

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 27th February, 2012

6.00 - 8.30 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Anne Regan (Chair), Chris Coleman, Rowena Hay, Diggory Seacome, Duncan Smith, Jo Teakle, Jon Walklett, Wendy Flynn and Simon Wheeler
Co-optees:	James Harrison and Karl Hemming
Also in attendance:	Jane Griffiths, Cabinet Member Housing and Safety, Councillor Klara Sudbury

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors McKinlay and Webster.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Karl Hemming declared a personal interest in agenda item 10 as he had links with the Cheltenham Tenants' and Leaseholders' Voice.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting held on 9 January 2012 were approved as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

None received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No matters were referred to the committee.

6. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member Housing and Safety updated members regarding the committee's recommendations on youth services in the town. Cabinet had supported the recommendations and these were now being progressed in a number of ways. She had raised the committee's concerns about the recording of antisocial behaviour with the Chief Inspector of Police and this had resulted in a meeting being arranged to discuss the issue which Trevor Gladding would also attend. Other issues were being followed through via the Positive Lives Partnership and the Positive Participation Partnership. As Cabinet Member she had asked Tracey Brown to look at safeguarding issues and these were due to be discussed at the Cheltenham Safeguarding Forum taking place on 28 February.

The chair referred to the recent papers for the Positive Participation Partnership where statistics suggested there had been increases in antisocial behaviour in July, August and October 2011. The Cabinet Member advised that these figures

represented peaks in the year rather than comparisons with the previous year and there was always expected to be an increase in the summer months.

She concluded that the county council scrutiny arrangements were due to scrutinise the outcomes from the £50,000 of county funding allocated to youth work in Cheltenham. She suggested that this issue could also be a topic for scrutiny under the new scrutiny arrangements to be adopted by the Council.

The Cabinet Member updated members on the installation of CCTV on the Honeybourne line. The first phase was underway which would result in the positioning of seven cameras between the railway station and Waitrose and this would be completed by the end of March. Further phases could follow once funding had been secured.

Members raised concerns regarding the monitoring of the CCTV and wanted to know where this would be done and how regularly. The Cabinet Member agreed to raise this question with the police and emphasise the importance of regular monitoring if the CCTV was to be a successful deterrent.

Councillor Walklett expressed his disappointment that only Phase 1 was currently affordable. He highlighted a recent spate of burglaries in Swindon Street and he did not understand why the stretch of line between the station and Waitrose had been selected as the priority for the first phase as the crime figures did not support this decision.

The Cabinet Member responded that the police had wanted to prioritise this stretch of line and it had been more deliverable in terms of the financial support being offered by the various partners.

7. TOURISM AND MARKETING STRATEGY UPDATE

Jane Lillystone, the Museum, Arts and Tourism Manager, introduced the information paper which had been circulated with the agenda. She highlighted the progress in setting up a new customer service team encompassing the Tourist Information Centre which would relocate to the new Art Gallery and Museum in Spring. Work was also under way on updating the Cheltenham Tourism Website which was important in attracting additional visitors to the town.

The chair asked what was being done to promote Cheltenham as a tourist destination worldwide. In response, the officer advised that the council was linked into the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) which marketed Cotswold Tourism worldwide and focused on important developing markets such as Asia. This approach was the most effective use of the limited marketing resources available to the council. It was still important to promote Cheltenham as a destination in its own right and hence the decision to carry out customer research and improve the website to meet customer needs. She would continue to work closely with the DMO and the Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure Cheltenham was represented at the strategic level.

In response to a question she advised that tourism was responsible for bringing in £847 million into Gloucestershire and generating 16,000 jobs. She did not have the exact figures available for Cheltenham at this meeting.

In response to a question she confirmed that they worked with Cheltenham Festivals to ensure appropriate links between the two websites.

8. PROSCENIUM BUILDING/GARDENS GALLERY

The chair welcomed Bob Freeman to the committee to give a presentation on the Proscenium Building which now housed the Gardens Gallery. In his presentation he outlined the history of the Proscenium Building and the role of the Gardens Gallery Community Interest Company in managing the facility. The gallery had been successful in attracting 23,000 people per annum to a variety of exhibitions and provided a range of benefits to the town.

Going forward, the company had identified two areas for improvement. The first was to improve local signposting and improve their marketing of the gallery. The MP for Cheltenham had recently described the gallery as one of Cheltenham's 'hidden gems'. The second issue was to reduce energy consumption. The gallery currently had an income of £10,000 per annum which currently matched its expenditure and energy consumption was a major part of that. The gallery would be liaising with the council's planning and conservation officers to see what changes to the building might be acceptable in order to reduce energy costs.

In response to a question relating to any increase in footfall at the gallery as a result of the Cheltenham Festivals being located in the gardens, he advised that there had been a very significant increase. As the gallery was already booked up to 18 -24 months ahead, it had not been possible to coordinate the nature of the exhibitions with the theme of the Festivals. In 2013 he had kept a slot free during the Literature Festival in October and they hoped to be able to curate a suitable exhibition for the first time.

The chair thanked Mr Freeman for a very interesting and informative presentation.

9. LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS UPDATE

Craig Mortiboys, Health Communities Partnership Manager introduced the update on the London 2012 Olympics which had been circulated with papers. He advised members that the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) planned to announce the route and timings on the 19 March and until then the route through Cheltenham was not public information. There had been some initial discussions with local community groups who might want to organise their own events. He also highlighted the legacy work outlined in section 3 of the report particularly the welcoming of the Malawi team to Gloucestershire and enabling their use of local facilities for training and forging links with local schools.

Significant work would continue to take place over the coming months with a wide range of partners to prepare for the Torch Relay celebrations. The council would continue to work to make the most of the opportunities presented by the Olympics to encourage a more active and inclusive society in the town.

10. CHELTENHAM BOROUGH HOMES- CHELTENHAM TENANTS' AND LEASEHOLDERS' VOICE

The chair welcomed Tracy Palmer-Jones from Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) and Lisa Ledster representing the Cheltenham Tenants' and

Leaseholders' Voice (CTLV) to the meeting to update the committee. TPJ gave apologies on behalf of Caroline Walker from CBH who had been unable to attend.

Ms Ledster explained how the CTLV had been set up. Twelve volunteers had put themselves forward for membership and were now undergoing training and development. This involved meeting with a variety of organisations including the joint core strategy team, the Police, Gloucestershire County Council and the borough council to understand how they could work together to improve the lives of people that they represented. All the sessions had been recorded so that they could be made available to others who could not attend. Members also had access to a range of personal development sessions in skills such as communications. They had scheduled a series of monthly meetings throughout the year. The aim of the group was to tackle issues which were important to local people which may not be picked up by the council or other organisations. Examples included parking, dog fouling and antisocial behaviour and residents may be more willing to raise these types of issues with a community representative rather than on a more official basis. Hence the group enabled tenants to have a 'voice'.

In response to a concern from a member that the group should represent the whole of Cheltenham and not just the deprived areas, Ms Ledster reassured members that they would aim to have representatives from across Cheltenham. Although they were currently linked to CBH they also had a non-CBH resident on their group.

The chair thanked them for an interesting presentation and wished them every success in this new initiative.

11. DRAFT HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2012-2017

Martin Stacy, Housing and Communities Manager introduced the report which had been circulated with the agenda. The proposed Housing and Homelessness Strategy aimed to support both national and local priorities and emerging trends and had been influenced by the work of the member housing review group. The vision was "to enable residents to access and maintain suitable, affordable accommodation within communities that are safer, stronger and healthier." During his presentation, he highlighted that this was an opportunity for the committee to influence the strategy, identify any gaps or highlight any areas which needed more emphasis.

Members made a number of comments on the strategy as follows:

- The strategy referred to the potential savings of 35 tonnes of carbon dioxide per property by reusing empty homes. This figure should also be reflected in the Joint Core Strategy.
- The strategy needed to make a statement on the energy efficiency of new builds and the planning policy should be strengthened to support this to avoid fuel poverty in the future. The council should take a proactive stance on this and not wait for developers or government to lay down guidelines. This objective should also be reflected in the Joint Core Strategy.
- The strategy was a good starting point but needed to be more concise and include clear action plans. The section on vacant properties and the strategy in the appendix needed to be more aggressive. There needed

to be a clear process for empty property management orders so councillors could take the initiative for empty properties in their ward.

- A 'missing' was a strategy regarding children in care becoming adults and a co-ordinated approach was needed to provide them with the support and housing.
- The wording related to gypsies and travellers needs to recognize that there are various distinct groups which may have different needs.
- A member thought more clarity was needed on the figures for annual requirements for new housing and was concerned that the strategy relied on particular options in the Joint Core Strategy to supply those needs. They also suggested that CBH was not spending enough on new builds.
- A member referred to a recent press article which had stated there was 1500 unsafe private sector homes in Cheltenham which were not up to a basic standard. Tackling this issue must be a priority for any housing strategy.

In response to questions and comments from members the Housing and Communities Manager advised the following:

- An empty property in the private sector was identified from council tax data and priority was given to properties which had been empty for at least 12 months as this was the most effective use of the staff time available to investigate these properties.
- Although empty properties were important a bigger issue was working with landlords to encourage them to take on tenants with lower incomes.
- Officers would also explore the options for empty buildings owned by the county council or other public sector organisations as well as garage sites where a change of use could provide additional housing accommodation.

The Cabinet Member Housing and Safety advised the committee that there was some limited funding available to progress the issue of compulsory purchase orders. She thanked members for their comments and as the report was not due to go to Cabinet until June there was plenty of time for members to input to the final document. She concluded that there were very challenging times ahead.

12. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The chair explained that this was the last meeting of the committee before the new scrutiny arrangements were put in place. A discussion paper had been circulated which invited members to give their thoughts on the regular items which had come to this committee in the past and how they should be dealt with in the future. The options would be for them to be considered by the new overview and scrutiny committee, to be the subject of a scrutiny task group or a potential item for a member seminar or briefing.

James Harrison, as a co-optee on the committee, suggested that there were two types of issues which had come to this committee. The first had been items for proper scrutiny with options which members could debate. The second was items which had come to this committee in order to update members. These often involved a long presentation but did not pass the 'so what' test in that there were no outcomes or recommendations.

Generally members agreed with this view and it was important that the agenda for the new O&S committee was not overwhelmed with performance and update reports. If Service areas or partners were delivering to their Service Level Agreement there was no need for it to come to scrutiny. Representatives from the service area would be having regular meetings with Cabinet Members and officers to update on performance data and scrutiny would not want to duplicate this process. If there was an issue relating to the performance then the overview and scrutiny committee may decide to set up a scrutiny task group to look at it in more detail. The task group would add value through their detailed scrutiny and the main committee could check progress and help to decide whether the recommendations should go to Cabinet or Council. Presentations and updates, albeit very interesting should not come to scrutiny and could be open to all members possibly before Council meetings.

A member commented that in order for the new arrangements to be successful, Cabinet would need to work in a different way and review how they engage with O&S. O&S would also need to facilitate community calls for action as a vehicle for local people raising issues of concern.

The Director of Commissioning reassured members that it was the aim under the new arrangements to include co-optees on the scrutiny task groups whenever their knowledge or expertise could contribute to the review.

Members agreed that youth issues were an important issue that had been raised by his committee and should continue to be an item on the next overview and scrutiny agenda.

Members who had attended the recent scrutiny workshops encouraged all members to attend as they were an excellent way of finding out more about the new arrangements and contributing their views and ideas.

The chair thanked members for their comments and the support they had given her as chair of the committee.

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

The chair invited Councillor Penny Hall as the council's representative on the County Health, Community and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak. Councillor Hall advised members that she had raised the points made by this committee at the last meeting. This included their concerns that the setting up of an acute trauma centre at Gloucester Royal Hospital might reduce the Accident and Emergency (A&E) resources available at Cheltenham General Hospital. She had been reassured that the acute trauma centre was a virtual centre designed to bring in the appropriate medical skills when needed so that patients with multiple injuries could be stabilised before being transferred to Bristol. There would be no impact on the staff at Cheltenham and no transfer of resources away from Cheltenham to Gloucester. She had also raised their concerns about the shortage of acute A&E consultants at Cheltenham and she had been advised that they had been successful in recruitment. Improvements were being made to the A&E facilities at Cheltenham and she couldn't envisage that the town could ever do without this facility given its population. The Committee endorsed this view.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As this was the last meeting of the committee a further meeting was not scheduled. However the first meeting of the new committee will take place on Monday 28 May 2012 at 6 p.m.

15. BRIEFING NOTES-FOR INFORMATION ONLY

A briefing note on the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum Development Scheme had been circulated with the papers.

Anne Regan
Chairman