

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
29 NOVEMBER 2007

MINUTES
(18.00 – 19.15)

PRESENT Councillor John Webster (in the Chair), Councillors Peter Allen, Tina Franklin and Sandra Holliday

Hazel Kitchin

APOLOGIES Councillor Chris Coleman, Leader and Cabinet Member Quality of Life Jackie Sallis and Lorna Steers

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

2. MINUTES (Agenda item 3)

The Chairman referred to page 4 and indicated that there are three regeneration areas in Cheltenham and not five as stated.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th October be approved as a correct record, subject to the above amendment.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None

4. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

(a) By Council – None

(b) By Cabinet

- i) Final review of the council's 2007-08 conditional offers of grant (COG) and Regeneration in Cheltenham (agenda item 5Bi)
- ii) The Future Procurement of services from the Voluntary Sector by the Social and Community Group (agenda item 5Bii – for information)

The Chairman introduced the above items together as they were related. He explained that at the meeting held on 30th October 2007, the Cabinet had invited the Committee to monitor the implementation Action Plan for collaborative working between the regeneration companies to improve service delivery within their neighbourhoods and make better use of resources. He indicated that in respect of 5ii) the Cabinet had not supported the Committee's recommendation that the funding currently targeted at the Cheltenham Regeneration Partnership be continued to the Stronger Communities Partnership but had agreed for further exploration by officers of the status of the current

matching contribution from Gloucestershire PCT and the impact of potential withdrawal of CBC funding. The Chairman commented that whilst it might be appropriate for the Committee to receive a progress report from time to time from the Regeneration Companies, the Committee did not have the resource available to monitor the implementation Action Plan. It was the responsibility of the Stronger Communities Partnership to undertake this role and not the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that the Committee declines the invitation made by the Cabinet to monitor the implementation Action Plan for collaborative working between the regeneration companies

(c) Other Committees – None

5. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AT THE SECOND QUARTER and
6. DEVELOPING THE COUNCIL'S 2008/09 ANNUAL UPDATE FOR THE BUSINESS PLAN 2007-10 (agenda items 7 and 8)

The Performance Manager introduced the above items together as they were related. He indicated that the Summer flood emergency had had a big impact on delivery of services within the Social and Community Directorate, particularly resulting from the reinstatement of Leisure@. He asked the Committee to consider whether the 2007/10 ambitions were still relevant or over-ambitious in light of the circumstances.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 3.3 of the Corporate Performance report and congratulated Cheltenham Borough Homes on their performance which had culminated in a 3 star rating from the Housing Inspectorate. He also pointed out that the Summer Flood emergency had also had a detrimental effect on the local economy as demonstrated by the downturn in visitor spending per head in TIC.

The Chairman commented that the Single Advice Contract and regeneration in Cheltenham needed to continue to be priority work areas for the council, otherwise the previous good work undertaken over the past ten years would be undermined.

The Chairman asked the Performance Manager whether he felt the business plan 2007-10 was over-ambitious in view of the resources available. In response, the Performance Manager suggested it was a good opportunity to review the plan to ensure that the priorities were still relevant. He explained that the number of statutory Best Value Performance Indicators had been reduced significantly to 64 for District Councils so this will enable authorities to concentrate on their own local priorities and develop more meaningful indicators to measure performance.

The Deputy Chief Executive commented that the Council needed to make some difficult decisions as to the kind of services it wishes to provide in future based on the limited budget available over the next five years. Some services are statutory but some of the discretionary services such as culture, recreation and leisure make Cheltenham the place that it is and cuts in these areas could be detrimental to the town's economy and it's identity.

The Chairman commented that he would like the Committee to focus on the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership priorities, sustainability and the impact of climate change and tackling inequalities as part of its future work plan. The Council needed to

look at different ways of delivering services including stronger partnership working particularly with the voluntary sector and he felt that some work in building bridges was required in this area following the move to a single advice contract.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- i) Notes the high-level performance issues raised.
- ii) Notes the performance exceptions reported and refers any questions or concerns it may have about them to the responsible Strategic Director or Assistant Director

7. FUTURE PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES FROM THE THIRD (VOLUNTARY) SECTOR IN CHELTENHAM (Agenda item 9)

The Chairman explained that at the meeting held on 30th October, the Cabinet had endorsed in principle the future commissioning direction outlined in section 3 of the report, subject to further consultation through the VCA before the next Cabinet meeting. He indicated that at the next meeting held on 20th November 2007, the Cabinet Member Quality of Life had provided an oral update in respect of the comments and questions arising from the extended consultation. She had indicated that whilst they added to the debate, she believed that they did not alter the recommendations accepted by the Cabinet in the original report. The Chairman explained that he had asked the Cabinet to delay a final decision until after this Committee had had chance to consider the report and the consultation responses at its next meeting on 29th November 2007. However, the Cabinet decided to re-affirm Executive Decision 66 taken in principle at the previous meeting held on 30th October 2007.

The Chairman invited the Committee to consider the future funding and commissioning arrangements with the third (voluntary) sector in Cheltenham outlined in the report and make any suggestions that could be incorporated into the proposed approach, if necessary. The Chairman introduced Mr Chris Hickey to the meeting who he had invited to provide a response to the report on behalf of Cheltenham Voluntary and Community Action.

Mr Hickey raised the following key issues:-

- The report mentions the Gloucestershire Compact with the Voluntary and Community Sector. This document which aims to make a positive impact on the relationship between the public sector and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and their joint commitment to enhance partnership work is considered by the voluntary sector to be fundamental. However, the Council has contravened one of the six codes of practice relating to consultation which recognises 12 weeks as being good practice when consulting with the VCS and no reason for the compressed consultation process had been given. He felt that an opportunity to sit down together to reach a joint understanding of the Compact and produce a really good report had been missed.
- The responses to the questions arising from the extended consultation circulated by the Cabinet Member Quality of Life raise more questions with no process for further answers to be provided to the voluntary sector.
- In moving forward the Council needed to re-focus on the terms of the Compact.

The Community Development Manager provided responses to a number of questions raised by Members of the Committee.

The Chairman indicated that the Council was dependant on the enthusiasm, good will and commitment of the voluntary sector and felt that they had been treated badly particularly those organisations who despite good performance under the terms of their grant funding had not been successful in securing the single advice contract. He also questioned why the Cabinet Compact Champion had not followed the Gloucestershire Compact. It was important for the voluntary sector to be able to trust the council if there is to be increased working in partnership in future.

8. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEM – CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME AS AMENDED FOLLOWING DISCUSSIONS WITH NEW CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 10)

The Chairman indicated that following his appointment he had reviewed the current work programme with the Vice Chairman and added a number of items which had been included on the amended version attached to the agenda. He explained that in future he would prefer there to be one or two agenda items per meeting so that they could be discussed in more detail. He asked Members to put forward any ideas for new topics by completing the standard proforma, circulated with the agenda. The Committee asked to be kept regularly informed of the cultural partnership issue and the Art Gallery and Museum development.

The Committee agreed that the Christmas Lights in Cheltenham item could be taken off the work plan.

9. COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SESSION

The Chairman indicated that since the last meeting, the four conservative members of the Committee had resigned and that the letter had been circulated to all members of the Committee for information. He indicated that he had not yet seen a response from the Chief Executive.

The Chairman was concerned at the lack of Cabinet Member attendance at the meeting.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 9th January 2008

Councillor J Webster
Chair