

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2008

MINUTES  
(18.00 – 20.15)

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing  
Cabinet Member Finance and Culture

1. APOLOGIES Jackie Sallis

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3. MINUTES (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008 be approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Matters Arising

• **5B Future of Tenant Participation in Cheltenham**

The recommendations of the working group had been circulated to the Committee and would be presented to Cabinet by the Chairman of the working group on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2008

• **8 Appointment of additional non-voting co-opted Members of the Committee**

Council at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October had resolved that the co-opted membership of this Committee be increased to five (plus one non voting housing tenant representative). Through Angela Gilbert (Cheltenham VCA), the Voluntary Sector Forum will now be invited to nominate a representative to be a co-opted Member of this Committee.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

(a) By Council – None

(b) By Cabinet – None

(c) By Other Committee – None

6. PRESENTATION BY CHELTENHAM VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY ACTION (CVCA)  
(Agenda item 6)

Angela Gilbert, Services Manager of CVCA gave a detailed presentation on the core functions of this organisation providing a range of examples of the type of work undertaken to support local voluntary and community groups and the key issues and challenges faced both locally and nationally prospective. She also circulated an information leaflet to Members of the Committee for future reference.

The following responses were provided to Members' questions:-

- CVCA received a Community Investment Grant from the Council of £34k for 2008/09
- Whilst CVCA was keen to support new organisations, it had limited funds available. The setting up of the new Tenants and Leaseholders Voice in Cheltenham will be a big piece of work so CVCA would only be in a position to offer limited support.
- The part time post of the Manager (25 hours per week) limited the time available to go out and identify new groups. However, attending events such as Citizens Day provided opportunities to increase the information held on the database which was also shared with the council's Community Development team.
- Angela Gilbert represented the Voluntary Sector Forum on the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership and there were VCF representation on the local thematic partnerships.
- CVCA were not trained to provide legal advice and therefore clients were recommended to obtain professional help from solicitors in the town.
- The CVCA have developed regular discussions with the Borough Council which have proved to be very useful and it was hoped that this could be extended in future to engaging regularly with the police authority and the PCT.

The following comments were also made during discussion:-

- Cheltenham VCA had been very helpful in signposting the Gardens Galleries to Black and other Minority Ethnic groups, an example of the system working.
- A countywide event was taking place on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2008 'Delivering an Environment for a Thriving Third Sector: Successes and Challenges' and Members were encouraged to attend.

The Chairman thanked Angela Gilbert for her informative presentation and was very pleased with the work undertaken by Cheltenham VCA.

## 7. SINGLE HOUSING ADVICE - PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda item 8)

The Service Manager, Community Services presented this report which had been circulated separately from the agenda. She explained the process for monitoring the Single Housing Advice Contract being delivered by the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008.

Mr Andrew Banfield, Manager of CAB indicated that whilst he had had some initial concerns about consolidating arrangements for the delivery of housing and debt advice services across the town, he was satisfied with the level of service being delivered under the new contract. Following an independent review of housing advice, the CAB had been awarded a specialist quality mark.

The following responses were provided to Members' comments and questions:-

- Early intervention with regard to debt management was key to a positive outcome. The CAB were talking to the council's Council Tax department and getting involved with cases prior to the use of bailiffs.
- The current 'credit crunch' may reduce the availability of credit thus reducing the number of options to get into debt.
- CAB were pushing publicity with regard to their new location at St James Square. Members, having a key role within the community could assist with this communication.
- CAB continued to provide general advice through other sources of funding and signposted where necessary. Clients were given support and encouraged to self help where possible for future use. There was no indication that clients were dissatisfied due to the reduced services. Enquiries to CAB for those services under the contract specification had increased.
- The target was to respond to answerphone messages within the same or next day. It was acknowledged that there had been problems with telephones being unanswered, this was partly due to capacity and also technical phoneline and IT problems immediately following the re-location of premises. The CAB were looking at ways to reduce these problems, for example providing direct dial access to certain clients to free up the general telephone number.
- The figures for Q2 were lower for most of the indicators because of the summer holidays – parents were often diverted during this period because of having to look after their children.
- The CAB also provided a number of outreach services in the local area including Springbank, Oakley, Hesters Way Childrens Centre and home visits.

The Service Manager, Community Services indicated that the second quarter performance monitoring information will now be reviewed in relation to complimentary indicator information prior to the next joint CBC and CAB monitoring meeting due to take place on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

The Chairman thanked the Service Manager, Community Service for her report and Andrew Banfield for attending the meeting and requested that a 12 month report be submitted to the Committee following the CBC and CAB monitoring meeting which formed part of the process.

#### 8. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS (agenda item 8)

The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing reported on the following issues:-

- Allocation of funds through the Community Pride Scheme – report to Cabinet 28<sup>th</sup> October.
- The cleaning contract has been taken back in-house by CBH from April 2008. A team of 8 people with a deep cleaning machine are currently tackling the priority communal areas.
- Review of the Tenancy Agreement and Conditions of Tenancy for Council Tenants - report to Cabinet 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2008
- In view of the economic climate the council was unlikely to secure social housing through planning gain. Therefore CBH were looking at other avenues for funding including a bid through the Housing Corporation Grant

The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing provided the following responses to Members' questions:-

- the Council was still awaiting Government guidance relating to measures and reforms designed to respond to current challenges in the housing market.
- Citizens Day had been very successful. The objective of the day was to bring people together of different backgrounds as part of a Government initiative to provide an opportunity to celebrate local achievements, to build and renew community cohesion, and to develop greater local engagement. The event will be reviewed by the Community Development Manager and repeated again next year.
- He still had a few concerns about the single advice contract particularly reports of unanswered telephone call and delays in arranging interviews/appointments. Some people were going elsewhere so there needed to be better promotion of the services offered by CAB, particularly in view of its relocation.
- Problems had been reported about young people hanging around communal areas in blocks of flats and housing staff were working with the police to monitor the situation. Dispersal orders were an option but they were resource intensive. CCTV was operational at Coates House and Elgar House and CBH were working with the local community to tackle Anti Social Behaviour.

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

- The success of The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival which had run from 10<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October. The Council had made a significant investment in Cheltenham Festivals in the form of a 3 year funding agreement.
- The Art Gallery and Museum Development Trust had been set up. The Chairman is Grahame Lockwood, the Cabinet Member Finance and Culture and Chris Huckle are ex officio trustees together with 3 independent trustees.

9. BUDGET 2009/10 – IDENTIFICATION OF NON PRIORITY AREAS AND GROWTH ITEMS (Agenda item 9)

The Cabinet Member Finance and Culture explained that the Council is facing a budget gap of £2.6m over the next 5 years and has an estimated budget gap for 2009/10 of £777,000. As part of the strategy for bridging the gap, the Cabinet are keen to seek views from all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees on where it should look to find savings in services and consider funding growth.

Councillor McLain suggested that a working group would be the most productive way forward. Further information was however required including 'The Bridging the Gap' work to date, what level of council tax and cuts in services were being proposed by the Cabinet and further information relating to prudential borrowing all of which could have a significant impact on the budget.

The Strategic Director Environment pointed out that members need to be aware of the fact that there are two other Overview and Scrutiny Committees who may be attempting to engage in the budget process in a different way and as a result consistency was in his view paramount. He also urged members to invite the Cabinet Member Finance and Culture and the Section 151 to any working group meeting should members so decide to form one.

The Chairman suggested that the Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member Finance and Culture should also attend the first meeting to provide the necessary steer and guidance on the Cabinets' draft budget preparations.

RESOLVED that a budget working group be established consisting of Councillors Smith, Ryder, Hall and Karl Hemming.

The Chairman indicated that if any other members wished to join the working group they should let him know.

#### 10. WORK OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING (Agenda item 6)

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He referred to the summary of the work of Private Sector Housing and supporting data contained in the appendix which focused almost solely on statutory activities for which there is a mandatory duty for the Council to carry out and which contributes to national indicators and Local Area Agreement targets.

The following responses were provided to Members' questions:-

- The main risk to performance was the current inability to recruit professional staff as there is a shortage nationally of Environmental Health Officers, compounded by the uncertainty of single status. One approach being considered is to train up one of the technical officers to EHO.
- Local PI CS 18 PSH – the current figure for bringing back into use long term empty properties is 35 against a target of 40. Although the council has enforcement powers for the most difficult cases, the process is very time intensive.
- Local PI CS 25 PSH – The target to approve aids and adaptations under the disabled facilities grant is 115, however individual applications can be extremely expensive, the current cap is £30,000.
- Local PI CS 26 PSH – The percentage of service requests that should be responded to within three working days is currently 85% against a target of 95%. Urgent cases were being dealt with but there was lots of slippage in this area. The service is relying on skills in-house and some of the legal cases take time to resolve.
- Resources have been overstretched for the past 18 months to 2 years and unfortunately the cracks were now beginning to show within service provision.
- The Private Sector Strategy Group and the HMO licensing scheme shared information and good practice across the County but there was currently no joint working at ground level.
- Once notified, any liability transfers to the Landlord but if it is not followed-up or enforced by the council, there could be serious implications in a worst case scenario.

Councillor Ryder commented that Private Sector Housing have been under resourced for a considerable period of time and the relevant Cabinet Member should do what he can in the next budget round to secure more funding in this important area of work.

#### 11. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

##### A. Update on cruisers (boy racers) in Cheltenham

The Committee considered the scrutiny topic registration form submitted by Councillor Franklin which had been circulated with the agenda. It was agreed that Inspector Andy Poole, Town Centre INA Inspector would be invited to a future

meeting of the Committee to give a presentation on the work being undertaken to reduce issues relating to the anti social use of motor vehicles particularly 'boy racers'. The Chairman indicated that the item would be factored into the Committee Work Programme at the next Chairs/Vice Chairs briefing.

- B. Accessibility for all community groups at Leisure@, ethnic and the disabled  
The Committee considered the scrutiny topic registration form submitted by Councillor Ryder which had been circulated with the agenda. Councillor Ryder had some further issues arising from the response provided by Stephen Petherick, Commercial Manager and agreed to pick these up in more detail outside of the meeting. An update on Leisure@ was due to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> December.
- C. Use of non-ring fenced DCSF £1.8m grant  
The Committee considered the scrutiny topic registration form submitted by Councillor McLain which had been circulated with the agenda. It was agreed that the budget working group would look into this in more detail.

The Chairman requested a future briefing note on the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 which aims to promote the sustainability of local communities.

## 12. COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SESSION

The Chairman explained that following his request a mechanism has been developed to enable the Committee to receive feedback from Council representatives on outside bodies relevant to the remit of Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He referred to the proforma (Appendix A) and explained that as from the next meeting 2-3 Council representatives will be asked to complete the form for circulation as a briefing note with the agenda. If the organisations are on the agenda the council representative(s) will be invited to attend the meeting to contribute to the debate. It was important that the council received some value from having representatives spending their time on outside bodies and this was an opportunity for review.

## 13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

\*The Chairman indicated that at the invitation of the University of Gloucestershire, the next meeting will be held at the Park Campus. There will be a tour from 5.30 pm and the University will be giving a presentation.

Councillor Dunne (Vice Chair) explained that following discussion at the Chair/Vice they were keen to take meetings out into the community where possible in order to engage with the public.

***\*NB following this meeting, the University have subsequently indicated that they are unable to make this date due to the University Awards Ceremonies taking place. Under the circumstances the next meeting will be held in the usual venue (Pittville Room, Municipal Offices). It is anticipated that the meeting to be held at the***

To be approved at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008

***University will take place on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009 but this will be confirmed at the next meeting.***

Councillor D Smith  
Chair