

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Community Select Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, on 18 September 2007 at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillors Morris (Chairman)

Councillor Ahmed, Annaly, Billington, Clarke, Milne Home, Miss Thirzie Smart and Webb.

Alternate

Members: Councillor Dhesi (for Councillor Sibley) and Councillor Robbins (for Councillor Mrs Edwards).

Also in Attendance: Councillor Reynolds (Portfolio Holder – Community Recreation and Health) (for Minute No ECS.11/07) and Councillors Hughes and Rae (Members of Task and Finish Panel, Woodgreen Leisure Centre) (for Minute No ECS.11/07).

Officers: L Howlett (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), S Lodge (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in Attendance: C Baynes (Interim Chief Executive), I Davies (Strategic Director – Environment and Community), P Marston-Weston (Head of Recreation and Health), C Rothwell (Head of Urban and Rural Services), D Ginns (Interim Head of Communications and Community Planning) (All for Minute No ECS.11/07), G Helm (Head of Safety Communities and Community Development) (for Minute No ECS.10/07)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cotter, Mrs Edwards, Prestidge and Sibley.

RESOLUTIONS

MATTERS NOT OF AN EXEMPT OR CONFIDENTIAL NATURE

ECS.8/07 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 June 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ECS.9/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Ahmed, Clarke, Milne Home and Robbins declared personal interests as Members of Banbury Town Council and Councillor Dhesi declared a personal interest as a Member of Banbury Town Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

ECS.10/07 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which set out new or updated items of relevance to the Corporate priorities: A Cleaner, Greener Cherwell and A Safe, Healthy Cherwell.

The report set out (1) the Executive Forward Plan; (2) the latest version of the Select Committee Work Programme; and (3) the Crime and Disorder Review.

The Committee were informed of the latest position with regard to waste collection issues and it was suggested that Members might wish to consider whether there was any particular aspect of 'waste collection' in Cherwell that warranted scrutiny attention at this time.

The Committee were reminded that Councillors Clarke, Edwards and Sibley had served on the CCTV Task and Finish Panel and on 29 August 2007 they had visited the CCTV control room in Banbury and had met Cherwell District Council Officers responsible for the CCTV scheme.

It was noted that the Thames Valley Police county wide review of CCTV was expected to report back in February 2008 and noted that one of the main considerations of that review would be the number and location of CCTV control rooms. Cherwell's plans to upgrade to a digital recording suite in the Banbury control area had therefore been put on hold pending the outcome of the police review. The Panel had expressed some concerns about the possible implications of losing a 'local' Cherwell control room and had agreed that they would work with Officers to monitor developments and ensure that their reservations were registered as part of the Thames Valley Police process.

In the meantime the Panel had agreed that as a starting point they would conduct an 'audit' of the existing CCTV hardware (fixed and deployable cameras) within the District and compare that against Thames Valley Police criminal data. The objective would be to ensure that the Council was maximising its use of the CCTV resources in terms of location and type of equipment. The Panel would also look at the management of the scheme and the use of information, all of which would serve to inform the Council's contribution to the Thames Valley Police review and respond to the findings of the internal audit review. The Panel would meet again in October and a full report would be made to the Select Committee in November 2007.

The Committee were informed that on 6 November 2006 the Community Select Committee had presented a report to the Executive on the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Review. The original recommendations, the Executive's response and the current status of those recommendations were noted. The Committee also noted the progress on the implementation of the recommendations and considered whether this Scrutiny Review could now be removed from the monitoring section of the work programme.

The Committee noted the latest position with regard to Horton Hospital, Banbury and Bicester Community Hospital.

In connection with recreation for young people the Committee noted that Councillor Sames in his role as Young Peoples Champion had invited the Committee to nominate a representative(s) to join him on a working party looking at how CDC engaged with partner organisations for the benefit of the youth in the District, with particular reference to recreation. It was suggested that it would be appropriate to consider two Councillors, one each from Banbury and Kidlington to complement Councillor Same's knowledge of Bicester.

This exercise will be conducted during the autumn and would submit its proposals to the Executive in early 2008. This was an opportunity for the Committee, through its nominee, to play a part in policy development on key issues. The Committee could, if it so chose, invite Councillor Sames to bring the proposals to a Select Committee meeting for more general discussion in advance of submission to the Executive.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (1) had no further items to be added to the work programme from the Executive Forward Plan;
- (2) agree the work programme for 2007/08;
- (3) note the progress on the scrutiny review of CCTV;
- (4) note the progress on the implementation and recommendations of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Review and agree that this can now be removed from the monitoring section of the work programme; and
- (5) that Councillors Ahmed and Prestidge be nominated as representatives to work on the 'Recreation for Young People Initiative'.

ECS.11/07 THE FUTURE OF WOODGREEN LEISURE CENTRE AND THE OPEN AIR POOL

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Chief Executive on the future of the Woodgreen Leisure Centre and open air pool and noted the interim report of the Task and Finish Panel on the future of the leisure centre and which had been circulated to Members of the Committee.

The Committee noted the Executive summary and recommendations of the report, the context in which the report had been based, the key finding and the conclusions of the Task and Finish Panel. This included appendices relating to (i) the Scrutiny Review Scoping Document; (ii) details of organisations and individuals who had given evidence and site visits which had been made; (iii) details of reference documents and websites; (iv) timeline of key events in the history of the Woodgreen Leisure Centre; (v) the Options analysis and (vi) the Value for Money analysis.

The Chairman invited Councillor L Pratt, who had been Chairman of the Task and Finish Panel to introduce the report.

Councillor Pratt stated that the Task and Finish Panel had undertaken a demanding review which had focussed on facts and figures and had tried not to be swayed by emotional consideration, although this had often been difficult.

She noted that the Panel had been criticised in the press but felt that they had:-

- (1) achieved a clear understanding of insurance and covenant issues;
- (2) undertaken site visits where similar facilities had been redeveloped;
- (3) heard the views of many local interest groups; and
- (4) placed indicative costs against options in order that Members could see the financial implications.

The Task and Finish Panel had ruled out:-

Option 1 – to close Woodgreen and quit the site and

Option 4 – to commit to the wholesale redevelopment of Woodgreen.

She asked the Committee to assist in reaching a decision regarding Options 2 and 3 and make a recommendation on the preferred option to the Executive.

She stated that there had never been any expectation on the part of the Panel that an early decision could mean that the pool would be open for the 2008 summer season and that it was clear from the initial visit to the pool that given its state of repair an extensive schedule of work would be required. It was the Panel's task to produce recommendations that could feed into the 2008/09 budget exercise.

Councillor Pratt then made the following points:

- (i) that it was clear that the Council could no longer sit on the fence and ignore Woodgreen and some action needed to be taken;
- (ii) the Scrutiny Review had looked at the future of the whole of Woodgreen Leisure Centre including the community hall and bowls club and not just the open air pool;
- (iii) the Panel's job was to explore the principles and issues impacting on Woodgreen and to look at the evidence objectively;
- (iv) the Panel had looked at what was possible and what was affordable;
- (v) the Panel did not see their job as a fully researched and costed concept design for Woodgreen;
- (vi) the line had been taken that Woodgreen and the pool would be regarded as a District facility and that the preferred option must be to the benefit of Cherwell the implications being that the financial costs should also be borne across the District;
- (vii) this did not distract from the fact that Woodgreen was at the heart of one of the most economically and socially disadvantaged areas of Cherwell and that there was a need for investment in the community;
- (viii) the Panel had decided against any form of public opinion survey at the outset as it was considered that it would not deliver any new opinions that were not already known;
- (ix) it was felt that all organisations and individuals were passionate in their support for Woodgreen and the pool and the Panel applauded their willingness to adopt new ideas and arrangements and welcomed their offers of financial contributions;
- (x) in the financial analysis of the pool refurbishment the Panel had erred on the side of caution. Taking into account the insurance requirements for new build standard, the comparative costs of Droitwich Spa Refurbishments and estimates from the Council's consultants this suggested that Banbury Town Council and the pool campaign estimates were too low;
- (xi) the financial analysis assume that the pool would open for an 8 week period over the summer holidays. It would not be open even for weekends earlier in the summer as increased opening hours would lead to increased costs;

- (xii) a lot of discussion about lottery funding, Olympic grants and volunteer fund raising had taken place and all of these avenues should be pursued in maximising the income streams but the Panel had considered that there were no guarantees of income and as such none of these options should feature in the financial analysis.
- (xiii) approaches by individuals offering to take on the management and operation of the open air pool had been considered to be a secondary consideration compared to whether or not there should actually be a pool at Woodgreen.

In concluding Councillor Pratt stated:-

- (1) that the Panel had agreed that the Council did need to make an investment in community facilities at Woodgreen;
- (2) that there was a choice between Options 2 and 3 and how much the Council were prepared to spend on this investment;
- (3) that the Executive had indicated that there was £750,000 available for investment in Woodgreen and they would have to determine where any additional funding, if any, would come from.

She thanked Members of the Task and Finish Panel, Officers of the Council and all organisations and individuals who had contributed towards the publication of the report.

A number of Members of the Committee spoke in favour of Option 3 to completely refurbish the pool and dry facilities.

The Committee recognise that any option they put forward would need to provide value for money and that any income generated would depend very much upon the weather. Even so Members felt that the Council should proceed with Option 3.

It was felt that the pool had provided a wonderful facility for Banbury and the surrounding area over a long period, and provided a facility in an area of the town which was the most economically and socially deprived. By developing additional facilities on the site this would provide regeneration of the area to the benefit of residents.

The development of the pool would provide a welcome facility for families and would provide a healthy environment which would assist with childhood obesity and would be in line with the Council's Cleaner and Greener policy. The Committee furthermore welcome the support of Banbury Town Council which included a financial revenue contribution and a possible financial contribution from Banbury Canoe Club.

It was felt that the provision of pool facilities as suggested in Option 3 would have only limited competition with facilities provided at Spiceball Park.

In relation to the indoor bowling facilities the Committee considered that this provided an important leisure facility which was relied on by many people and one which should be retained.

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends Option 3 to the Executive Committee in that the principle of the re-opening Woodgreen open air pool and refurbishment of the Woodgreen Leisure Centre is sound and should be progressed and that the Task

and Finish Panel reconvene with a view to working up proposals having established options and costs and report back to this Committee's next meeting.

ECS.12/07 **END OF MEETING**

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm.