

**A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
WAS HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

Councillors Ms Ballard (P), Beavis (P), Carr (P), Champion (P), Dickson, Mrs Forder (P), Forder (Chairman) (P), Foster-Reed, Geddes, Hylands (P), Mrs Searle, and Miss West (P).

**17. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for inability to attend the meeting.

**18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**19. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 July 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

**20. DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PROGRAMME**

A) REQUESTS FOR SCRUTINY

No requests had been received.

B) WORK PROGRAMME

Members were advised that in excess of 40 attendees were expected at the conference on Loneliness and Isolation amongst Gosport's Older People on 8 October 2009.

Due to a clash of events, officers undertook to arrange for the Budget Issues Working Group meeting on 13 October 2009 to commence at the earlier time of 5.00 p.m.

The first meeting of the Recruitment and Succession Planning Working Group had been arranged for 27 October 2009.

C) OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR SCRUTINY

It was suggested by Councillor Carr that problems related to rubbish clearance on private, unadopted alleyways be scrutinised. Members debated the suggestion and decided that, as the alleyways were private and did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Borough Council a scrutiny would be likely to prove inappropriate. Officers undertook to investigate and report back to Councillor Carr.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted; and
- b) problems related to rubbish clearance on private, unadopted alleyways be not scrutinised.

## **21. REPORTS RECEIVED**

### **(i) GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME**

Consideration was given to a briefing note by the Head of Policy and Performance which advised Members on the first year of the Gender Equality Scheme (GES) and its revised Action Plan.

Members' attention was drawn to a pilot scheme of the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire named 'Fastforward', the goal of which was to ensure that barriers to employment were addressed through partnership and/or Council actions identified in the Economic Strategy and Action Plan 2008/11. Appropriate training would be offered through the scheme.

Members raised the issue of Council employment appointments being made on merit without discrimination, with positive action being taken where appropriate to assist in maintaining a representative gender balance. Officers advised that the policy was to appoint the best candidate and, as yet, no action had been required. Should an imbalance arise in the future, it would have to be addressed and the advertising of vacant posts may have to reflect this.

Members were advised that many staff, once appointed by the Borough Council, tended to remain in the Council's employment for a considerable time.

The Chief Executive advised that when the most recent appointment to a Director post was made, the short list had been narrowed down to two people, one of each gender. Increasingly staff appointed to regulatory and environmental health posts tended to be female whereas accountancy staff seemed to be predominantly male.

Members were reminded of their Equality and Diversity E - learning opportunities.

Officers were thanked for their report.

RESOLVED: That the briefing note of the Head of Policy and Performance be noted.

(ii) UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION

Consideration was given to a joint briefing note by the Chief Executive and the Borough Solicitor which advised Members on the latest developments regarding:

- the Sustainable Communities Act 2007
- Councillors' Calls for Action
- petitions
- the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill

Members were advised that the various pieces of legislation were part of the government's campaign to increase local democracy and empower local residents.

With regard to the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, around 300 proposals had been forwarded by various bodies to the Local Government Association. Many were of a similar nature and would be sifted before being forwarded to central government. New legislation before May 2010 was unlikely.

With regard to Councillors' Calls for Action, Members were advised that this expanded and strengthened the role of Overview and Scrutiny whereby the Committee would work with partners and have the opportunity to hold them to account.

Members were advised that the idea of joint scrutiny had been floated by Hampshire County Council. This concept would give Councillors a role in the scrutiny of bodies with non-elected members and was welcomed by those bodies.

With regard to petitions, Members were advised that the legislation covered how local authorities should respond to petitions and gave citizens greater powers to hold local authorities to account and influence local services.

With regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, Members were advised that this legislation covered a number of areas, as shown in the briefing note, including the promotion of democratic understanding and a requirement for County and Unitary Authorities to prepare an assessment of the economic situation in their area. The Borough Council was currently assisting Hampshire County Council and the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire with this work. The assessment would be of a factual nature and would be reported to the Economic Development Sub-Board.

The Bill also introduced the title of Alderman for former elected Councillors as a way of retaining expertise.

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Members were advised that Councillors' Calls for Action would exclude planning or licensing decisions.

It was noted that the profile of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 appeared to have been lowered which was viewed as unfortunate as it offered a way for local authorities to increase their revenue.

RESOLVED: That the joint briefing note of the Chief Executive and the Borough Solicitor be noted.

(iii) ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SPECIAL MEETING ON POST-16 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ON 12 OCTOBER 2009

Consideration was given to a draft letter from the Chairman of the Committee to representatives of the Learning and Skills Council and Hampshire County Council regarding the extraordinary meeting of the Committee to be held on 12 October 2009. The draft letter included a number of questions for the representatives.

It was agreed that the representatives be asked to provide answers to the following:

1. Describe levels of educational achievement at 16+ in Gosport relative to those in other parts of the county and country. We would also be interested in hearing your theories that might explain variations from national and county norms.
2. Explain the possible consequences for the local economy and employment.
3. Outline the LSC's involvement with the subject, its past recommendations and proposals, their fate and the possible reasons for it.
4. Explain the financial and other implications for Gosport of the 'wind-up' of the LSC?
5. Provide an assessment of where we stand now and what needs to be done. For example, how do you see the national agenda for partnership and schools working together playing out in Gosport?

RESOLVED: That the questions detailed above be asked of the representatives of the Learning and Skills Council and Hampshire County Council at the extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 October 2009.

**22. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business to discuss.

The meeting ended at 7.02 p.m

CHAIRMAN