

Minutes

SOCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH AND HOUSING POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

25 July 2011

Meeting held at Committee Room 3 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Judith Cooper (Chairman) Patricia Jackson Peter Kemp (Vice-Chairman) John Major David Benson Sukhpal Brar Roshan Ghei Dominic Gilham</p> <p>Others Present: Cllr Philip Corthorne</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Sharon Townsend, Head of Adult Education Tricia Collis, Head of Adult Social Care Natasha Dogra, Democratic Services Officer</p>	
1.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO REPORT THE PRESENCE OF ANY SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Cllr Kuldeep Lakhmana, and Cllr Roshan Ghei substituted. Apologies had been received from Cllr Wayne Bridges and Cllr Dominic Gilham substituted.</p>	Action by
2.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Cllr Gilham declared an interest in item 4 – the Rural Activities Garden Centre report as he was Ward Councillors for the area where the centre is situated.</p> <p>Cllr Kemp declared an interest in item 4 – the Rural Activities Garden Centre report as he was Ward Councillors for the area where the centre is situated, and as he was the Council's Disabilities Champion.</p>	Action by
3.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED IN PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items on the agenda were Part 1 and would be considered in public.</p>	Action by

4.	<p>FORWARD PLAN - RURAL ACTIVITIES GARDEN CENTRE (638) <i>(Agenda Item 4)</i></p> <p>The Chairman of the Committee welcomed Members and consultees to the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing, Cllr Philip Corthorne was invited to address the Committee. Cllr Corthorne was pleased to be able to present the report to the Committee and be able to receive the comments of the Committee.</p> <p>During a meeting with parent carers last September Cllr Corthorne said he made three commitments; to ensure the necessary capital was attained to modernise the RAGC, to ensure current service users could continue to use the centre following the refurbishment, and finally to encourage engagement with parents carers as the RAGC developed. Cllr Corthorne said the Project Plan set out an exciting increase of potential on the site of the centre.</p> <p>The Chairman invited parent carer Mr David Pickwick to put his questions to Cllr Corthorne. Mr Pickwick thanked Cllr Corthorne for his involvement with this matter and for his support.</p> <p>Mr Pickwick asked Cllr Corthorne how the sum of £240k for the refurbishment was arrived at. Cllr Corthorne understood this figure was the total deemed necessary for the refurbishment by Officers. Officers stated that they had received a quote of £180k to replace the main building, followed by an Access Audit and a quote for the greenhouse glass replacement – this was a rounded figure rather than a detailed costing. Officers said this figure was on par with the Disabilities Discrimination Act funding level figure. Officers said that if further funding was needed in the future the normal Council procedure to seek external funding would be adhered to.</p> <p>Mr Pickwick said he was encouraged by Cllr Corthorne's words and understood how the RAGC would fit in with the Adult Education department. Mr Pickwick did highlight the issue of available transport links for non-independent travellers. The Chairman said this query would form part of their comments to Cabinet. Cllr Corthorne informed Mr Pickwick that he would follow this query up with the relevant officers.</p> <p>A Committee Member asked Cllr Corthorne whether the modernisation of this centre would reduce the numbers of service users at other centres. Cllr Corthorne said he did not think this would be an issue.</p> <p>The Chairman invited Tricia Collis to present the Cabinet report to the Committee. Ms Collis said the Adult Social Care department and Adult Education department had been working together on the RAGC for many years. The site had huge potential to offer training and life employment skills to disabled people. The site offered the opportunity for the Green Spaces team to get involved and provide more opportunities to engage people in a rich mix of activities and services.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>Tricia Collis, Head of Adult Social Care</p>

Ms Collis said the centre runs an education curriculum which covered skills such as retail, customer care and catering. Service users were able to access this curriculum with ease, and were encouraged to do so as it gave them access to a brighter future. Ms Collis said the courses provided opportunities to engage learners in a range of activities such as flower cutting, micro-enterprising, horticulture and craft selling and production. Opportunities such as the National Garden Scheme enabled service users to get involved with external competitions. This allowed the centre to produce a rich blend of activities for the service users.

Ms Collis said the RAGC provided a horticultural bridge towards greater independence and supportive employment for service users. Ms Collis said the proposed modernisation promised a very exciting future for the centre.

The Chairman opened the floor to questions from the Committee Members. A Member asked when the site would be fully accessible. Ms Collis said the site should be fully accessible by the end of 2011. The Council's Property team had started scoping the site plans and these would be finalised by the end of August, subject to the decision made by Cabinet at their meeting this week. The implementation of the refurbishment should be complete by Easter 2012.

Members asked if there was potential for the extension of the centre. Officers said this was not possible; however at 2.5 acres the site was very large already.

Members asked if any service users had displayed flowers at Chelsea Flower Show. Officers said this had not been done yet, but the joined up approach from Green Spaces and the Adult Education team may allow for this opportunity to flourish. The Committee agreed that this opportunity would help build the confidence of service users and allow them to experience a competitive environment.

A Member of the Committee stated that although the proposed plans looked promising Officers must ensure the centre is run by a suitable manager with the right experience and capabilities. Members agreed that the manager would require a degree of business acumen along with the experience of working in their field previously. Members commended the current staff at the centre. Labour Committee Members stated that there was cross party Council commitment for this project.

Members asked Officers whether there was a Master Plan for this project. Officers said there would be a Master Plan and this was currently being developed by the Property team. Members asked Officers whether they were looking at building partnerships with stakeholders and external agencies. Officers said they had started this process and had met with relevant stakeholders to discuss the project plan. Officers said Phase 1 of the project was based around receiving Cabinet approval. Phase 2 involved engaging charitable bodies, researching training courses for staff and involving stakeholders.

Officers also clarified that the centre was open to use by people physically disabled as well as those mentally disabled. Agencies such as Hillingdon MIND and Hillingdon Hospital would therefore be engaged as stakeholders in Phase 2 of the project.

Members asked whether skills such as numeric, literacy and ICT would be encouraged. Officers said funding would be available to offer these skills to service users, and these key skills needed to be imbedded in the curriculum and be taught on site at the centre.

A Member of the Committee asked Officers to correct the following points in the report:

- The centre hosted five ponds, not one small pond;
- The centre had four poly tunnels, not three.

Members expressed their concern over the amount of change the service users would be faced with. Officers said they would engage with service users at each stage and would provide them with constant support. Officers said the staff at the centre would not be changing so staff would have consistent support. Officers welcomed Members' idea of asking service users to keep a paper or electronic diary of the changes happening at the centre. The Committee agreed this would be a good way of engaging service users and keeping them involved in the transition. The Committee reminded Officers that the office at the centre contained photographs from the early 80s which could be used in a video diary.

Officers said they would be researching the possibility of offering micro-enterprise skills to the service users through clubs and training courses. However, Officers said they would research whether starting enterprises would compromise the benefits received by any service users.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for their useful and positive comments, and thanked witnesses for attending the meeting.

Resolved: Members of the Committee would like to submit the following comments to Cabinet for consideration:

- 1) The Committee welcome the '*Rural Activities Garden Centre - Project Plan for its modernisation and sustainable future*' Cabinet report which they believe will provide the service users with the support they require presently as well as recognising the potential for the future development of the RAGC;**
- 2) The Committee believe that the relevant stakeholders should be involved in the development and implementation of the Project Master Plan to ensure consistent support and active engagement and;**
- 3) The Committee specifically request that Cabinet:**
 - a) Urge Officers to engage closely with current service**

	<p>users whilst developing the Project Master Plan, to ensure continuity and an easy transition for the users of the centre and;</p> <p>b) Instruct Officers to consider transport solutions for non-independent travellers accessing the centre.</p>	
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 5.00 pm, closed at 6.00 pm.</p>	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Natasha Dogra on 01895 277488. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.