

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 10th January, 2011
6.00 - 7.55 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Duncan Smith (Chairman), Chris Coleman, Barbara Driver, Wendy Flynn, Rowena Hay (Vice-Chair), Diggory Seacome, Jo Teakle, Jon Walklett and Simon Wheeler
Co-optees:	James Harrison and Karl Hemming
Also in attendance:	Councillor Andrew McKinlay (Cabinet Member Sport & Culture), Councillor Klara Sudbury (Cabinet Member Housing & Safety) and Councillor John Webster (Cabinet Member Finance & Community Development), Paul Jones (Head of Financial Services) Sonia Phillips (Assistant Director Wellbeing and Culture) and Geoffrey Rowe (Chief Executive – Everyman Theatre)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

None received.

The Chairman took the opportunity to welcome Councillor Coleman as the newest member of the committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

3. AGREEMENT OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 08 NOVEMBER 2010

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 08 November 2010 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

None received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

There were no items referred to the committee.

6. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

Cabinet Member Sport and Culture had a number of items on which to update the committee.

In reference to the Art Gallery and Museum (AG&M), a Heritage Lottery Fund bid had been made back in November 2010. The decision was expected in March 2011 and this was presuming Council agreed to ratify the decision to underwrite the funding.

The Christmas Market held at the AG&M on the 16 December attracted over 400 visitors and many exhibitors, which really raised its profile.

Refurbishment works to the Drawing Room and Conference Suites at the Town Hall had recently commenced. The new box office system, INFX, had been in use since December and it was interesting to note that since this time internet bookings had greatly increased.

He had also been made aware that the Pump Rooms would soon be featuring on the BBC2 programme, Flog It.

The Tourism and Marketing Strategy featured later on the agenda and having assessed the document, he was satisfied that it was an accurate reflection of what Cheltenham had to offer and the challenges faced by the town.

Leisure@ was performing better than forecast, all areas except casual swimming which was inexplicably, not.

The two Christmas events organised by the Play Development Team were cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. These were Lottery funded and the money was to be used by the end of December 2010, however, this had now been extended to March 2011.

In an attempt to maximise the position of the Healthy Lifestyles Officer in light of the changes to the NHS, a real focus had been given to GP referrals. Given the expected changes it was envisaged that GPs would favour exercise referrals in the future.

The following responses were given by the Cabinet Member Sport and Culture (with input from the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Culture) to questions from members of the committee;

- There was an annual programme of events over the summer period held in parks across the town. This did not include a climbing wall and whilst in respect of structure, this would be possible, with unknown budget and health & safety implications, no commitment could be made.
- The Leisure@ performance did not include the month of December, when Cheltenham had been badly affected by the snow, but adverse weather in the past had affected the leisure centre.
- The Healthy Lifestyles Officer post was part funded by the PCT. Conversations were underway about securing the future of this funding and it had been guaranteed for another 12 months. In the meantime efforts were being made to build it into the base budget.
- Many leisure activities and services were high on the commissioning agenda, but were undergoing 'Systems Thinking' first. More detail would be tabled with the committee in due course.

The Cabinet Member Housing and Safety circulated a copy of the Community Safety Handbook 2010-11. She explained that 20,000 had been printed at no cost to the Council and would be amended and printed again later in the year.

She had attended the Supporting People Board meeting in November, where the possibility that budget cuts would be larger than expected was discussed, but not in any great detail. This would be discussed in further detail at the next meeting in February.

Following a motion at Council in December, a potential £50k had been identified in the draft budget to match fund County Council funding for youth work in the town. The Chief Executive of CBC had written to the County Council following the motion.

The Cheltenham Strategic Partnership had suggested that a reference group be established in order to develop a framework for allocation of the funding. The budget would not allow for the current offering to be replicated and a mapping exercise of youth provision in Cheltenham was ongoing.

There had been some positive initial discussions with the County Council, though further discussions were required about who would take responsibility for the allocation of funds. The Policy and Partnerships Manager and Partnerships Officer (Children & Young People) were the Officers leading on this.

She invited members to highlight specific issues and priorities within their own wards.

Given the focus of the next meeting was Community Safety, members were asked to highlight any specific queries to her or the relevant Officers in advance.

In response to a question from a member of the committee, the Cabinet Member Housing and Safety confirmed that she was also concerned about the timescales relating to the youth provision in Cheltenham, given that redundancies would soon be made by the County Council. Unfortunately, until detailed discussions had taken place she was not in a position to commit to anything. Her hope was that the County Council had already undertaken a mapping exercise.

The Chairman suggested that a working group be established by the committee, in an advisory capacity rather than for decision making purposes.

The Cabinet Member Housing and Safety was appreciative of this proposal and Councillors Coleman, Teakle, Driver and co-optee Karl Hemming volunteered to assist, as and when required.

7. EVERYMAN THEATRE

Geoffrey Rowe, Chief Executive of the Everyman Theatre, introduced a PowerPoint presentation (appendix 1) which admittedly, some members had already seen.

The theatre hosted 45 weeks of mixed performance arts which included pantomime, ballet, the Literature Festival (though not the Jazz Festival this year, a decision of Cheltenham Festivals) and ran a large scale education and community programme.

He talked through various figures for 2009/10, which he explained were much the same each year and the result of a successful model which had been in practice for 15 years. A study a couple of years ago had indicated that the Everyman Theatre had a £10million economic impact on the town.

Some highlights of the past year had included numerous West End shows, Studio Christmas shows for younger children and adults, as well as 16 entirely new shows.

Images demonstrated some of the restoration works required to the Theatre, for which the cost would be just under £3million. Members were shown a breakdown of the budget and income, which highlighted the £200k shortfall.

The Everyman was facing challenging times as a result of the current financial climate and whilst to date the downturn had not affected ticket sales, it could. The availability of quality productions, which may do fewer tours, was the biggest risk faced by the Everyman Theatre.

Once completed the restoration works would provide a new heritage aspect, with tours of the theatre a condition of the Lottery funding.

Physical access had been addressed as a legal requirement and recent improvements to the sound system had been made for those with hearing difficulties. In his view social access was not a problem as he didn't believe that the theatre was elitist, though he did feel that economic access may be an increasing issue.

He explained that 54% of tickets were sold as concessions and highlighted the Pantomime Fund, which saw organisations such as the Rotary Club providing young people of their choice, with tickets for the Pantomime. Perhaps in better economic times there could be a Cheltenham Fund supported in part by the Council.

He felt strongly that there was a marked difference between the Everyman Theatre, which was funded by the Council and those facilities which were managed by them (Town Hall, Leisure@, etc). He suggested that there was scope for improved co-operation with regard to marketing, etc.

In closing, he proposed that a successful Everyman Theatre was good for Cheltenham, which was ultimately good for Cheltenham Borough Council.

The Chairman invited questions from members of the committee.

The following responses were given by Geoffrey Rowe to questions from members of the committee;

- Catering at the Theatre generated £100k profits but the café had failed despite various attempts to make it succeed and had ultimately become an alternative bar area.
- Another income stream was the sale of tickets on behalf of other people, approximately 100,000 tickets which generated a good level of income.
- The Everyman did host the Russian ballet and ice –skaters, but there was great expense associated with bringing international acts to the theatre. Attempts had been made to secure the Irish Theatre that went to Oxford but these had failed.
- The Everyman was largely a professional theatre; there were other theatres in Cheltenham that hosted amateur groups.
- Cheltenham Festivals would be competitors with their own box office, though there had always been friendly competition with the Town Hall. It seemed peculiar for Cheltenham to have 3 box office systems in consideration of the cost to each organisation.
- The period of closure for the restorative works had meant that the theatre would not be hosting the Literature Festival this year as there was no guarantee that the work would be completed by October, as was currently envisaged.
- 54% of tickets were sold as concessions which suggested that a majority of patrons were younger/older. Outreach work focussed on those in the community who were not readily engaged, centring on areas of deprivation or ethnic minorities.
- There was not a connection between outreach and/or education work and ticket sales but ceasing this work could impact the theatre in the future. Musicals (Fame, etc) and plays of content (To Kill a Mocking Bird and Blood Brothers) were highly popular with young people. Cutting back was a difficult decision but a necessary one.
- It was accepted that improvements to signage for the Everyman, in and around Cheltenham could be made and suggested that the issue was, in his opinion, compounded by the fact that they were funded rather than managed by the Council.

The Chairman thanked Geoffrey for his attendance and presentation.

8. INTERIM BUDGET 2011/12 (INCLUDING HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT)

The Cabinet Member Finance and Community Development introduced the report as circulated with the agenda and referred members to the budget papers circulated on the 21 December 2010.

He stressed that these were the biggest reductions in public expenditure in the history of local government, exceeding those made after the war.

The cuts had been greater than those initially indicated by Government as they had recalibrated the model so that places like Cheltenham took a bigger hit than authorities in areas that were more dependent on welfare services.

The challenge for Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) was how to deliver services differently whilst maintaining effectiveness, but reducing expenditure.

There were two ways of looking at the 'Big Society', one was to cynically assume that it was simply doing things on the cheap and the other was that it would mean more power to the community.

He highlighted that the Medium Term Financial Strategy identified that cuts would be required over the next 4 years. It was important to note that, were all these cuts to be made over night that the Council would cease to function and as such, the commissioning approach was its only way forward.

Human Resources and IT had not been subjected to the same level of cuts as other areas as these services would be critical in supporting future changes from which savings could be derived.

There were a number of issues and he asked that the committee focus on those that related to their remit, highlighting some to members.

One off funding was available and given that the County Council would now be focussing on vulnerable people, CBC would contribute £50k to enable the provision of youth work in Cheltenham. This funding would not be used to save Youth Workers from redundancy though, as the model was not sustainable and the funding was not necessarily long term.

He referred members to page 87 of the budget papers and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Rents were to be increased by an average of £188.76 a year, which was higher than Council Tax for a Band D property. He did not wish to comment further given that this was being imposed by Government but did note that this could see those in low-paid work and living in social housing, worse off.

The Chairman was aware that for some members of the committee, this was the first time they would have been involved in assessing budget papers and as such asked the Head of Financial Services to give a brief explanation of the various appendices.

The Head of Financial Services talked through each of the appendices, highlighting that Appendix 4 (page 47) was expected to be the focus of most debate as this document outlined the various measures to address the budget gap.

The Chairman suggested that all members turn to page 49 – 53, areas for member approval which had not been built into the base budget, commenting that the employee parking levy (Item 6) was long overdue and should be implemented ASAP in his opinion.

The following responses were given by the Cabinet Member Finance and Community Development (with input from the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Culture) to questions from members of the committee;

- Item 18 – Since purchasing their own box office system, Cheltenham Festivals would receive commission that would have previously been received by CBC. This was a separate issue and CBC was looking at how to recoup this.

- Item 21 – Whilst regrettable, the reduction in grant to the Performing Arts Society was necessary and a casualty of circumstances.
- Item 62 – The forums referred to were the Disability Forum and the Pensions Forum. Both had, had their budgets cut from £500 to £250, though there was talk that the Disability Forum may disband.
- Benefits would continue to cover rents in Cheltenham for those that qualify, despite the increase in rents and such it was not envisaged that there would be a significant increase in rent arrears although those tenants who did not qualify for benefits would be significantly worse off and the arrears would have to be monitored closely. The rent increase and changes to benefit rates would likely affect some areas within London.
- The HRA reform in April 2012 would offer a one off deal to come out of the subsidy system at the expense of taking on debt via a loan. Previous consultation had suggested CBC would be better off but the revised offer was likely to be less generous and therefore would need to await the revised proposal.
- The additional £35k on the ALMO management fee was in respect of CBH's contribution towards the purchase of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system as part of the 'GO Programme'. Only one property was sold last year under the Right to Buy Scheme and it was unlikely that any number would be sold this coming year and as such there were no plans to reduce the fee paid to CBH. Equally, CBC would not expect CBH to request an increase once the development in St. Pauls was completed.
- The figure for disabled adaptations was an estimate based on current demand. This service was mandatory so adaptations would have to be undertaken. Both CBH and private sector housing promoted the adaptation service.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Community Development made a final, important point. The ear-marked reserve and general reserve were very different and Cabinet were determined to go ahead with certain schemes that formed part of long term plans.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member Finance and Community Development and the Head of Financial Services for their attendance.

9. TOURISM AND MARKETING STRATEGY

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Culture introduced the report as circulated with the agenda.

She explained that the 2009/10 Business Plan had included a milestone to develop a Tourism and Marketing Strategy. At that time, a working group was established and included Councillors Rawson, Ryder and co-optee Karl Hemming from this committee and Councillors Cooper and Stennett from the Economy and Business Improvement O&S Committee.

The Strategy had come before both committees, prior to consultation with stakeholders and had been due to come before the committee again in September 2010.

However, during this time, there were a number of Government announcements and it was felt appropriate to await further announcements and decisions and she hoped that members understood and accepted the reasons for the delay.

Section 2 of the report detailed the progress made to date.

Councillor Rawson introduced himself as the Chair of the working group and advised members that he was speaking in his capacity as the Chair of the working group and a former member of the committee, rather than in his current role as a Cabinet Member.

He too hoped that Members understood the reasons for the delay but stressed that work had continued. The strategy had helped populate the Corporate Plan and improvements had been made to the website, which could in part explain the increase from 500,000 hits last year to 1 million at this time.

During their research the working group had reviewed a policy from 2005 which was nothing more than a list of growth bids, clearly the position had changed and the strategy had to be more than simply a 'shopping list'.

The strategy sought growth within current resources and took consideration of announcements that Visit Britain would have funds made available to them to promote tourism and the fact that Civic Pride was being taken forward in the town.

Previous comments made by members of this committee and E&BI were about the action plan, which members felt was unconvincing given it was not linked to the Corporate Plans.

The key had been identifying things that could be slotted into current resources and budgets and taking account of the current economic situation.

Councillor Rawson invited questions and comments from members of the committee.

Councillor Driver highlighted that whilst the booming night-time economy was positive for some; it was not for others and queried how much it cost to address any issues that were a result (litter, vandalism, etc). She queried why Officers were no longer attending the Town Centre meetings, where such queries were being raised.

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Culture would investigate why Officers were no longer attending these meetings and seek a resolution for Councillor Driver.

The Chairman proposed that the action plan should be reviewed by the committee in September 2011.

As there were no further questions or comments the Chairman moved to accept the recommendation.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the Marketing and Tourism Strategy be approved for consideration by Cabinet.

10. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Chairman referred members of the committee to the work plan.

As agreed earlier in the meeting, a review of the Tourism and Marketing Strategy action plan would be scheduled for September 2011.

The focus of the next meeting (28 February 2011) would be Community Safety.

Councillor Hay asked that an update from the Public Art Review Working Group be scheduled for the 9 May meeting.

The Chairman asked that members contact the Chair, Vice Chair and/or Democracy Officer with any additional items.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN DETERMINES TO BE URGENT AND WHICH REQUIRES A DECISION

There were no further items for discussion.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting was on the 28 February 2011.

Duncan Smith
Chairman