

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14TH JANUARY 2009

MINUTES

(18.00 – 20.10)

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE Cabinet Member Finance and Culture (Councillor Rawson).

1. **APOLOGIES** Councillors Tina Franklin and Les Godwin.
Jackie Sallis.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Dunne declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 as a Board Member of Cheltenham Borough Homes.

Councillor Hall declared a personal interest in agenda item 10 as the council's appointed representative on Bournside Sports Hall Management Committee.

3. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18TH NOVEMBER 2009**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th November 2009 be approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. **PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

The Chairman indicated that a public question had been received on the subject of 'Cruisers'. As an update on 'Cruisers' from Gloucestershire Police was scheduled for the next meeting on 23rd February 2009, the question had been referred to the police for a response at the meeting.

5. **PRESENTATION FROM UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE (agenda item 6)**

Kevin Richardson, the Dean for the Business School gave a presentation covering the following key issues:-

- Factual and statistical information about the University and its history
- The growing reputation of the University – national and international
- Commitment to sustainability
- Student activities in the community
- Community relations
- Links with local industry and commerce
- Ongoing plans to develop relationships within the community

(A copy of the presentation is available from Democratic Services)

Kevin Richardson provided the following responses to Members' questions and comments:-

- Bursar training was offered by the University of Gloucestershire and take up was regional.
- For financial reasons more students were from this part of the country but at the recent very successful Open Day there had been a mix of people from right across the country demonstrating the growing reputation of the University and its specialism in some areas.
- Work placements were critical for the success of the undergraduate programme, 76% of undergraduates who have placements get jobs quickly. However this will be more difficult in the current economic climate. The aim of the University was to provide local work placements to all students who want them locally. The University therefore valued support from strategic partners such as the council and local employers and have built up a mutual respect. The University wished to be recognised as a trusted and critical member of the local community.
- Access to higher education was improving with recognition that experience can be as relevant as A levels. There were a number of conversion programmes and flexible degree programmes including top up to degree level.
- E-learning was at the heart of University policy, enabling a non traditional route to learning by remote access. This included part time courses and adult return to learning. It was recognised that more communication was required in this area as take-up was more likely to be tripped upon rather than being actively pursued.
- It was confirmed that the University had no current plans to vacate the Pittville Campus and it would continue to be used for Media, Arts and Communication for the foreseeable future.
- 'Engineering' has changed from the traditional definition and the University is working closely with Dowty Engineering in respect of the 'investing and shaping' programme under the Governments Apprenticeship Scheme. The University offers the 14–19 year old diploma but needed regular guidance from employers as to the direction of employment and skills requirement.
- First year students were housed by the University and generally preferred to be accommodated on campus. Subsequent private accommodation was approved by the University. The trend is changing to reflect an increase in postgraduate and adult learning.

The Chairman thanked Kevin Richardson for his presentation.

6. PRESENTATION FROM EVERYMAN THEATRE (agenda item 7)

Geoffrey Rowe, Chief Executive of Everyman Theatre Cheltenham gave a presentation covering the following key issues:-

- What they do - including the broadest range of theatre and a substantial programme of community and education work (ReachOut)
- Financial information and audience analysis
- Programme improvements over 2008 and breakdown of events held in the Main Auditorium and the Studio Theatre
- ReachOut – A programme which helps children and adults explore their creative potential through the arts in a wide range of community and educational initiatives.
- Increasing cost of running and caring for a Victorian building
- The £2m refurbishment project proposed for 2010/11 – possible funders including approach to Cheltenham Borough Council

(A copy of the presentation is available from Democratic Services)

Geoffrey Rowe provided the following responses to Members' questions and comments:-

- The Everyman had submitted an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (£1m) and had approached the council for match funding.
- In view of the current economic climate, the Everyman could only spend the funds it was able to raise and it was unable to claim back VAT. It was acknowledged that secondhand cinema seats had been re-upholstered in 2001 through dedicated sponsorship but as they leaned back and were uncomfortable with not much leg room, it seemed sensible to change them as part of the refurbishment project.
- From analysis that had been undertaken there was a broad range of socio and economic background in respect of the audiences that went to the Everyman Theatre. Having a programme of events that was attractive and welcoming to the entire population of Gloucestershire, he strongly disagreed with a comment that the theatre was an elitist place to go.
- ReachOut activities taking place in Cheltenham included visiting schools, engaging with older people and people with disabilities, organising drama workshops and one-off community projects. The Everyman will try to respond to every group that approached them.
- There was certainly scope for better working together and collaboration between the other cultural providers across the town. Most of the organisations were not in direct competition as they had their own areas of influence eg the Town Hall was unable to take plays but likewise the Everyman was unable to hold symphonies. Each of the organisations was likely to produce six or more promotional brochures per year so perhaps this was an area where savings could be made.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Culture was pleased that the Everyman was withstanding the economic downturn at present and attendance continued to be good. He commented that with the distraction of the productions taking place in the main theatre the audience did not notice the dilapidation in some areas of the theatre. He recognised that without some involvement from the council, the theatre would be unlikely to lever in other external funding. He indicated that there was no provision for funding in the 2009/10 budget but with further lobbying, and Member support it could be considered as part of the next budget setting process.

The Chairman thanked Mr Rowe for his presentation. Mr Rowe indicated that if any Member wished to have a tour of the theatre in the daylight they should contact him by telephone or email him as he would be happy to show them round.

7. CHELTENHAM BOROUGH HOMES – RENEWAL OF MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT UPDATE REPORT (agenda item 8)

The Assistant Director Community Services introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that an updated Management Agreement between the council and CBH had been drafted to cover a ten year period between 2010 – 2020 to allow for business stability and forward planning. Following consultation with tenant and stakeholder representatives it was anticipated that a final draft will be available for both Cabinet and CBH Board by June 2009 with sign up and implementation by 1st April 2010.

The Chief Executive CBH explained that the final draft needed to be approved as soon as possible because the document provided the basis of their business plan which was required to be produced by September 2009. He indicated that customer satisfaction had increased from 80% two years ago to 86% and CBH was in the top dozen housing organisations in the country.

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

- Whilst the primary focus remains that of housing service provider, CBH will be applying to access Housing Corporation Grant to enable the development of new homes and the new agreement will reflect this ability.
- The management fee payable by the council was calculated in parallel with the management agreement and was payable and reviewed every year.

The Assistant Director Community Services commented that performance of CBH had been exemplary.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- i) notes the report
- ii) establishes a small, time limited working group comprising of Councillor Bishop, Ryder and Karl Hemming to act as a consultative body in response to para 3.4 of the report.

8. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING (agenda item 9)

The Cabinet Member Finance and Culture updated the Committee on the Development Trust which had been set up for the Art Gallery & Museum development scheme and the ongoing fundraising campaign. He indicated that the council had committed £2.5 million to the scheme but needed a further £2.5 million through fund raising to make the project happen.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member Finance and Culture confirmed that the Town Hall was currently undertaking a competitive tendering exercise to replace the existing and outdated ticket system for the box office. They were hoping for a solution that could be integrated with the software used by Cheltenham Festivals.

9. REPORTS BACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES (agenda item 10)

The Chairman explained that a mechanism had been developed to enable the Committee to receive feedback from council representatives on outside bodies relevant to the remit of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He indicated that 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. He explained that at the end of the two year cycle the Committee would report back to Cabinet/Council with any recommendations.

The Committee considered the following reports:-

1) Dowty House (Rep - Cllr Anne Regan)

The Chairman commented that the organisation did some very good work for older

people but questioned whether a CBC council representative was necessary?

2) Care and Repair (Rep – Cllrs Thornton and P Hall)

The Chairman commented that the work undertaken by this organisation closely aligned with the work of the Council and the Business Plan priorities.

3) Cheltenham Womens refuge (Rep – Cllr Thornton)

A proforma had not been completed by Cllr Thornton as no meetings had taken place since the appointment had been made by the Cabinet in July 2008.

4) Bourneside Sports Hall Management Committee (Rep – Cllr D Hall)

The Chairman commented that some valuable work was undertaken by this organisation but questioned whether a CBC council representative was necessary?

Councillor Surgenor asked whether this mechanism had been adopted by the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees as it was a valuable exercise. In response the Chairman indicated that this Committee was pioneering the mechanism but it would be worth raising at the next Scrutiny Champions meeting.

10. CO-OPTION (agenda item 11)

The Committee considered the nomination received from Cheltenham VCS Forum in respect of a voluntary and community sector representative on the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that the Committee appoints Abdul Jabbar as a non-voting co-opted member of the Committee for a period not exceeding two years.

11. CABINET'S INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION (agenda item 10)

The Cabinet Member Finance and Culture presented the Cabinet's interim budget proposals for 2009/10. He explained that it was a difficult time for the Council to be planning its budget in the current economic climate. The Council had already seen the impact of this through the reduction in a number of income streams such as planning and search fees, the price paid for recycling materials and the recent decline in interest rates had led to a reduction in investment income. The Council had realised cost savings in terms of the management restructure, administration, and other costs such as relating to the Council's borrowing. The Cabinet was projecting to deliver services within budget whilst protecting services across the board. The Cabinet was also looking at ways to increase income including a proposal to introduce a charge for pre-application planning advice. This would also transfer the cost of planning advice to developers rather than council tax payers generally. He indicated that the sale of the Regent Arcade was anticipated to be completed shortly but this had not been included in the interim budget proposals but hopefully would be in the final budget. The Cabinet Member Finance and Culture indicated that this capital receipt would have to be used to finance existing

commitments such as the Art Gallery Development scheme. He paid tribute to the hard work of officers involved in the Bridging the Gap work and achieving efficiency savings. He indicated that there was little scope in this budget for growth but in view of the impact of the recession on housing need it was considered justified to fund a new part-time post of Homelessness Prevention Officer. He thanked the budget working group of the Committee for their report and commented that he had found it a very useful sounding board.

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

- It was disappointing that the work on the joint legal services project instigated by the Countywide Joint Improvement Board had not come into fruition. However the issue of joint services was being looked at further at BOD level (procurement, and corporate services) with the Strategic Director Corporate Services taking the lead.
- Cheltenham devotes fewer resources to supporting homeless people than many other comparable councils. The responsibilities of the Homelessness Prevention Officer were outlined in para 9.4 of the report. Improving the councils performance in these areas was not just desirable in its own right but would be highly cost effective, especially in helping the council qualify for maximum funding from the Area Based Grant system and ensuring that the Deposit Loan Scheme was effectively managed.
- Prudential borrowing could be used to finance the HRA capital programme but it was an expensive option.
- The planned maintenance reserve is projected to run out by 2013 so it was proposed that £300k be transferred from the capital reserve to the planned maintenance reserve to support immediate funding of the 20 year maintenance programme. This would continue to be top-up by 100k per annum in order to fund a sustainable 20 year maintenance programme.
- The Assistant Director Built Environment provided assurance that there was currently not a backlog of essential maintenance and there would be no compromise to Health and Safety.

12. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS (agenda item 13)

A) Care Village provision in the Borough of Cheltenham

The Committee considered the scrutiny topic registration form submitted by Councillor D Hall which had been circulated with the agenda. It was agreed that an item would be included on the Committee work programme for a future meeting.

B) All purpose gymnastic centre for Cheltenham

The Committee considered the scrutiny topic registration form submitted by Councillor D Hall which had been circulated with the agenda. It was agreed that this item would not be taken forward as events had been overtaken by the recent Call-in of Cabinet decision 42/2008 Cheltenham Indoor Cricket Centre/Gymnastics facility feasibility study by the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

C) Common Assessment Framework

The Committee considered the scrutiny topic registration form submitted by Councillor

Regan which had been circulated with the agenda. Councillor McLain provided some background information about CAF which is an assessment tool that is being developed across agencies working with and delivering services to children and their families. He suggested that an officer from the SHAPE team be invited to talk to the Committee as they were linking local practitioners together by setting up and maintaining multi agency groups to look at CAF. The Committee agreed that a presentation from SHAPE should be included on the agenda for the meeting on 6th April which was to be themed around children and young people.

D) Timetable for reports back from representatives on Outside Bodies

The Chairman referred to the appointments to outside bodies which had been circulated with the agenda. He asked the Committee whether they required formal presentations from any of the organisations listed.

It was pointed out that there was currently a vacancy for a representative on the Gloucestershire Home Safety Check Scheme Management Committee and on the South West Home Safety Council. The comment was made that this was probably because Members did not know what the purpose of these organisations was. It was agreed that the following organisations be invited to give formal presentations to the Committee, to be included in the work programme for future meetings:-

- Gloucestershire Home Safety Check Scheme Management Committee
- South West Home Safety Council
- Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre
- Cotswold and Forest of Dean Destination Management Organisation (DMO)
- Cheltenham Theatre and Arts Club (Playhouse)

The Chairman suggested that if a suitable meeting room was available then perhaps the Committee could take the next meeting out to the Playhouse and they could do their presentation then.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING
Monday 23rd February

Councillor D Smith
Chair