

## SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23<sup>RD</sup> FEBRUARY 2009

### MINUTES

(18.00 – 19.50)

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

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing (Cllr John Webster)  
Leader of the Council (Cllr Steve Jordan)  
Cllr Diggory Seacome

#### 1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Cllr Surgenor proposed Cllr Godwin as Chairman of the meeting and this was seconded by Cllr Fisher.

RESOLVED that Cllr Godwin be appointed Chairman of this meeting.

2. **APOLOGIES** Councillors Lydia Bishop, Martin Dunne and Duncan Smith  
Jackie Sallis  
Cabinet Member Sport and Play (Cllr Andrew McKinlay)

#### 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Driver declared a personal interest in agenda item 9 Update on St Pauls Regeneration as a Board Member of Cheltenham Borough Homes.

Hazel Kitchin declared a personal interest in agenda items 6 Presentation from the Playhouse Theatre, Cheltenham and 11 Cheltenham Arts Council as a Member of the Arts Council Executive

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2008 and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009**

The minutes of the above meetings were considered consecutively.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2008 and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009 be approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### Matters Arising

Cllr Ryder referred to page 5, para 2 of the minutes of the Call-in meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2008 and indicated that she had not yet received the information she had requested at the meeting.

5. **PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

One public question had been received from Parish Councillor Hugh Evans, Chairman of Swindon Parish Council as follows:-

"Are the committee aware that in addition to the cruiser events being held on the inner ring road on Sunday nights, similar events take place every Sunday in the Kingsditch Industrial Estate?"

"Are the committee aware that these events cause great distress to the residents of Swindon Village?"

"What action can be taken to prevent these events from taking place?"

The question had been referred to the police for a response under agenda item 7 Update on 'cruisers'.

## 6. PRESENTATION FROM THE PLAYHOUSE THEATRE (agenda item 6)

Paul Scott and Douglas Brinklow gave a presentation covering the following:-

- A potted history of the building
- What the Playhouse does and how it uses Council funding
- Income and turnover (impact of flooding event in summer 2007)
- Development and current business plan
- Challenges and future plans for 2009/10

Douglas Brinklow was extremely pleased to announce that the Playhouse had just received a Civic Award from Cheltenham Borough Council in association with the Cheltenham Civic Society, for standards of excellence in the restoration of historic buildings.

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

- There were 13 regular groups that used the Playhouse Theatre but the aim was to encourage as many other user groups as possible and for the Playhouse to be recognised locally as 'The Cheltenham Community Theatre.'
- It was acknowledged that more could be done in respect of marketing and they had been looking into renting publicity services one day a week, however it was very costly. Currently 10% of operating expenses was spent on marketing activities.
- The Playhouse paid the council a peppercorn rent for the building but were responsible for maintenance and running costs and as such provided huge value for money in looking after an important asset of the town. It was clarified that the Playhouse Theatre had received one-off funding from the Council (part of the capital receipt from the sale of the Axiom and continued to receive an ongoing revenue grant of £5K per annum from the Council.
- It was confirmed that as part of the refurbishment work flood defences had been put in place which could be activated providing there is a flood warning and the Playhouse were signed up to the Environment Agency flood warning scheme.

Councillor McLain was concerned that some work that had been instigated whilst he had been the relevant Cabinet Member regarding changing the terms of the lease had not been progressed and asked that a briefing note be prepared for the next meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman congratulated the Playhouse on their success and wished them well in their future plans for the building. He explained to the Committee that patrons were invited to become partners of the Playhouse and whilst this was not a large amount of money per person every little helped and encouraged everyone to join up.

The Chairman thanked Paul Scott and Douglas Brinklow their presentation.

#### 7. UPDATE ON CRUISERS (agenda item 7)

In introducing this item, Trevor Gladding Community Safety and Licensing Manager provided some background on the work of the 'cruiser group' which had been meeting over the past six years and had been very successful in closing off access to car parks and other meeting places of 'cruisers' in the town centre. However it was recognised that this success has displaced the problem to areas such as the Kingsditch and Gallagher retail parks. Lockable gates had recently been installed at Gallagher retail park to prevent access at night but the problem had already moved on. He indicated that the anti-social behaviour problems associated with a minority of 'cruisers' and 'boy racers' were not just in Cheltenham but countywide and countrywide. A number of Local Authorities had been consulted about how they were tackling the problem but in many aspects Cheltenham was ahead in the progress made to date. Having talked to organisations including the Airport and the Racecourse, the group had been unsuccessful in finding a public or private piece of land for use by 'cruisers'. Other initiatives to deter the 'boy racers' from the town centre included being able to alter the traffic light system on the inner ring road in order to slow the traffic flow when deemed necessary. Partnership working with the police and other departments and agencies was ongoing but success was very much dependant on the resources available. It was anticipated that Civic Pride proposals including the closure of Boots Corner will further help to alleviate the problem in future.

Inspector John Roberts, Town Centre Inspector Neighbourhood Area provided an overview of 'Operation Highlander' which represented the enforcement arm of police tactics in dealing with the issue of 'cruisers' in Cheltenham. He explained that this operation had used a number of tactics ranging from simple speed detection activity to more complex activities involving various departments and agencies looking at the roadworthiness of vehicles. He indicated that when the resources had been available this had clearly had some impact on this type of behaviour over the short term but was unlikely to act as any form of deterrent to a motivated group of enthusiasts such as this.

Having inherited the issue since taking over the running of the Town Centre INA in January 2009, Inspector Roberts indicated that he was keen to identify what was likely to be the most effective way of tackling the issue whilst serious consideration was given to changes in the Town's road layout which was the only sustainable solution to deter this behaviour over the longer term. With the approach of lighter nights and 'cruiser season' it was his intention to tackle the problem robustly in partnership with the council employing some new tactics including the use of a 'speed gun' to hopefully see some improvements for the community.

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

- There were a number of legal impracticalities as to why a byelaw could not be put in place to deter 'cruisers' and 'boy racers' from the town.
- Work was ongoing with the council's Urban Design Manager to look at traffic calming and future road layout in Cheltenham as part of the Civic Pride proposals.

- Where 'cruiser' activity was taking place on private land without consent, letters had been sent to the owners indicating that if an accident was to happen then they would be liable. Some had heeded this advice and installed gates to prevent access but some have not.

Councillor McLain suggested that some funding might be possible through the Business Pride initiative which could provide the necessary incentive for getting the gates installed. The Community Safety and Licensing Manager agreed to look into this further.

The Community Safety and Licensing Manager and Inspector John Roberts agreed to provide an update at the next meeting of Swindon Parish Council.

The Chairman thanked the Community Safety and Licensing Manager and Inspector John Roberts for the update.

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

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

- The Future of Community Development in Cheltenham Conference on Friday 24 April 2009 from 9.15am to 4.00pm at St Matthews Church, Clarence Street, Cheltenham. Details had recently been sent to all Members.
- The celebration to mark the completion of the decent homes programme which had been postponed due to the snow was now to take place on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009.

In response to a question from Cllr Ryder, the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing acknowledged that a small number of properties had not been upgraded in cases where the tenant had not wanted the work to be done. However if she was aware of any other examples he would be happy to pursue the matter outside of the meeting.

#### 9. UPDATE ON ST PAUL'S REGENERATION (agenda item 9)

The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing introduced this report which had been circulated separately from the agenda. The report outlined the activities which had been delivered in St Paul's since the Committee was last updated in September 2008 and future activities planned over the next few months.

Paul Stephenson Assistant Chief Executive - service delivery (CBH) and Caroline Walker Head of Regeneration & Housing Support Services had also attended the meeting to answer any technical questions.

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

- The possible re-location of St Paul's Community House had not been decided and was the subject of further discussions.
- The needs assessment undertaken at the beginning of the decant process allowed tenants to make personal choices as to whether they came back to St Paul's or not and enabled school provision to be maintained where requested.
- The individual needs of disabled tenants had been assessed and by working with occupational therapists properties had been designed to meet their requirements.

The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing commented that at the beginning of the regeneration project there had been a lot of suspicion and fear within the tenants concerning the process. However over the period of transformation which had included a change in the council political administration, the process had been carried out slowly and sensitively to ensure that the tenants' individual needs were met. He regularly attended the Community House and indicated that speaking with the tenants many were now overjoyed with their new or upgraded homes.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing, Paul Stephenson and Caroline Walker for attending the Committee to provide an update.

#### 10. DEVELOPING THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS Plan – Our Plans 2009-10

Richard Gibson, Policy and Partnerships Manager introduced this item which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that the briefing note informed Members on the progress of Our Plans 2009/10 and provided the opportunity to reflect on the draft content against the ambitions for which the Committee is jointly accountable for (Attachment A of the report). Following consultation with all three Overview and Scrutiny Committees the final version of Our Plans 2009/10 will be presented to Council for approval on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

Members' made the following comments:-

- Aim 1 - Promoting Community Safety  
Ambition 1A. A query was raised whether the funding recently approved by Council for the taxi marshall scheme was enough for the whole year.
- Aim 4 - Building healthy communities and supporting older people  
Ambition 4B. The feasibility of introducing a SMART card could be looked at so that the free swimming initiative for under 16 year olds applies to residents of Cheltenham only.
- Aim 5 - Building Stronger Communities and Supporting Housing Choice  
Ambition 5E. No target had been set for 2011/12 for the number of disabled facility grant approvals. In response the AD Community Services explained that targets were very difficult to set because approvals varied from the installation of stair lifts to a whole house extension which could take up a significant part of the budget.
- Why did Ambition 5E - working in partnership to increase the number of older and vulnerable people supported to live independently at home fall under Aim 5 Building stronger communities and supporting housing choice and not Aim 4 Building healthy communities and supporting older people? In response the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing indicated that this ambition came under his portfolio because it was about bricks and mortar and building lifetime homes eg designing new properties to enable wheelchair access should it be required in the future and adapting existing properties through the use of disabled facility grants so people can remain in their homes.
- Aim 6 – A focus on children and young people  
Ambition 6A . It was suggested that we consider how we can find a place in the town centre for youth activities

Ambition 6B. The resource implications indicated that an additional £39,500 was proposed to be made available to support actions to target child poverty in areas of most severe deprivation, however there was no supporting detail as to how this was to be spent. In response the Policy and Partnership Manager indicated that a report on how this money was proposed to be spent was due to be considered by Cabinet shortly. The Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing commented that the council will be working with other agencies to ensure that relevant benefit entitlements were taken up as well as other initiatives to tackle the problem over the longer term including re-skilling and education.

- Aim 9 – Investing in arts and culture

Ambition 9A. The Business Plan included the milestone to work with the Playhouse Theatre in their quest to extend the theatre through the acquisition of the lease to the adjoining property. However there was no mention of any proposed changes to the lease on the current building as alluded to by Cllr McLain. Therefore the briefing note requested for the next meeting needed to clarify the situation.

Ambition 9A. There were a number of cultural providers listed as partners working together with the council but the Garden Galleries had been omitted. In response the Leader indicated that the list was not exhaustive of all the partners but were new projects and partners specifically for 2009/10

There was a discussion around Care Villages and it was agreed that a briefing note would be prepared for a future meeting.

The Chairman asked that in view of the ongoing economic recession whether there was an alternative plan if ambitions could not be delivered within the budget. In response the Leader explained that the Council will need to adopt a flexible approach and the Business Plan will have to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis throughout the year.

## 11. REPORTS BACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES (Agenda item 10)

The Committee considered the following reports:-

- 1) Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum Development Trust (Rep - Cllr John Rawson)
- 2) Everyman Theatre (Rep – Cllr Garth Barnes)
- 3) Cheltenham Arts Council (Reps – Cllrs John Rawson and Diggory Seacome)
- 4) Playhouse Theatre and Arts Club (Cllr Seacome)

No comments were made in respect of the reports that had been submitted on this occasion .

Cllr Hall asked whether the council had a representative on The Sports Council. It was agreed that the list would be checked and a response provided outside of the meeting .

## 12. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS (agenda item 12)

No scrutiny topic registration forms had been submitted for consideration on this occasion.

Karl Hemming suggested an update at a future meeting on the recently established tenant participation group 'Cheltenham Tenants and Leaseholders Voice'.

Cllr Ryder suggested an update in respect of the Choice based lettings system in September 2009.

13. COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SESSION

The Committee indicated that whilst holding the meeting at The Playhouse had worked well there had been no hearing loop facility and this should be taken into consideration when choosing an alternative venue to the Municipal Offices. When meetings were taken out into the community they needed to be publicised to encourage public participation.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING  
Monday 6<sup>TH</sup> April

Councillor D Smith  
Chair