

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 January 2010

MINUTES
(18.05 – 19.45)

PRESENT: Councillors Duncan Smith (Chairman), Wendy Flynn (arrived at 18.45pm), Les Godwin, David Hall, Sandra Holliday, Paul McLain, John Rawson, Chris Ryder and Charles Stewart.
Co-optees James Harrison and Karl Hemming.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Webster - Cabinet Member Finance And Community Development
Grahame Lewis – Strategic Director
Richard Gibson – Policy And Partnerships Manager.

1. APOLOGIES

Jackie Sallis.

The Chairman introduced and welcomed James Harrison as the new Cheltenham Arts Council representative. He replaced Hazel Kitchin, who sadly passed away a few months ago.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2009

RESOLVED THAT: the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2009 be approved by the Committee as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

None received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No matters referred to Committee.

6. 2010/11 BUDGET PROPOSAL

Cabinet Member Finance and Community Development referred members to the papers from the Cabinet meeting on the 15 December 2009 and explained that the budget aimed to achieve two things;

- close the £1.2 million budget gap and protect front-line services as much as possible
- have a planned approach to address the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) over the next 4 years.

Final out-turn showed an under-spend of approximately £9k, and a projected budget gap of £1.2 million for next year, which would grow to £3.7 million by 2014 as outlined in the MTFS.

An increase in Council Tax of 2.5% had been proposed which was consistent with assumptions in the MTFS.

Two key appendices had been included for the first time. Appendix C with initiatives/ cuts proposed to close the budget gap. Appendix D – cuts/ initiatives put forward by Officers, that were specifically rejected by the current Cabinet but which would need to be considered in future, by whatever administration was formed. They all though demonstrated difficult choices.

He proposed that this was how the budget should be done in future years – so everyone was clear about what decisions were taken and what the other options actually were.

There would, he hoped, be a budget gap of only £347,000 to close next year, against £1.2 million this year.

Some of the key initiatives in Appendix C included, some cuts and efficiencies;

- Members allowances would be frozen for five years.
- The Chief Executives salary would be frozen for a year.
- An increase of only 1% on pay for Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) employees this year. Though, in a recent statement the Chancellor had announced a cap on wages for public sector workers of 1% for 2011/12 and 2012/13. This would result in pay increases being capped at 1% for the next three years at CBC.
- Shared Services would provide savings of £50,000 this year and more as time went on.
- The Sourcing Strategy would offer approximately £100,000 of savings this year and tens of thousands in the years to come.
- Increased car parking charges in 14 of the 17 CBC car parks. The cost would increase by 10p for the first hour, which produced a range from 60p to a maximum of £1.50p an hour in the Regent Arcade. In Rodney Road there would be an increase of 20p for the first hour, taking it to £1.50. Many of the car parks had not had price increases for several years, and the Regent Arcade prices were last adjusted in 2004.
- The proposed reorganisation of litter picking (part of the street cleaning budget) would produce a saving of £18,000 from the total budget of £650,000. All streets would be litter picked a minimum of once a fortnight, except central areas and areas such as Bath Rd, Prestbury, Coronation Square, etc, which would continue to be cleared of litter on a daily basis. A responsive service would tackle the worst areas on the basis of demand and service requests and there would be a dedicated service in the town centre.
- There would be an increase to crematorium charges of 5.5%, secured with an investment of £110,000 to bring the west chapel into service.
- An 18.9 reduction of Full Time Employees (FTE), this included only 2 redundancies.
- There had only been limited savings to the Capital fund. It had been decided to reverse the decision to ring fence £300,000 for Pittville Park which had been pledged by Council subject to a successful Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid, in light of the unsuccessful bid
- A £250,000 grant to the Everyman Theatre next year (2011/12) and the £1

million loan, which would not be interest free and was to be repaid over 25 years.

- An investment of £350,000 for being the Councils contribution to the current refurbishment scheme to the Regent Arcade.
- £155,000 had been allowed for information storage for IT.
- A £49,000 investment had been made to enable flexible working, which would produce savings in the future.
- To compliment the street cleaning initiative, £6,000 would be used to purchase more litter bins for the town centre.
- The Community Pride fund (£40,000) would be continued but this would most likely be the last year.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the difficulty of these decisions and a choice was available, accept the cuts and initiatives that had been recommended or look at the options which had been tabled, but refused.

He invited questions from members of the committee and these are listed below together with his responses;

- The interest from investments in Icelandic Banks had not been forthcoming, how had this affected the budget and what was the impact of the announcement by the Icelandic President that he would no longer consider UK investors as preferred creditors?
 - The Cabinet Member advised that the loss of interest on investments following the fall of the Icelandic Banks had been factored into last years figures, based on the amount we would expect to lose. At the moment CBC are considered, preferred creditors by two of the three Icelandic Banks. The other bank, Glitner Bank, had advised that they would not consider CBC a preferred creditor, though this is very much in discussion and CBC are being supported by the Local Government Association (LGA). The press coverage following the Icelandic Presidents announcement related to individual depositors with British bank accounts who had been underwritten by Government guarantee, and the dispute between the British Government and Iceland about repayment of the compensation paid to depositors by the British Government. It did not affect the CBC claim.
- Was the level of cleansing required in the town centre a result of the thriving night time economy in Cheltenham, would there be the additional resources required to clear the additional letter bins and how would this impact on other areas of the town?
 - The Cabinet Member felt that the level of dirt and litter in the town centre was not solely a result of Cheltenham's night-time economy but could also be attributed to a high level of footfall. It was hoped that by increasing the number of litter bins in the centre, the issue of littering would be far reduced and the committee were assured that the resources were in place to clear the additional litter bins. The new litter bins would be situated where they were most needed and other areas would be cleaned at least once every fortnight.
- During discussions in the past around increasing parking charges Officers had voiced concerns that it would impact on usage levels and which were the car parks where charges would not be increased?
 - Officers had commented that the across the board 3.5% increase to car parking charges would not have a negative impact on the overall revenue. The three car parks that would not be subject to increased parking charges were, West End, Grosvenor Terrace and Coronation Square.
- There was no additional funding for parking enforcement within the current budget proposal, yet current proposals from Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) outlined

plans to extend restrictions in to other areas of Cheltenham, how this would be resourced?

- Whilst aware of the 'enforcement' debate, this was an issue for GCC. Whilst CBC, employ and pay the Parking Enforcement Officers in Cheltenham, the funding comes from GCC via a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

In response to other questions, the Cabinet Member offered the following responses;

- The sale of Regent Arcade would be dependant on achieving the value at which it is considered to be worth and would be open to all members for debate.
- There was high demand at the crematorium, which currently offered a 20 minute service the proposal was that investment would allow this to be extended.
- Commercial Waste Collection had been a real success and was generating revenue, but a figure had not been associated to the service as nobody was sure how much it could/would make.
- A pay increase had been factored in for this coming year. The Chancellor had indicated a 1% cap on pay for all public servants in 2011/12 and 2012/13. The Cabinet had rejected imposing a wage freeze because it would mean coming out of the national pay bargaining system.
- The increase from £6.2 million to £7.6 million for Social and Community (Soc & Comm) allocation was due to some functions having moved from other areas and movements from reserves such as the capital reserve and the single status reserve. They were not as a result of the expansion of the Soc & Comm revenue budget.
- The statement by the IDEA that CBC were "doing too much" was a general one. It was most likely related to the level of Arts and Culture related funding, as being amongst the highest in the Country. The view had been taken that this was integral to the success of Cheltenham as a place to live and visit.

Whilst members of the committee understood why the decision had been taken, they voiced concerns about the reversal of the decision to ring-fence £300,000 for Pittville Park. Members felt that this could impact the credibility of the Council with regard to any future HLF bids and urged that this be reconsidered.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his attendance and moved to summarise the recommendations of the committee;

- Cabinet reinstated some or all of the £300,000 for Pittville Park.
- Environment Committee colleagues considered;
 - the proposed reorganisation of the cleansing arrangements in the town and the impact that this would have on other areas of the town.
 - the inconsistencies between the increased parking charges and the impact on usage levels.
 - further evidence from the Cabinet Member as to why there was no additional funding for parking enforcement within the current budget proposal and how this tied up with the Gloucestershire County Council Service Level Agreement and members requested the extension of this service outside of the town centre.
- The Group Accountant provided a complete profile of the General Fund, particularly Social and Communities.

RESOLVED THAT: the recommendations of the committee be formerly raised with the relevant Cabinet Members and Officers.

7. DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY 2010-2015

The Policy and Partnerships Manager introduced his report and associated appendix, which had been circulated with the agenda.

He accepted that there was still some work to be done with regard to identifying measures, baselines and targets and assured the committee that consultants would not be used to do this work and that it would be fully populated by the time it went to Council. This had been scheduled for February, but due to the recent inclement weather several consultative events had been cancelled and as such it is now scheduled for March.

Councillor D Hall referred members to the paper which was circulated at the start of the meeting and suggested that an alternative to 'supporting independent living' was the provision of Retirement or Care Villages. His suggestion was not that CBC provided such provision but instead, encouraged the provision of such facilities in both the private and public sectors.

The Chairman acknowledged that this very issue had been raised by members of this committee in the past and whilst it was a County Council function, this committee could work with other partners. He had been advised that Cheltenham Borough Homes were developing a Sheltered Housing / Supported Living Strategy, which he was yet to have seen.

The following comments were made by members of the committee;

- How could we hope to improve the provision of Arts and Culture when surely, our priority would be maintaining what we were currently providing. The strategy needed to take consideration of the financial climate and focus on the core functions.
- The partnership priorities would not be solely delivered by CBC and as such we would not always be able to influence delivery/standards.
- The strategy was aspirational and the budget was factual, they should have been more joined up.
- References to affordable housing seemed to centre around social housing provision; surely this needed to be more broad.
- Cleanliness was raised as an issue in the Place Survey, if people saw their streets looking clean and tidy, it could strengthen communities and improve their perception of safety.
- Some of Cheltenham's most deprived residents may not feel that 'Arts and Culture' would be particularly relevant to them.

In response, the Policy and Partnerships Manager explained that, whilst every attempt had been made to reduce jargon and ensure that it was easily understood by the public, it did in fact serve a number of purposes. The document was not just aimed at the general public, but would be used by the Council's external auditors etc, and as such, references to national indicators needed to be retained.

He also noted that the strategy would in no way replace the service standards which set out for customers what we deliver, how and when.

The Chairman thanked the Policy and Partnerships Manager for his attendance. The committee agreed that he should attend the next meeting (01 March) in order that the committee could review the version of the Corporate Strategy which would be taken to Council on the 29 March.

RESOLVED THAT: i) comments and recommendations of this committee be considered. ii) the revised Corporate Strategy be discussed by this committee again on 01 March 2010.

8. CHELTENHAM FESTIVALS JOINT WORKING GROUP

The Strategic Director explained that it had been his intention to bring something to this committee however, the working group had agreed that the tendering process was vital to any recommendations. As such he had prepared a briefing note and would come to the next meeting of the committee (01 March), once the outcome of the tendering process was known.

In response to a question from Councillor Ryder with regard to the £5,000 which was allocated to Imperial Gardens, the Strategic Director agreed to provide a written response.

RESOLVED THAT: the Strategic Director would report back the recommendations of the working group to this committee on 01 March 2010.

9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

The committee reviewed the work plan. In addition to items currently scheduled for the next meeting, the committee agreed to discuss;

- Corporate Strategy – further review
- Cheltenham Festivals Working Group – recommendations
- Equality Action Plan – review (as requested by the Policy and Partnerships Manager)

RESOLVED THAT: the three items above, be added to the work plan and scheduled for the next meeting (01 March).

10. COMMITTEE FEEDBACK SESSION

The Chairman thanked all attendees for their time.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 01st March 2010

Councillor Duncan Smith
Chairman