

**AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE WAS HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2009**

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

**23. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Champion and Miss West.

**24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**25. CURRENT AND FUTURE POST-16 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
PROVISION IN GOSPORT**

The representatives from the Learning Skills Council and Hampshire County Council were introduced to the Committee:

- Anne-Marie Mountifield: Learning and Skills Council Partnership Director
- Mike Stoneman: Learning and Skills Council Partnership Manager
- Melanie Saunders: Hampshire County Council Manager of Educational Improvement
- Brian Pope: Hampshire County Council Director
- Bob Eardley: Hampshire County Council: Infrastructure

A background paper from the Learning and Skills Council entitled “Gosport Post 16 Vocational Provision – Overview and Scrutiny: 12 October 2009” was circulated to the Committee and is affixed in the Minute Book as Appendix A.

The Chairman explained that the discussion would revolve around five questions to the representatives which had been notified in advance.

The first question put to the representatives was as follows:

*Describe levels of educational achievement at 16 plus 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.*

Anne-Marie Mountifield referred to data set out in the background document relating to those leaving school in August 2008 with five or more GCSE grades A\* - C including English and Maths, and Level 2 which included five or more grades A\* - C. Also contained was data regarding percentages of young people achieving Levels 2 and 3 qualifications by the age of 19 together with comparators relating to adult skills in the Gosport area.

In all these areas the statistics relating to Gosport did not compare well either nationally or with the rest of the county.

Members were advised that there were key gaps at entry levels 1 and 2 and these were explained by historical configuration of provision, transport, how learners value learning and routes into learning which are not always felt to be natural choices. In some areas participation was very low. Low educational attainment was often as a result of family influence.

Brian Pope advised that there was no OFSTED pre-sixteen educational failure in Gosport. At age five the key indicators were communication and language skills and social and emotional behaviour. In Hampshire 50% of children gained a satisfactory level of attainment in these areas whilst in Gosport the level was only 37%. This 13% gap had closed to 8% by the time the children left school. The key solution for some children would be to remove social and economic factors.

Members stated that the per capita spending in Gosport at Key Stages 3 and 4 (11-16) was less than in Hampshire as a whole and queried whether enough was being done to help. Brian Pope advised that the pre-five system was still very new and funding had been provided for children's centres with a degree of success, but there would always be room for improvement.

The Chairman summed up this part of the discussion by stating that Gosport was a Borough where educational attainment was much lower than the county average. It was suggested that this reflected economic and social deprivation in the Borough but generally schools were doing their job properly.

The second question was put to the representatives:

*Explain the possible consequences for the local economy and employment.*

Members were advised that, compared to the south-east generally, there were social and economic issues in Gosport. Broadly speaking average earnings were lower and many people had to leave the Borough as they could earn more elsewhere. Benefit dependency was higher as was the claimant count in relation to age group.

More attention needed to be paid to workless people aged 18 to 24 years. In relation to job density there was slightly over 0.5 of a job per resident of working age, indicating that there were not enough jobs in the Borough for the resident population. This did not compare favourably with surrounding areas.

With regard to entrepreneurial activity, it was noted that the number of VAT level businesses was very low. There were a number of small businesses and self employed people but this was unlikely to generate a great deal of employment.

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There was a challenge in relation to the provision of apprenticeships which would require working with public sector colleagues to encourage apprenticeship opportunities. Efforts had been made to give short term assistance with apprenticeships to provide some experience.

Members noted that the Ministry of Defence was a major employer in the area but was reducing in size. This would affect job opportunities and would need to be taken into account.

There were emerging opportunities in the area e.g. the Rowner Renewal scheme where young people would see opportunities to work in the Borough in areas with a positive, tangible future.

Question 3 was put to the representatives:

*Outline the Learning and Skills Council's involvement with the subject, its past recommendations and proposals, their fate and the possible reasons for it.*

Ann-Marie Mountifield advised that there is considerable movement of people around the PUSH area with large mobility amongst people studying. There were six or seven education establishments within a ten mile radius; Fareham College, St Vincent and Bay House School were the major providers locally.

Since 2002/03 independent reviews had been commissioned, of which all sought a structural solution. This included a public consultation exercise on a proposed merger of St Vincent and Fareham Colleges.

Young people were being adversely affected, especially regarding employment opportunities and there was a need to be mindful that the body responsible for young people would be changing.

Members felt that there was a vocational deficit in Gosport with low educational attainment and this needed to be addressed. It was not always easy for students to travel out of the area to study and students with a record of poor educational attainment were more reluctant to travel substantial distances to further their training and education.

Ann-Marie Mountifield advised that there was a desire to achieve a strategic solution. There were many different views but there was a need for a deliverable, sustainable solution which would be signed up to by all parties. There was also a need to look at geographical areas in isolation and to concentrate on those not in education, employment or training.

Members were advised that various schools had worked on a number of initiatives to address the vocational deficit. However, these were very piecemeal and would require significant investment to provide solutions.

Question 4 was put to the representatives:

*Explain the financial and other implications for Gosport of the 'wind-up' of the Learning and Skills Council.*

Ann-Marie Mountifield drew Members attention to page seven of the background paper.

There should be no implication relating to the abolition of the Learning and Skills Council as there would be bodies to succeed it. The drive would be to bring arrangements together in a more streamlined way for the education of those aged between 0 and 19. The Learning and Skills Council was currently responsible for post 19 education and there would be an agency established to carry on this work.

Legislation was currently moving through Parliament and was due to be ratified on 1 April 2010. Education for 16 to 19 year olds would be the responsibility of local authorities. Skills and apprenticeships would be the responsibility of the Skills Funding Agency.

Question 5 was put to the representatives:

*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?*

Ann-Marie Mountifield advised that there were insufficient vocational opportunities in Gosport for young people and adults. Members suggested that the problem in Gosport was more serious than other areas of the country due to its low educational attainment and poor transport. Members were advised that the problem was very acute in Gosport. The challenge was to equip people for sustainable employment. There were also challenges relating to opportunities for post 16s and concern regarding the number of young people not in education, employment or training together with those working without having achieved level 2 education and undertaking no training. There were also concerns about the outward migration of workers from Gosport and the lack of level 2 and level 3 achievements by the age of 19 years.

Brian Pope advised of the need to raise attainment at age 16 in Gosport. There had been recent improvements and collaboration between schools would be of assistance. The challenge would be how to intervene and get children on track. Leadership and management of schools together with teaching would be important. There had been some collaboration in the past to help with problems with mathematics which had seen a 3% improvement.

Consideration needed to be given to the moving of resources around the system when necessary, particularly in anticipation of future challenges.

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Members were advised that Building Schools for the Future was critical. £80m would be made available in the first phase and it was hoped that £100m would be provided for the second. However, this would not happen until proper post -16 education proposals had been made.

Bob Eardley advised on Building Schools for the Future which would involve rebuilding, refurbishment and modernisation of every school in the country and would run beyond the year 2020. All authorities had been asked to identify where schools had low academic achievement and social deprivation. Nationally, Gosport was about halfway down the list but the ground rules had changed. Gosport was further ahead in the national programme than had been anticipated. The phase 2 funding would affect Gosport with £50m being available for the three secondary schools. This would be divided by the Partnership for Schools mainly on the basis of pupil numbers.

Members were advised that the allocation of £100m would not be sufficient and therefore funding from other areas would be needed. Details of 16 plus capital funding were not yet known. Obtaining funding through Building Schools for the Future was not considered to be easy and there would be a need to show that there was a proper strategy.

Members were advised that capital funding was still unclear and that demand outstripped supply. Funding for 16 to 19 year olds in schools and colleges had been committed up to 2011 after which there were no guarantees due to the impending General Election and the movement of responsibility from the Learning and Skills Councils to local authorities.

In answer to a question, Members were advised that the position of St Vincent College is the currently the same as for all other establishments.

Members were advised that Central Government was at present bringing in funds on a more modest scale. Building Schools for the Future would be part of a transformation agenda and funding post-16 education would have to respond to increased demand. Funding could be allocated to other areas due to local requirements or desires.

All the reviews had basically concluded the priorities for action shown on page 6 of the background paper. The challenge would be to obtain consensus and for all parties to pull in the same direction. Building Schools for the Future is the only avenue for funding and would need partnership working to be successful.

Members drew attention to wider issues affecting Gosport e.g. business grants to attract new employers to the town. Members were advised that strategic procurement leading to, for example, apprenticeships were a direct gain for the local population and there was funding available. For example, the Rowner Renewal scheme would require skills and would be beneficial to the local economy.

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The representatives were questioned related to the priority given to Havant over Gosport in relation to the Building Schools for the Future. Members were advised that the criteria were:

- a. GCSE results in 2008; and
- b. Tax Credit take up.

Gosport was second out of ten in the area after Havant.

The Chairman thanked the representatives of the Learning and Skills Council and Hampshire County Council, in particular for the paper they had produced. It was felt that none of the parties were satisfied with the current situation and that despite substantial efforts the LSC had failed to find a comprehensive set of answers to what was a very disturbing situation. He hoped that the deliberations of the Committee may contribute to finding a way forward.

At this point the representatives left the meeting.

Members expressed the view that, whilst the provision of education was not a Borough Council responsibility and it could therefore not make any impositions, it ought nevertheless to be possible for it to apply pressure and exert some influence where the need was as clear as in this instance..

Members were advised that Bob Eardley of Hampshire County Council, who had earlier attended the meeting, had approached the Borough Council with a request for officers to sit on the Leisure and Cultural groups. The Borough Council officers nominated were David Martin and Damien Wilson respectively.

It was agreed that the whole Committee scrutiny of this area should continue and that Councillor Edgar, in recognition of his education role within Hampshire County Council, should be invited to attend any further meetings of the Committee where post -16 education was being discussed. In particular it was agreed that the two 11-16 schools, Bay House School and St Vincent College should all be given an opportunity to present their views to the Committee.

The Chief Executive advised that under the Comprehensive Area Assessment, District Councils were expected by the Government to exert influence in all areas of their community and show leadership. Therefore, the Borough Council would need to form a view on post -16 education, bearing in mind that, if the problems were not addressed, it was unlikely that jobs would be attracted to the area. In the past people had made their voices heard, for example, on the proposed merger and siting of colleges in Fareham.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the scrutiny of post-16 vocational education provision in Gosport be continued;

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- b) the scrutiny be carried out by the whole Committee;
- c) Councillor Edgar be invited to attend the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when post-16 vocational education provision in Gosport is to be discussed; and
- d) other education providers be invited to such meetings as appropriate.

**26. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business to discuss.

The meeting ended at 8.08 p.m

CHAIRMAN