

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
31 MARCH 2008

MINUTES
(18.00 – 20.00)

PRESENT Councillor John Webster (in the Chair), Councillors Peter Allen, Chris Coleman
Tina Franklin, and Councillor Morris (substitute for Councillor Holliday)

Hazel Kitchin and Lorna Steers

1. APOLOGIES Councillor Holliday
Cabinet Member (Stronger and Safer Communities)
Jackie Sallis

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs Steers declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 The Future of Tenant Involvement in Cheltenham as Chairman of the Cheltenham Federation.

3. MINUTES (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th February 2008 be approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

(a) By Council – None

(b) By Cabinet - None

(c) Other Committees – None

- 6 SOCIAL IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Chris Hickey, Cheltenham Centre for Change gave a presentation on the Impact of Climate Change and Peak Oil on Cheltenham based on the document with the same title that had been circulated with the agenda. He briefly covered the global and national context and focussed on local and personal initiatives that have been put forward to adapt to the consequences and to mitigate the effects of climate change and increasing energy costs. The presentation identified Civic Leadership (the council) as being critical in co-ordinating these activities and taking the leading role in instigating change as a matter of priority.

Councillor Allen was concerned that counter arguments had not been put forward regarding alternative reasons for changes in the weather pattern and the public document was therefore not balanced. He suggested that the government has to take a lead on reducing carbon dioxide emissions and combating climate change. Whilst he recognised that the council could make a contribution, how could it promote localism when the government is closing post offices across the town which impacts on the local community and small businesses. It was also necessary to put pressure on countries like China and India that generate significantly more carbon dioxide than Britain.

Councillor Morris indicated that the recently agreed Business Plan 2007 – 2010 had been informed by community consultation and set the priorities for the Council, however tackling Climate Change was not on this list. The council can have an awareness of climate change which should be applied to all its functions and activities, however it was not in a strong position to force others to comply. He felt it was up to individuals to take responsibility for the initiatives and taking them forward and not the Council as the document suggested.

Mr Hickey thanked the Committee for their engagement in the debate. In response to comments he indicated that it was his view that Britain needed to address its own issues before it campaigned against other countries. However, international engagement was on a future agenda. He suggested that in its Leadership role the Council had many opportunities to influence policies and business partners and had a duty to plan effectively for the future. He suggested that a separate Committee be set up to tackle climate change and be at the frontline of creating solutions.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hickey for his presentation and indicated that the Scrutiny Champions Group would shortly be considering how to take the topic forward.

7. THE FUTURE OF TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN CHELTENHAM (Agenda item 7)

The Assistant Director Community Services presented this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that at its meeting on 30th October 2007 Cabinet requested further information on future tenant representation post April, after the ending of funding to the current Tenants Federation in light of the negative report from the grant review body, which had recommended the ending of the Council's grant to the Federation.

The Assistant Director Community Services indicated that an independent expert in tenant participation had been commissioned to consult with local stakeholders about their aspirations, review current practice in the field and recommend a consensus way forward as stage 1. In the meantime the Community Involvement team at CBH had developed alternative structures for tenant involvement and participation which were working well.

The Assistant Director Community Services provided the following responses to Members' questions:-

- During the first year of change a sum of £20k has been ringfenced from the Housing Revenue Account to facilitate training and communication in relation to tenant and leaseholder representational activity in the borough. When a new sustainable structure was evidenced the running costs would be met from the HRA

and costed options would form part of stage 2 of the development and subsequent report back to Cabinet in July 2008.

- The independent consultation exercise had to be undertaken within a short timescale but had covered a wide cross section of stakeholders as detailed in the report. There had been no deliberate attempt to exclude anyone.

Councillor Morris expressed his disappointment with progress to date and was concerned that there was currently no framework for tenant and leaseholder involvement in housing in Cheltenham. He pointed out that in October 2007, the Cabinet had accepted the view of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and was therefore aware at that stage that as at 31st March 2008, the Cheltenham Federation would no longer exist. He asked what was expected of the new Resident Strategy Group as the terms of reference outlined in the report were not very comprehensive. In response the Cabinet Member Quality of Life indicated that this had not yet been decided. She explained that in the interim period the Community Involvement team at CBH were working hard to maintain tenant involvement and participation and CBH officers were available at the meeting to provide an update if required by the Committee.

Councillor Webster commented that the premises at 350 High Street were well established and recognised as a centre for Cheltenham tenants. He suggested that the Council take over the lease to allow Cheltenham Federation to provide a skeleton service and some continuity over the interim period. In response, Mrs Steers confirmed that as grant funding had ceased, the Cheltenham Federation had already given up the lease.

Mrs Steers indicated that this was her last meeting as representative of Cheltenham Federation. She expressed her disappointment at the process leading up to the council's decision to withdraw funding to the Federation. She also raised some concerns regarding future tenant participation in Cheltenham and the proposed way forward.

The Committee was concerned that despite the work of its review group in making recommendations to the Cabinet to cease funding the Federation, it had not been involved in the future development of tenant participation and requested that it be consulted in future. It was crucial in Members' view for any alternative structure to be 'independent' from CBC and CBH.

8. ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Museum and Arts Manager summarised the stages of the RIBA Open Design competition culminating in the unanimous decision of the jury panel that Berman Guedes Stretton (based in Oxford and London) be awarded the commission, in the anticipation of realising a distinguished and successful AG&M Development scheme. She indicated that next steps included a progress report to Cabinet on 15th April with an outline of the funding strategy to be launched at the end of April 2008. Project planning for the building of the new extension at the AG&M will be starting including the submission of a planning application. An Audience Development Plan is also to be developed including the launch of a touring exhibitions programme and the launch of further consultation with the local community (users and non-users) and stakeholders.

The following responses were provided to Members' questions:-

- The judging panel had received detailed costings for each of the shortlisted schemes and had undertaken some benchmarking and quantity surveying exercises. The winning submission was within the budget of £4m building costs plus professional and other fees.
- In view of the recent problems associated with flooding a risk assessment for flood protection will be undertaken together with a detailed report on the sub-structure of the building.
- HLF South West had indicated that a funding application from the AG&M would not be favourably considered for reasons largely related to pre Olympic funding shortage and another potential bid from CBC relating to Pittville Park Restoration Scheme. However in view of this development a funding strategy has been developed which includes the setting up of a Development Trust in order to benefit from significant grants and donations which might not otherwise be forthcoming. This has resulted in an independent recognised Trust proposing to make a significant grant allocation to the scheme. The HLF has suggested an application could be made in 2010 which could be the basis of a separate phase 2 scheme of the library/museum galleries.
- The Cabinet Member was not prepared to divulge at this stage how much funding the Cabinet were prepared to commit to the scheme, however it would be subject of the Cabinet report on 15th April 2008.
- The Deputy Chief Executive clarified that apart from £500k already committed from the sale proceeds of the Axiom, the Cabinet did not have the authority within current capital resources to match fund the project and therefore a recommendation would have to be made to Council.

The Committee praised the Museum and Arts Manager for her hard work and enthusiasm for the project. The Committee supported the development scheme as it will be a significant additional facility for the town and indicated that the council should demonstrate its commitment by making a significant funding contribution, however this needed to be supported by a detailed business plan including on-going revenue stream to finance the running costs of the building in the future.

9. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member Stronger and Safer Communities had given her apologies but had prepared a briefing note for circulation to the Committee, for information.

The Cabinet Member Arts and Culture reported on the following:-

- Unveiling of statue of Gustav Holst in Imperial Gardens on 4th April 2008 at 12.00 noon.
- The Pittville Pump Room floor had recently been replaced.
- Town Hall catering contract was up for renewal.
- The Playhouse is closed for two months for refurbishment.
- The Music Festival has reached its sponsorship target already but any more sponsorship is welcomed.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor Allen relating to the lack of facilities for young people particularly budding actors/actresses following the closure of the Axiom and Young Arts

Centre, the Cabinet Member Arts and Culture indicated that school productions were now widely popular, the Art Centre and Arts Development programme run by the AG & M and its outreach service also offered activities in this area. Councillor Morris commented that it was important to promote this information across the borough particularly through the resource centres in the regeneration areas.

10. COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SESSION

Councillor Morris hoped that following the Borough elections, a cross party structure for this Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be in place for the benefit of the town.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Steers for her contribution to the work of the Committee as a co-opted Member and wished her well for the future.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Thursday 5th June 2008

Councillor J Webster
Chair