3. MINUTES (Agenda item 3)

Councillor Webster referred to page 3, item 6 Single Advice Contract and requested that at the end of the first paragraph the following be inserted 'He requested that O & S be kept informed of the Cabinet decision so they could express their attitude to it.'

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2ND April 2007 be approved as a correct record, subject to the above amendment.

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) Other Committees – None

6. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda item 11)

The Leader reported on the following issues:

- Midwinter Area Improvement – proposals are out for public consultation.
- NHS Dentistry – boost for Cheltenham and Tewkesbury, a press release to be issued shortly.
- The successful launch of the Screenwriters Festival to take place during July which will bring in significant economic growth to the town.
- One of Cheltenham's Twin Towns, Sochi has been shortlisted to host the 2014 Winter Olympics, the Leader, Chief Executive and the Mayor have pledged the council's support where possible. The outcome will be known on 4th July.

The Leader referred to the comments made by Councillor Webster relating to the Single Advice Contract and welcomed the opportunity to update the Committee as follows:

At the same time that the Cabinet had considered the referral from Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee it had also received a letter from Angela Gilbert (Cheltenham Voluntary and Community Action) on behalf of the voluntary organisations concerned, agreeing in principle to work to a shared quality standard and adopt a common form of recording statistical data. They had asked for officer support to meet the aspirations of CBC and to work together to develop proposals for future service delivery. Under the circumstances the Cabinet had welcomed the input from the Committee which would add to the evidence base but could not accept the recommendation of the Committee at that time. The Cabinet had agreed a twin track approach, requesting officers' to work with the voluntary organisations to develop proposals as to how the benefits of closer partnership working can deliver improved advisory services for the town. At the same time officers will continue to prepare tender documentation for a single advice contract. A report will be brought back to Cabinet on 18th July 2007 providing appropriate legal and other advice to allow a fundamental decision to be taken which is based on all available evidence including the report of the Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Webster, the Leader confirmed that the recommendations of the Committee had not been rejected totally but deferred to a subsequent meeting to allow the time necessary for the organisations involved to provide a final response and collate all the evidence.

In response to further questions, the Leader indicated that the full details of the contract had yet to be finalised and the range of services provided will depend on the response from the organisations concerned. The important issue is to identify the best option to support advice services across the town to enable the delivery of accessible and effective services to the people that need them.

The Chairman requested that the Cabinet re-visit retirement villages as this type of accommodation could provide the necessary care and quality of life to older people and free up houses at the same time. The Cabinet Member Quality of Life indicated that from April 2007 this area of work has come under her portfolio and a report would shortly be coming to Cabinet on the issue. The Leader commented that he was also talking to CBH with regard to the provision of sheltered accommodation and hoped that the Chairman would champion this at Board level of CBH. The Chairman indicated that it was already in hand.

The Chairman referred to the use of the portable climbing wall at local events which had provided good fun and exercise to users and challenged council employees to do more to support this provision by arranging fund raising events.

The Cabinet Quality of Life reported on the following issues:

- St Paul's Moving Forward - Newsletter 26 to residents.
- The Deputy Mayor had today unveiled the mosaic artworks at Hesters Way Resource Centre. This artwork had been funded by Second Homes money through Cheltenham in Bloom.
- Opening of Lynworth Court extension today which has been built to hold social events.
- the grand opening of the recently refurbished Montpellier Gardens to be held this Saturday which she encouraged all members to attend.

7. PRESENTATION BY BROMFORD HOUSING GROUP (BHG) (Agenda item 6)

The Chairman indicated that Annette Homer, Head of Housing (South West) had sent her apologies and introduced Steve Cook, Managing Director Fosseyway Housing Association (a member of Bromford Housing Group) and Ken Bellis, Neighbourhood Investment Manager to the Committee.

In introducing the presentation Steve Cook provided a brief overview of the company and the work being undertaken to promote the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Housing Market Partnership. He outlined some of the constraints of delivering more affordable housing followed by future business proposals and opportunities.

Ken Bellis provided more detailed information on the structure of the organisation, housing provision, customer service, performance information, partnership working and customer involvement.

(A hard copy of the presentation slides is available from Democratic Services on request.)

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

- more partnership working between the various Registered Social Landlords is beginning to take place particularly with a view to building communities rather than individual schemes.
- emergency response is available 24 hours a day and is manned rather than automated.
- Where new affordable housing developments are built by developers as a section 106 contribution, BHG have little control over the amount of land available for gardens, trees and shrubs or play areas.

The Chairman thanked Steve Cook and Ken Bellis for their interesting and informative presentation.

8. ST PAUL'S REGENERATION PROJECT UPDATE (Agenda item 7)

The Assistant Chief Executive (Service Delivery) Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) introduced this joint report of himself and the Assistant Director Built Environment which had been circulated with the agenda. He indicated that progress has been supported by comprehensive and consistent communication and consultation with residents as set out in Section 2 of the report. The Committee was invited to provide any feedback that it would wish to see considered by Cabinet as part of the ongoing decision making and project planning process.

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

- 12 residents of Crabtree Place have accepted offers of alternative accommodation.
- The outcome of home visits is not confirmed in writing immediately following the meeting because it can take time to transfer the information into a choice as the line of communication can often be backwards and forwards between CBH and the tenant concerned – one fix does not fix all. CBH have to work within certain constraints but individual needs are met as far as is possible.
- The Community House, managed by Cheltenham Community projects is well used by residents and is key to the success of the project, hosting drop-in events, daily surgeries and keeping residents informed about the regeneration project.
- Site security had recently become a problem and the police had been informed. Although one or two show houses could be useful PR it was not a good idea to leave premises empty.
- The redevelopment provided a good opportunity to address special needs and raise the standard to allow individuals to live as independently as possible. Consultation will continue to take place with special need cases and their occupational therapists.

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

- The Assistant Chief Executive (Service Delivery) CBH was not aware of any reports from residents of damage over the past six weeks but would look into the matter further and get back to the Chair of St Paul's residents group. He also agreed to discuss outside of the meeting issues raised by the Chair of St Paul's residents group relating to the management of the Community House.
- The Assistant Director Built Environment indicated that individual negotiations had commenced to purchase those privately owned dwellings recommended by the consultant to be demolished. He agreed to discuss with Mr Wright outside of the meeting, the details of a specific case who had not heard anything regarding compulsory purchase. It could be that the property is not within the area specified.

The Chairman suggested that the setting up of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme may help to reduce incidents of anti social behaviour in the area. She requested that where possible, residents are kept within the community during the redevelopment so that children can remain at the same schools so their education is not disrupted. She commented that the Community House was an excellent and friendly facility open to everyone and she had enjoyed dropping in for a coffee. During her visit many residents had been excited about the kitchen and bathroom choices which were on display.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and looked forward to the next update.

RESOLVED that Committee

- i) notes the contents of the report and progress made to date
- ii) notes the activities planned until March 2008

9. PROACTIVE POLICING OF BOY RACERS (Agenda item 8)

As requested by the Committee, Chief Inspector Steve Radcliffe provided an update on the proactive policing of boy racers. He covered the following main issues:-

- Boy Racers/Cruisers (showing off cars) are usually young people aged 18-22. They need to be in full time employment or fairly well off as modifications to the car are very expensive and insurance can be up to £2000 per year.
- Since April there have been 22 incidents reported in Cheltenham which is relatively low when compared to the national figure of 27,969.
- Potential Hot spots in Cheltenham include the ring road, St James car park, Gallagher Retail Park and Tewkesbury Road and are usually areas within close proximity to a motorway and fast food outlets. The road policing unit at Bamfurlong deal with any problems associated with boy racers/cruisers.
- If a car is unregistered, has no insurance or no tax it can be removed from the road. A number of initiatives have been set up locally to try to reduce the problem including installing barriers in car parks and retail parks, engaging with boy racers where possible and introducing speed control schemes such as 'dying to drive'. However, a significant number of the boy racers/cruisers are from outside Cheltenham so unfortunately there is no ownership.
- The craze is not as prevalent as 12 months ago and seems to be moving towards an increase in the use of mopeds. However, the police can use off road motorbikes to tackle problems identified in open spaces.

The following comments were made by the Committee:-

- Altering the sequence of the traffic light system on the inner ring road has taken away the opportunity to speed and mitigated the problem over the last 6-8 months.
- The problems were now more to do with the mobile disco associated with Boy Racers/Cruisers which impacted on local residents, particularly around meeting points which were often well publicised events.

In response to a question and comments from Councillor Allen, Chief Inspector Steve Radcliffe recognised that once a barrier is installed the problem moves to another site but indicated the police are working with site owners to prevent this happening and were able to make representations through the planning process.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Steve Radcliffe for his update and for the work being undertaken with the Council to tackle the problem.

10. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Agenda item 9)

As the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor Hall introduced this Information/Discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. She briefly outlined the work of the Committee

over the past year and indicated that at the November meeting the Director of Public Health will give the Annual Report which will enable HOSC to consider any issues that the report raises for inclusion in the 2008 workplan. Councillor Hall requested the opportunity to share this report with the Committee at its meeting on 29th November and ask for comments to feed into the HOSC workplan.

The Committee welcomed the update indicating that it was important for Cheltenham's views to be represented on local health issues. It was acknowledged that HOSC was not just a listening desk and had successfully opposed a number of issues on the Future of Healthcare in Gloucestershire resulting in the NHS agreeing to re-think some of its proposals. On the Mental Health consultation the centralisation of older people's services had been referred by the HOSC to the Secretary of State and was awaiting an outcome.

The Committee flagged up the following as particular areas of concern:-

- There were no notices on display at the General Hospital to indicate that the first 20 minutes of parking is free. As a hospital governor, Councillor Franklin agreed to take up this issue.
- What has been the effect of closing down facilities in 2007, has the change been for the better - are people able to get the specialist treatment they need, are waiting times being reduced?
- Aftercare services.
- Hospital cleanliness and MRSA.

RESOLVED that Committee considers the Annual Report of the Director of Public Health at its meeting on 29th November 2007 and provides proposals for the HOSC workplan.

11. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2007/08 (Agenda item 10)

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He indicated that the Committee was required to agree a workplan for 2007/08 which reflects the relevant priorities of the business plan, whilst leaving sufficient headroom to respond to urgent issues through the year. He invited feedback as to what had worked well or not so well over the past twelve months.

The Committee felt that presentations by outside bodies had been informative and useful and should continue to feature in the workplan (no more than 1 per meeting). Single items and themed meetings had also worked well. The Chairman indicated that the Scrutiny Champions Group recommended one or two items per agenda so that they can be considered in more depth.

The following items were suggested for inclusion in the workplan:-

- Single Advice Contract (10th September 2007)
- *Affordable Housing (Cllr Webster)
- *Arts development (H Kitchin)
- Update on work of newly appointed joint PCT/CBC Healthy Lifestyles Officer (29th November 2007)
- Retirement/Care villages (to monitor Cabinet progress)

- Local Area Agreement (in particular the thematic blocks relating to the Social and Community remit; Children and Young People, Healthier Communities and Older People and Safer and Stronger Communities)

* Scrutiny topic registration form to be completed for further details.

RESOLVED that the workplan for 2007/08 be approved.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 9th July 2007

The Chairman informed the Committee that there will be a joint meeting of Social and Community and Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the progress on implementing the council's cultural review on Tuesday 31st July 2007, at the Pittville Pump Room from 6.00 pm.

Councillor Mrs B Driver
Chair