

**A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WAS HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2009**

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

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Councillor Allen had been nominated to replace Councillor Geddes for this meeting.

37. APOLOGIES

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

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

39. POST 16 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN GOSPORT

A copy of a letter received from Dr Ian Johnson, Principal of Brune Park Community College, was circulated to Members. A copy of the letter is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix A.

The Chairman advised that, with regard to this issue, he was currently endeavouring to organise a visit for Members to South Downs College. He had also met with County Councillor Kirk and advised him that he would be producing initial findings from this meeting and would invite his comments upon them. It was hoped that Councillor Kirk would be able to attend a future meeting for this purpose.

The education establishments were represented as follows:

- Bridgemary School represented by Mr Richard Carlyle, Vice Principal and Acting Head
- Bay House School represented by Mr Ian Potter, Headteacher
- St Vincent College represented by Mr Steve Wain, Principal

The representatives were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Are you aware of any particular deficiencies in Post 16 Vocational Education and if so what are they?
- What are the particular implications of these deficiencies in your Institution and how are you endeavouring to address them?
- How do you believe the issues can be best addressed bearing in the mind the likely financial climate over the next few years?
- Are there any more general implications for your Institution?

Bridgemary School

Mr Carlyle advised that there was a lack of opportunity for Post 16 year olds and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) were aware of this lack of provision.

The School did have planning permission for a vocational centre and had a partner, Highbury College, which had been chosen by the LSC, not by the school. The lack of provision had been partially addressed by Fareham College but not all the learners with needs were accessing provision.

The transition of responsibility from the LSC to the local authority was being managed and funding for capital build was required. There was a broad curriculum remit which had been successful in addressing level 1 needs.

The local authority had not expressed a preference for Post 16 provision but had indicated that they had funds to support a vocational centre at Bridgemary School.

The vision involved addressing engagement with adult education, encompassing both male and female students and the family engagement philosophy.

With regard to addressing the post 16 issues, the school had a partnership arrangement with Highbury College. A survey had been carried out amongst sixteen year olds regarding the curriculum plan. The classroom environment would support the provision of vocational education. The school had an open attitude but could be certain of nothing at the present time.

With regard to the suggestion of one college to specialise in vocational education whilst another specialised in academic education, Mr Carlyle expressed the view that, to an extent, his school would like to see a centre of excellence for the most able students but advised that this would need to be carefully mapped and thought through.

Mr Carlyle advised that the school intended to support the local community whilst it appeared that other providers were adopting a more aggressive stance.

There was a possibility of £80 million being provided under Building Schools for the Future (BSF) for secondary education provision in Gosport. This had led the school to reflect on communication and the provision of a Gosport Learning Village to support all year learning. If the BSF avenue were pursued, all secondary education institutions would be required to produce a Strategy for Change document. This would have to include Post 16 provision.

With regard to the Federation, Mr Carlyle stated that, economically, it would make sense to provide for a cluster of educational services, with joined up thinking to support health and education services and the community.

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There had been no clear information in the recent BSF announcements but, should the area miss out on the £80 million of funding, there may not be further opportunities.

Members raised the issue of the 14 to 19 agenda and the introduction of 17 new diplomas by the end of 2011. Mr Carlyle advised of the Gosport 14 to 19 Collaboration which was at a very mature stage. The level of uptake had been disappointing despite considerable marketing efforts. It could be that people were waiting to see how the arrangements panned out. It was heavily funded at the start but the timeline for the release of diplomas appeared to be causing delays.

The Chairman suggested the intake at Bridgemaury School was potentially less aspirant due to social and economic factors in the area and asked whether the relative lack of opportunity affected Bridgemaury students more than others. Mr Carlyle advised that all students needed to know what their next step would be in order to be properly motivated. They would need to be able to identify effective progression routes.

The Chairman suggested that there was a need for provision for vocational education in Gosport but this was in the areas where there was least investment and asked whether this could be addressed. Mr Carlyle advised that pre-16 engineering courses had been successful and there had been a 100% double pass rate at GCSE level in Bridgemaury School. The school worked well with HMS Sultan and other schools needed to tap into this valuable community resource. The BSF would support a large ICT infrastructure.

With regard to collaboration, Members asked whether there were any problems between schools and colleges. Mr Carlyle advised that it was not true that diplomas were exclusively vocational although some schools had encountered problems in this area. There was a wealth of partners but it was difficult to sustain a financial relationship. Industry in schools worked very well to enable students to relate to the job market and industry specification. It was useful for students to be taken out into the industrial workplace.

With regard to the introduction of the 17 new diplomas by 2011, Members asked whether the schools would lose out if they waited for too long. Mr Carlyle advised that the sport and leisure diplomas would not be coming in for a couple of years but, in the meantime, they would be able to support students in other ways in this subject area.

Mr Carlyle was asked whether the entry level requirements for diplomas would be likely to dissuade students. Some students were happy doing BTech Engineering and that would be part of their future career. Not all students wanted to specialise too early.

The Chairman thanked Mr Carlyle for his contribution and asked him to pass on the best wishes of the Committee to Cheryl Heron, the Principal of Bridgemaury School, who was leaving shortly to take up a new post.

Bay House School

Ian Potter advised that there was a paucity of post 16 vocational education in Gosport which was mainly to do with the lack of routes of progression. Too many students took routes which were determined only by what was available and not by what they would ideally like to do.

Mr Potter advised that the number of students going to Sixth Form College or further education dropped at age 17 and dropped further at age 18. This correlated with the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) group, the size of which increased as students became older. There was a need to keep students engaged in learning but the size of the NEET group increased because the courses available were not what they wanted. If students did not attain a sufficiently high level at GCSE they would go on to courses that were available but not necessarily ones where they would continue to achieve. Level 2 vocational courses should include areas such as construction and retail.

With regard to the new diplomas, Mr Potter advised that they were successful to an extent but they were not the panacea that had been hoped for. A student would need to be a high flyer to be successful in the diplomas. The foundation was only worth a D grade (level 1) and this was a missed opportunity. It would be possible to map out a route of progress in Gosport i.e. level 1 with some level 2 work but not considered satisfactory for level 3. There could be a menu of vocational courses available and level 2 vocational studies could bring the student up to a level sufficiently high to start level 3 at age 16. Students could be working at levels 1, 2 and 3 at the same time but in different areas. At the moment there was an “eggs in one basket” attitude. The system needed to be more flexible and there was a need for flexible thinking, including the area of collaboration.

Mr Potter advised that at Bay House 120 students out of 350 remained in the school to study for ‘A’ levels. 150 of the 350 were of academic ‘A’ level standard and would be following the correct route of progression. This left 200 students to whom the school felt a commitment and there were concerns about how any transition was managed. There were concerns that students would simply take whatever courses were available but their confidence as learners would be increased if a greater choice were available.

Traditionally adolescents tended to follow whichever course of action would be easiest. This would often involve following their peer group and providers took advantage of this. Bay House remained viable as many students came to the Sixth Form from outside the school. The school’s retention stacked up well and it achieved its fitness for purpose. In many establishments students were taking inappropriate courses and only realised this when they were older.

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Mr Potter advised that the Fareham / Gosport Consortium illustrated the destination of those leaving Bay House School. He highlighted the trend for greater numbers to go to Fareham College. However, if it suited a student from Bay House to go outside the consortium because it was the right move for them, the school would encourage this.

Mr Potter advised that, if Gosport could offer the same facilities as Fareham, students would not need to travel to Fareham. Students were often reluctant to make the effort to travel and would only do so if they perceived the need to do so. Greater diversity of provision in Gosport would lead to greater engagement and achievement of learners post-16. Mr Potter advised that the situation could be addressed through curriculum diversification. The perception may be that Bay House was only interested in academic progression but, in fact, it was the most comprehensive provider in the area for 11 to 16 education. Students at Bay House are socially diverse and so offering a diverse and appropriate curriculum provision posed an interesting challenge.

Mr Potter advised that the school's Enterprise Academy which provided for 14 to 16 year olds served the needs of potentially NEET young people. The first cohort were all now in further education. Mainstream education was not serving the purposes of these students.

Vocational provision at Bay House included general vocational courses, BTechs and now diplomas. Four diploma courses had been available since September 2009. Different courses were led by different establishments with Bay House and Brune Park leading the way on diploma provision this year. Next September, Portchester School would be providing diplomas and then Henry Cort School. Bay House would be the only provider of two diploma lines in 2010. In 2011 Fareham College, Henry Cort and Crofton School would also be leading on diplomas. This was evidence of which establishments were active in providing leadership on the vocational agenda, and those institutions that were not.

Mr Potter advised that the solutions to the problems would have to be addressed by leadership and by those that had been involved in engagement, overview and accountability. His vision was for a thriving multi site provision for 14 to 19 year olds. The leadership of this would commission the provision at the Bridgemary Skills Centre and at other sites such as Quayside and the Enterprise Academy. The provision of a centre of excellence for marine studies at the St. Vincent College site would be advantageous and contribute to this multi-site approach. This could all be led by an executive who could promote a joined up approach with apprenticeships and workplace learning.

At Brune Park and Bay House discussions had taken place regarding the use of ex-caretaker houses for such multi-site provision. Provision should fit around the students it served e.g. there should be places for students who were emotionally challenged.

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Mr Potter expressed a preference for a federated joined-up approach in Gosport and the leadership of this approach would be important.

The Chairman endeavoured to summarise the points so far made by Mr Potter in that there were many different answers required, existing facilities were not good or numerous enough and clarity of vision and leadership were needed. He asked whether Mr Potter agreed with this summary, and Mr Potter confirmed that he did.

Mr Potter advised that the LSC were not effective as leaders and it would be interesting to see what the Local Authority would do. He was always in favour of a merger of colleges but not at the Daedalus site as this would put everything under one roof. Currently there was too much of a mentality where establishments simply took interest in their own students and tried to increase student numbers. Consideration needed to be given to young people who may not be likely to undertake further education. The biggest issue was post 16 year olds not attending education and the responsibility for this issue.

Mr Potter advised that the Gosport and Fareham Education Improvement Partnership in Gosport was very effective. For Gosport it was a pre-cursor to the way that Hampshire County Council saw education being organised in the future.

The Joint Partnership for 0 to 14 year olds involved collaborative leadership. This could attract funds and provide early intervention which would improve the situation for students later on. Currently there were meetings being trialled for joint governance at all levels.

There was an issue as to whether resources were deployed in the right way. Gosport was not large enough to sustain provision for 14 to 19 year olds with the roll out of diplomas. Mr Potter supported the idea of a Consortium and joint governorship. Post 16 funding would come from the local authority and the landscape would shift due to the introduction of the diplomas. There could be a 0 to 14 and 14 to 19 years executive structure. The improvement partnership would evolve into a Children's Partnership and the commissioning of services would come to Gosport. An executive would be needed to achieve economies of scale.

A Member raised the issue of how an executive would be made up and whether independent people would be invited to join. Mr Potter advised that executive members would be people involved in the education profession but they would seek a relationship with non-executive members. The body would have to begin with existing personnel but this would not necessarily be maintained ad infinitum. The traits, attributes and strategic abilities of members would need to be identified and they would have to buy into the vision and not wish solely to protect their own establishment.

Members raised the issue of the Enterprise Academy and were advised that this was used to assist “harder to reach” students. Bay House provided for those who did not want, or who were advised not to, study academic routes of progression. It was felt that this provided a different route to success.

With regard to the implications of the lack of post 16 vocational education, Mr Potter advised that Bay House had more to gain by not engaging in this important agenda if the School were to take a narrowly self-interested approach. However, the School did not want to do this. There were now significant opportunities e.g. with the Improvement Partnership and possible BSF funding which may provide an opportunity to move away from the demands of the financial climate and take advantage of economies of scale. The question had to be asked whether the right kind of leadership was available.

The Chairman thanked Mr Potter for his contribution.

St. Vincent College

Mr Wain advised that education in Hampshire had been very successful due to it being organised around the Tertiary Education Model which was envied in other parts of the country. People in Gosport understood the rationale for that system however changes in the 1990s led to the creation of Bay House School Sixth Form.

Mr Wain felt that the tertiary system was the best way of educating post 16 year olds and cited three research papers (1) which demonstrated the following:

- The availability of a sixth form in a local school reduces post 16 participation.
- The overall range of courses in an area falls when a school sixth form opens.
- Schools without sixth forms outperform those with at GCSE

The consequences were clear in that decisions made in Gosport had now created a structure which made addressing Gosport’s educational issues harder than it needed to be. Mr Wain advised that far from wishing to engage in further structural change it was now essential for all education providers in Gosport to work together and support each other.

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Mr Wain advised that he was concerned that the LSC had wanted to close St. Vincent College without having any clear future strategy and thus there was a real danger that the tertiary education system could have folded. The LSC had invested in Bay House and planned to expand post 16 provision at Bridgemary School, the intention being to undermine St. Vincent College and create disharmony amongst the education community. St Vincent had on at least two occasions put proposals to the LSC to increase the range of vocational provision in Gosport, each of which required minimal investment and each had been rejected. Despite this the college has managed to extend the range of vocational courses over the last three years. 26% of students were working at level 2 or below with various courses offered including NVQs. This figure is roughly three times that you would normally find in a sixth form college.

Once vocational courses already offered at St Vincent had been accounted for the remaining gaps are concentrated in the following areas: general engineering (mech / elec), motor vehicle, marine engineering, construction trades, and hospitality and catering. However, it was unlikely that there would be sufficient demand for the later two to make Gosport only provision viable.

The College had been classified as “good” by Ofsted and experienced its best ever A level results in 2009 and students at the college now perform significantly better than their GCSE results predict. This level of performance is achieved whilst providing places for everyone regardless of prior ability or previous success. Ofsted advises that “Educational and Social Inclusion are outstanding” In relation to vocational courses Ofsted advises that “success rates are high on many vocational courses”. Since the potential merger had been taken off the agenda, applications for the College had increased by 20%. Mr Wain advised that he would like to see the four educational establishments working together and supporting each other with the creation of a Gosport Federation focusing on student needs. There were currently 6,000 students aged 11 to 19 to serve in the Gosport area. Gosport should take the initiative when approaching decision making bodies like the LSC or the local authority through working together. Discussions had taken place regarding co-location and there had been some positive dialogue. Similarly positive discussions had been held regarding the development of the St Vincent campus. A federated, co-located college was a future ambition however in the interim the LSC are proposing to create 150 further vocational places in Gosport. The LSC proposal needs to be handled carefully to prevent further local disagreement. St Vincent College advised they were willing to support the building of a new facility on the Mill Lane site.

Mr Wain advised that a Skills Centre would be provided at St. Vincent College with the following advantages:

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- Ample space for the development
- Planning permission should be granted
- Students would be part of the college as opposed to an outreach centre
- Alternative options are available if students changed their minds
- Excellent progression opportunities are available at a college
- Access to friends and role models is better at a college
- Access to support, if necessary is easier on a college campus
- Students from all schools already mix well at St. Vincent
- St. Vincent was in the south of the Borough and would not impact on traffic flow as well as being close to other areas earmarked for development
- The LSC has already identified that the need for vocational provision is in the south of the area.
- Revenue funding for 150 new students alone would equal £6- This revenue combined with land sale income would ensure that any third party gap funding would be manageable.
- The LSC funding revenue would also further benefit other Gosport students and remain within Gosport
- Other training providers could access facilities e.g. for apprenticeships
- The Borough wishes to develop specialist marine engineering facilities and St Vincent has direct access to the sea.
- The current funding climate makes any outreach provision vulnerable to cuts and thus the future of vocational provision would be better assured as part of an existing college campus.

Mr Wain advised that he appreciated that Bridgemaury School may look at proceeding with its plans to open a skills centre on their site. Although this would clearly be an inferior solution to that proposed by the college, St Vincent wants an end to strife. With that in mind it would support this if St Vincent was the schools partner college. College support would not be given to proposals taking income out of the area as this would lead to further fragmentation of education and ultimately lead to reduced choice in the Borough not only for young people but for the significant number of adults we serve too.

Mr Wain felt that there was influence that could be exerted by the Borough Council. The town should be working together on this and he sincerely hoped we all would.

Mr Wain stated that he was encouraged that the Borough Council was expressing an interest and it was good to bring people together. The local education authority was currently in listening mode and is genuinely open, as they themselves said, to ideas.

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Mr Wain was asked about the possible selling off of some areas of the St. Vincent College site. He advised that the estate comprised three parts. It was anticipated that Forton Field and Forton Lake would be sold and a new vocational site built. The £3m-£4m funding gap was an indicative figure but was manageable. Making the creation of a skills centre a realistic proposal

With regard to the Gosport Federation, the Education Improvement Partnership and the 14 to 19 Consortium, Mr Wain advised that he wished to see education governed by representatives of all institutions and that self interest was not to be encouraged. The local education authority felt that there was a need to federate because of future funding issues however there were other compelling reasons to do this.

With regard to co-operation with other establishments Mr Wain advised that there were different views on the configuration of education. He advocated the tertiary system. He felt that there had been consequences related to the expansion of Bay House. There was now an opportunity for the establishments to work together. He was open to ideas but felt that post 16 provision needs to be centralised to increase its range and quality.

The Chairman thanked Mr Wain for his contribution.

40. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to discuss.

The meeting ended at 7.15 p.m

CHAIRMAN