

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
8TH SEPTEMBER 2008

MINUTES
(18.00 – 20.15)

PRESENT Councillor Duncan Smith (in the Chair), Councillors Lydia Bishop, Tina Franklin
Martin Dunne, Les Godwin, David Hall, Paul McLain and Chris Ryder.
Hazel Kitchin and Karl Hemming

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing

1. APOLOGIES Councillors Sandra Holliday
Jackie Sallis

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Karl Hemming declared an interest in agenda item 5b Future of Tenant Participation in Cheltenham as he was a member of the steering group which had set up Cheltenham Tenants and Leaseholders Voice.

3. MINUTES (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd July 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

FUTURE OF TENANT PARTICIPATION IN CHELTENHAM

In introducing this report the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing explained that at its meeting on 22nd July, the Cabinet had considered the contents, noted progress made to date and the further recommendations for progressing tenant participation in Cheltenham and had referred the report to this Committee for their consideration and recommendations. He introduced Mr Ian McDougal, the independent consultant who had been commissioned to prepare the previous report to Cabinet in March 2008. He had subsequently facilitated meetings with tenant and resident representatives and a range of stakeholders resulting in the election of an interim subcommittee to act on their behalf.

Ian McDougal gave a presentation entitled 'moving Forward in Partnership' which outlined the background to the current position detailed in the Cabinet report 22nd July 2008 and

the proposed way forward. In order to progress the issue, Ian McDougal recommended that the Committee:-

- i) approve the formation and funding of the new Cheltenham Tenants and Leaseholders Voice
- ii) recognises that support and guidance will be needed to ensure this new group develops links and adds value to the Borough of Cheltenham.

For the benefit of new Members of the Committee, the Chairman asked Ian McDougal to provide a brief overview of events leading up to his previous report considered by Cabinet in March 2008 entitled 'Future Developments for Tenant Involvement in Cheltenham' and to highlight some of the weaknesses that had been identified with the previously run independent tenant organisation.

The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing indicated that in his view there has to be an autonomous body that represents the interest of CBH's clients and whose role is to continually examine and constructively criticise the Council and CBH services. An effective independent tenants/leaseholders body with a mandate wider than just rents and repairs was key in this.

The Committee raised the following key concerns:-

- economies could be made by utilising existing buildings eg CBH or one of the resource centres across the borough, rather than leasing a new one
- the need for two rooms was questioned as it necessitated the use of larger premises than 350 High Street resulting in increased costs associated with the lease
- a detailed business plan would have to be considered by the Committee before a recommendation regarding funding could be made to Cabinet
- was the Bristol model comparable to Cheltenham and the indicative annual budget therefore an accurate reflection of costs?
- There would be an element of duplication of services, eg signposting, information and training was already being provided by other organisations established across the Borough – why invest in something new?
- The report indicated that the new centre would 'offer a Cheltenham wide service to tenants/leaseholders and other groups' was this not the role of CBH?

Ian McDougal provided the following responses to some of the concerns raised:-

- It was important for tenants to see the new organisation as totally independent of CBH/the Council and separate premises were key to this. The use of two rooms had proved successful in the Bristol experience, the usage had increased over time to a point where the facilities were now being hired out from time to time to external organisations.
- Whilst the Bristol centre represented and dealt with significantly more tenants than Cheltenham and issues and concerns may be different, the concept worked well as a model and the running costs had been adjusted to reflect Cheltenham's needs. The previous tenant organisation had been set up in a similar fashion but unfortunately it had not been well run and there was little or no on-going training and development.
- Although some of the services may be duplicated by other external organisations it was important to have one body which specifically focussed on tenant/leaseholders issues in one place and provided advocacy and a voice on their behalf. The Housing Inspectorate in measuring performance expect tenants to have meaningful opportunities to participate in the day to day management of their properties and to be involved in their landlord's strategic decision making processes.
- The inspirational milestones over the next few months included a publicity campaign, capacity building, identifying and launching the new centre and

production of a detailed business plan by tenants/leaseholders which could be brought back at a future date.

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

- £20,000 had been available from the HRA account to facilitate the first stages of this work, together with £6,500 which had been recovered from the failed previous Tenants Federation grant. To date approximately £10,000 had been spent on consultancy fees, recruitment and training of tenant and leaseholder representatives. Based on the Bristol model the initial indicative annual budget is £28,000. The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing pointed out that this was a significant saving when compared to the previous Tenants Federation who received grant funding in the sum of £84,000 for 2007/08.

The Committee supported the principle of an independent tenants organisation but felt it was not in a position to make any recommendation to Cabinet until a number of questions raised above had been answered. The Chairman suggested that a small cross party working group be set up to explore the matter further and produce a report with it's recommendations.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Cabinet Member Community Development indicated that there was no specific time constraint in relation to recommendations coming back to Cabinet.

Kath Chamberlain was concerned that any delay in a decision could result in tenants losing interest in the process which was key to the success of the new organisation.

The Chairman suggested that the working group prepare a report to be circulated to Members of the Committee for comments. Providing there were no issues raised, the recommendations of the working group could then be submitted to Cabinet as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that a working group consisting of Councillors Dunne, Godwin and Ryder be set up to look into the concerns raised above in more detail and make recommendations to Cabinet on behalf of the Committee.

(c) By Other Committee – None

**6. UPDATE ON BLACK AND OTHER MINORITY ETHNIC (BoME) COMMUNITIES
(Agenda item 7)**

The Community Development Service Manager introduced this item which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that at the request of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the briefing note had been prepared to detail the progress and developments which have been made since the recruitment of the council's new BoME capacity worker in October 2007.

The BoME capacity worker highlighted some of the particular successes and future development projects.

The Chairman congratulated the BoME capacity worker for a successful year which had exceeded expectations.

The BoME capacity worker provided the following responses to Members' questions:-

- the Bangladeshi community as a percentage of Cheltenham's population was not known. Approximately 10% of the town were from black and other minority ethnic communities.
- there were parallel BoME groups in Gloucester although in more concentrated areas and the council was sharing information and drawing on good practice from this where possible.
- The initiative to celebrate the Chinese New Year could not be an annual event because it would not be fair on the other ethnic communities. As part of the 2007/08 Action Plan a series of cultural events had been set up and facilitated to promote the role, begin engagement, and to celebrate diversity. Future commitments and developments for BoME work will be dependent upon securing either additional corporate funding as part of a budget growth bid or trying to identify potential projects with partner and external funders.
- She was not aware of the Parish Pride initiative but part of her role was to encourage and assist BoME groups to apply for funding so she was interested to find out more about it.

In response to a question from Karl Hemming with regard to encouraging participation of BoME communities in local neighbourhood projects, the BoME capacity worker agreed to speak to him separately outside of the meeting.

Mrs Kitchin commented that the Horticultural Society might be a good contact with regard to potential sponsorship of allotment gardening projects.

The Chairman asked the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing what the Cabinet's strategy was for taking this work forward. In response, the Cabinet Member indicated that the agenda was general capacity building of BoME communities in Cheltenham and making sure that experiences of the BoME capacity worker are disseminated throughout the council to inform policies, strategies and the delivery of services. He was unable to comment at this stage how the Cabinet proposed to take community integration and cohesion agendas forward.

The Chairman thanked the Community Development Service Manager and the BoME capacity worker for their presentation.

7. UPDATE ON ST PAULS REGENERATION PROJECT (Agenda item 8)

The Assistant Chief Executive (Service Delivery) Cheltenham Borough Homes introduced this report which had been circulated separately from the agenda. He explained that since the commencement of the regeneration project in 2007, considerable progress has been made in delivering key elements of the project to support the transformation of the St Paul's estate. In consultation with local residents and a wide range of stakeholders, a draft urban design masterplan has been prepared and will be presented to Cabinet on 23rd, together with an outline costs plan.

Councillor Ryder congratulated CBH on their delivery of the project to date, and was pleased that the project had received positive local media coverage recently. In response to her question, the Assistant Chief Executive (Service Delivery) CBH indicated that the downturn in the economic climate had not slowed the project down so far. The delivery of transformational improvements will be the next stage of the project, starting with improvements to existing housing. Funding options will be subject of a further report to Cabinet in November 2008.

The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing commented that the objective of the regeneration scheme is to provide a mixed tenure and more balanced and sustainable community. The credit crunch was an inherent risk and the Government were already looking at measures and reforms designed to respond to current challenges in the housing market. However there were also some benefits to be gained under the circumstances as the works could be done cheaper.

In response to a question from Councillor Godwin, the Partnership Manager (CBH) explained that from the outset all residents had been guaranteed 'Right to Return' to their original homes. However, as a result of the preference and choices exercise undertaken in the early stages of the decant process a number of tenants had chosen to make their temporary home permanent as their needs and aspirations had already been met.

In response to questions from the Chairman, the Partnership Manager (CBH) confirmed that the St Paul's Resident group which had been very vocal in the early stages of the project had now disbanded. Tenant involvement/participation continues through the consultation group set up during the urban design planning stage, which now meets to discuss other issues and remains fully briefed.

The Chairman indicated that the Committee would be interested in setting up a small working group to assist the Cabinet in reviewing future funding options. In response to his further comments the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing acknowledged that it was within the power of the Local Authority to grant mortgages although usually as a last resort but it was something that could be explored.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Chief Executive (Service Delivery) CBH for his report which was very encouraging.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- i) Notes the contents of the report and progress made to date;
- ii) Notes the actions planned over the next three months

8. APPOINTMENT OF ADDITIONAL NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE (agenda item 9)

The Strategic Director Environment briefly introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that in view of its wide ranging remit and with the support of the Chairman, the Committee were being asked to consider recommending to Council that provision be made to appoint up to two additional non-voting co-opted members to assist in the work if the Committee where specialist knowledge would be of benefit.

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends to Council that the co-opted membership of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee be increased to five (plus one non-voting housing tenant co-opted member).

9. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS (Agenda item 10)

Scrutiny topic registration forms were submitted by Councillor Frankin, McLain and Ryder. These will be passed to the relevant officer for completion of the implications section and will be considered by the Committee for inclusion in the work programme at

the next meeting.

Councillor Hall indicated that he needed to carry out further research before he could submit scrutiny topic registration forms in respect of the topics he had suggested at the previous meeting

10. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING (Agenda item 6)

The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing was conscious that it had been a long meeting for everyone so indicated that he would keep his briefing short. He reported on the following:-

- He would be taking a report to Cabinet on 23rd September 2008 'Review of the tenancy agreement and Conditions of tenancy for Council Tenants. It related to issues such as dealing effectively with anti-social behaviour, rules relating to keeping animals and pets, dealing with local areas of nuisance and effective management of communal areas.

In response to a question from Councillor Ryder, the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing explained that within his portfolio he was responsible for the people element of St Paul's Regeneration and that the Cabinet Member Built Environment was responsible for the bricks and mortar. He indicated that every fortnight on a Friday he visited the Community House and talked with residents who were far less hostile than in the very early stages of the redevelopment.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 20th October 2008.

Councillor D Smith
Chair