

**A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
WAS HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2009**

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

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Councillor Murphy had been nominated to attend this meeting in place of Councillor Beavis

**31. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Beavis and Carr.

**32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**33. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 24 September, 12 October and 12 November 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as true and correct records.

**34. DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PROGRAMME**

A) REQUESTS FOR SCRUTINY

No requests had been received.

B) WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Mrs Forder updated the Committee on the work of the Budget Issues Working Group. The Group had looked at the Budget Monitor and ways to make it more understandable and easier to read. The Borough Treasurer had acted on the Group's wishes and had circulated a draft of the document in a revised format. It was hoped that the new format would make the document easier to understand.

Councillor Mrs Forder suggested that training sessions for Members on budget issues would be useful. The Working Group was due to meet again on 9 December 2009.

The Work Programme was noted.

C) OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR SCRUTINY

There were no other suggestions for scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

### **35. REPORTS RECEIVED**

(i) GOSPORT'S SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY –  
PROGRESS UPDATE

Consideration was given to a briefing note by the Chief Executive which provided Members with a progress update on Gosport's Sustainable Community Strategy and its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

It was pointed out that education did not have a particularly high profile within the document. Officers advised that the views of the Committee had been taken into consideration and representation on the LSP Board had been improved and the Gosport Education Improvement Partnership also dealt with such issues. However there were a limited number of priorities where concentrated consideration could be given and these were currently congestions, employment opportunities and health and wellbeing.

Members were advised that the Local Strategic Partnership was chaired by the Chief Executive of Gosport Borough Council. There was also a co-ordinator who worked 50% for Gosport Borough Council and 50% for Fareham Borough Council.

Members raised the issue of functions that could be performed by the Local Strategic Partnership but not by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire. Officers advised that the Local Strategic Partnership was local in nature and therefore able to make use of the benefits of local networking and relationships. As an example of this, the Rowner Regeneration Project had been initiated by the Local Strategic Partnership. The Local Area Agreement linked in with the Local Strategic Partnership and this was reflected on the agenda of the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire.

The Borough Solicitor explained the structure of the Local Strategic Partnership and advised that when the legislation was first introduced for Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Strategies, one of the main aims had been to promote community leadership by local authorities. The Gosport Borough Council representative on the Local Strategic Partnership was the Leader of the Council.

In answer to a Member's question, Officers advised that there was high level representation from the Police on the Local Strategic Partnership. At neighbourhood level the Community Safety Partnership was responsible for looking at neighbourhood panels. This could be a Local Strategic Partnership communication vehicle in the future. The concept of "one point engagement" was being looked into.

With regard to the travel website, Members were advised that the contractor did not manage to make all the correct links at first. Once the website was ready these would be advertised and linked with the Gosport Borough Council website.

RESOLVED: That the briefing note of the Chief Executive be noted.

(ii) REPORT OF THE RECRUITMENT AND SUCCESSION WORKING GROUP

Consideration was given to a briefing note of the Borough Solicitor which sought approval of the Working Group's recommendations to Personnel Sub-Board.

The Chairman advised that the Working Group found the Council's policies and practices to be sensible and appropriate but it was acknowledged that the Workforce Development Plan may result in some changes.

The Council was in a situation where it would be losing some Senior Officers due to retirement during a period of transition and financial constraint. It would be difficult to replace these Officers on a one to one basis and there would be a need for flexibility and an element of training up of other staff. It was also acknowledged that the trainee scheme had been successful.

With regard to the sharing of senior posts with neighbouring authorities, Members were advised that currently Gosport Borough Council had partnership arrangements with:

- Fareham Borough Council (Building Control)
- Eastleigh Borough Council (Internal Audit)
- Havant Borough Council and Portsmouth City Council (Coastal Defence)

Other Councils were looking at the benefits of sharing services. There was an arrangement in existence in Hampshire for sharing legal services and Havant and East Hampshire District Councils currently shared a Chief Executive. There were examples where this arrangement had worked well and also examples where it had not worked well. Such opportunities would be considered as and when they arose.

The Chairman advised that the type of work being undertaken by graduates at the moment was changing and that there was considerable talent available. There was a great deal of potential in trainee schemes. Officers advised that there were currently different types of trainee in Gosport Borough Council.

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- Office Trainee – 16/17 years old on a fixed term two year contract. It was noted that some trainees had progressed and it was possible to make a career path for them.
- Trainee Local Government Solicitors - two trainees within the Council had now qualified.
- Democratic Services - there had been problems recruiting experienced Democratic Services Officers and advertisements had been successfully placed for trainees. This was felt to be an advantage in that younger people were being recruited by the Council and they had been found to be adept with new technology.

RESOLVED: That the following recommendations be made to Personnel Sub-Board:-

- A. The Borough Council's policies and practice are appropriate to the current circumstances although these should be revisited when the current review of the workforce development plan is complete;
- B. Overview and Scrutiny Committee was impressed with what it learned about the flexible and imaginative strategies currently being advocated and pursued. Bearing in mind the relatively large proportion of senior officers who are expected to retire in the next few years, and the frequent difficulty of recruiting direct replacements, such flexibility will be needed and is to be welcomed; and
- C. The success of the trainee scheme was noted and fitted well with the strategies that will be needed particularly in the next few years.

(iii) POST-16 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The Chairman advised that an extraordinary meeting of the Committee had been arranged for 15 December 2009 to discuss the above subject. A draft letter to the heads of invited educational establishments was circulated.

RESOLVED: That the draft letter to the heads of educational establishments invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 December 2009 be approved.

(iv) MAINTENANCE OF ANN'S HILL CEMETERY

Consideration was given to a briefing note of the Leisure and Cultural Services Manager which provided historical information regarding Grounds Maintenance within Ann's Hill Cemetery compared to the current regime of maintenance.

Members were advised that the cemetery was arranged in three parts:

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- A traditional area which was fairly ornate.
- War graves.
- Lawned area.

Members were advised that all memorials and graves were owned by the families of the deceased and all had purchased the grant of right. Some of the memorials tended to be old and had fallen into decay. The newer memorials were often of white marble with infill chippings.

As owner of the cemetery, Gosport Borough Council had a duty to ensure that the area was safe and therefore topple tests on memorials had been carried out which sometimes resulted in the Council fitting supporting stakes. Some families had been distressed by this action. Where it had not been possible to trace the families, the Council had made memorials safe where necessary.

Memorials in the lawned area were governed by maximum sizes and the rest of the area was grassed. Over a period of time some of these memorials had become dangerous but the danger was not considered to be as great as with the larger memorials.

The war graves area was maintained by the War Graves Commission, was well kept and included a central memorial. There were other war graves in the traditional area, but most memorials were standard. With regard to grass cutting, the war graves were box cut with the lawned area being maintained by flymo.

Members were advised of the spring and summer meadows which were very attractive but also presented associated maintenance issues in that the Council would not deal with vegetation in graves, although some strimming was carried out where necessary.

The spring meadow on the east side had been provided as a pleasant setting for bereaved persons and visitors. However the disadvantage was that the area was unkempt and could become dangerous. It was intended to provide some paths through the area and also interpretation panels.

An issue was raised regarding the path along the north of the west side which provided access to houses. The bushes in the area had grown through the fencing and the contractors had refused to cut them back. Members were advised that there was a rolling programme to renew fencing along the perimeter. One side of the perimeter was owned by Hampshire County Council. There was a rolling programme which involved the removal of hedgerows. There had been problems this year with birds nesting in the hedgerows and the Council had concentrated on areas where the hedgerow was dead. Officers undertook to raise the issue with the contractor.

The issue was raised regarding trees in the cemetery which may be dangerous during high winds. Officers advised that there was a three/five year rolling programme to reduce the crowns and dead wood in the trees. Residents affected received appropriate letters from the Council. Members were advised that the next topple testing would take place in 2011. Approximately 1,000 memorials had failed the last test and everyone for whom the Council had records had been traced. Only around 80 memorials had been repaired as the Council relied on approaches from the families. The Council could not force families to repair memorials but a registration scheme had been introduced where there was a ten year guarantee of the memorial's safety. Standards had been set for memorials and information was updated as people came forward.

Concerns were raised regarding cars driving through the cemetery at high speed and inappropriate parking. Members were advised that attempts had been made to address this problem by closing the gate and installing bollards but this posed problems for hearses and other visitors. Traffic was being monitored but, as officers were not on site for the whole day, this presented difficulties. Efforts were made to encourage visitors to walk and speed signs were only an advisory measure.

RESOLVED: That the briefing note of the Leisure and Cultural Services Manager be noted.

### **36. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business to discuss.

The meeting ended at 7.22 p.m

CHAIRMAN