

**A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WAS HELD ON 22 JULY 2010**

Councillors Bradley, Dickson (P), Forder (Chairman) (P), Foster-Reed (P), Geddes (P), Hylands (P), Jacobs (P), Jessop (P), Kimber (P), Scard (P), Mrs Searle and Miss West (P).

13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bradley and Mrs Searle.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Geddes declared a personal interest, as a Hampshire County Councillor, in agenda item no. 5(i) (Dial-a-Ride).

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 June 2010 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

16. REPORTS RECEIVED

(i) POST 16 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that he and the Leader of the Council had been requested to continue the monitoring of Post 16 Vocational Education in Gosport. Regular meetings had been held with the Principals and Headteachers in Gosport and a meeting had taken place the previous week with County Councillor Kirk.

No clear vision had yet emerged, although Hampshire County Council, now responsible for 16 to 19 education had made funding available for an additional 130 places for vocational education in Gosport. The three senior schools in Gosport and Fareham College had made a bid to provide the courses and the provision would be known as Gosport College.

Fareham College had opened a Sixth Form where pupils were studying for A Levels.

The scrutiny of Post 16 Vocational Education in Gosport had been a major step forward and had led to Hampshire County Council placing a focus on the education of 16 to 19 year olds. There was a danger that St Vincent College may struggle to attract sufficient students in the future.

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The Chief Executive suggested that the Committee should consider continuing the scrutiny as pressure would need to be maintained. The Borough Council had given a strong message to the County Council.

The Principal at Fareham College had requested the opportunity to address the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as he wished to respond to its report. It was understood that 40% of the students at Fareham College came from Gosport and therefore the future of Gosport would have a direct effect on the College. Members agreed to this request.

The view was expressed that the responsibility for education rested with Hampshire County Council. Gosport Borough Council had highlighted the problems and it was now the responsibility of Hampshire County Council to respond and determine how it would improve the situation. It was recognised that Gosport Borough Council did not possess powers relating to education but it was able to exert influence in this area. It was suggested that, although it would be inappropriate for Gosport Borough Council to generate the vision, it would be necessary and relevant to express its fears for 16 to 19 vocational education in Gosport.

A number of Members expressed concerns regarding the future of St. Vincent College.

The question was raised as to whether the new Gosport College vocational courses tied in with local industries. Members were advised that Gosport Borough Council had not been involved in detail but it was recognised that education in vocational skills was below that needed in Gosport. There was a variety of groups within the Local Strategic Partnership, including a business group, where dialogue took place with education providers. The basic problem was that there was insufficient vocational training available.

The Chief Executive advised that the power of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should not be underestimated. There was considerable merit in continuing to monitor the situation and ensuring that Hampshire County Council knew that the Borough Council was still interested in the education of this age group. He suggested that the Committee listen to the views of the Principal of Fareham College.

The Chairman suggested that Gosport Borough Council should not necessarily subscribe to any other body's vision. Responsibility for education lay with Hampshire County Council and the Borough Council should be offering encouragement and support to the County Council.

The Chairman advised that he had received a letter from Highbury College who wished to speak to him in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee.

It was felt that the views of the people of Gosport should be heard on the matter of Post 16 Vocational Education.

RESOLVED: That the Principal of Fareham College be invited to a meeting with the Committee to respond to the Committee's report on Post 16 Vocational Education in Gosport.

(ii) GOSPORT DIAL-A-RIDE

Note: Councillor Geddes declared a personal interest in this item as he is a County Councillor but remained in the meeting room throughout its discussion and took part in the voting thereon.

At its meeting held on 10 June 2010, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested a report on Dial a Ride services within the Borough and, as a result, a briefing note of the Financial Services Manager was submitted to the Committee for consideration.

The Chairman explained that this report needed to be considered before a decision was made as to whether to pursue scrutiny further in this area.

Members were advised that the Gosport element of the scheme was funded on a 50/50 basis by Gosport Borough Council and Hampshire County Council. Fareham Borough Council did not contribute to the Gosport element. The method of funding had now changed, having operated under a Service Level Agreement arrangement. From 1 January 2010, following competitive tendering, the scheme had been run by Fareham Community Action providing both the Gosport and Fareham Dial a Ride Service. Gosport and Fareham Borough Councils were required to pay a monthly sum. Contributions from Gosport and Fareham Borough Councils and Hampshire County Council were based on the costs of providing the agreed vehicle operating hours in each borough and not the number of passengers using the bus. The Council received an invoice from Hampshire County Council who in turn made a payment to the operators, Fareham Community Action.

One vehicle was provided Monday-Friday exclusively for the Gosport Service with another being made available on Tuesday mornings. This service was being promoted but so far this year the take up had been low.

There were problems associated with people booking up the service weeks in advance which meant that other people tended to miss out. Although the Gosport bus was used solely for Gosport people, and the journeys would start in Gosport, the destination would frequently be Fareham.

Concerns were raised regarding the running of a service which was prevented from conveying passengers to hospitals. Concessionary travel would be looked into on financial grounds and it may be possible that this problem could be addressed at the next contract renewal. There was a termination clause in the contract which enabled parties to give six months notice of termination ending either on 1 April or 1 October.

A small charge was made for fares on the bus.

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Attention was drawn to the cost to the Borough of £23,000 per year which was matched by Hampshire County Council. There were 3,963 passenger trips in 2009/10 which worked out at approximately £12 per trip. The number of users i.e. 152 appeared to be rather low. This meant that each user was receiving benefit of approximately £300 per year.

It was suggested that a Working Group be established which would speak with representatives from Gosport Voluntary Action, Fareham Community Action and Hampshire County Council Transport Department.

It was agreed that a Dial-A-Ride Working Group be established and the following nominations were received to serve on the Working Group:

- Councillor Hylands
- Councillor Jacobs
- Councillor Scard

It was anticipated that the Working Group would report back to the Committee by its meeting on 27 January 2011.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) a Dial-A-Ride Working Group be established; and
- b) Councillors Hylands, Jacobs and Scard be nominated to serve on the Working Group.

(iii) REVIEW OF OUTTURN: BUDGET 2009/10

At its meeting held on 23 July 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had received a report on Review of Outturn: Budget 2008/9 (attached as appendix 1, appendices to original report not included) and agreed to receive a further report in respect of the 2009/10 financial year. As a result the Committee had set up a "Budget Issues Working Group" to examine the 2008/9 report.

Consideration was given to a briefing note of the Borough Treasurer which advised that the Working Group had met several times during the last Municipal Year and, whilst satisfied with arrangements for budget preparation and budgetary control, had recommended many improvements to the way in which financial information was presented to both Members and the public. Substantial changes had subsequently been made to quarterly budget monitor reports (which were now made available to all members rather than just those on Policy & Organisation Board) and to the Council's Budget Book. Additional financial awareness training had been made available on the recommendation of the Working Group. The Council's external auditors had recognised the resulting improvements during recent assessment visits.

Members decided that the tasks of the Working Group had now been completed and that there was no need for it to continue.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the report of the Borough Treasurer be noted; and
- b) the Budget Issues Working Group be disbanded.

(iv) NURSERY WORKING GROUP

Councillor Kimber advised that the Working Group had met at the Nursery on 13 July 2010 and a briefing note had now been received of the questions asked and the answers given. He thanked staff for their assistance.

It was acknowledged that there were problems at the Nursery and the Working Group would now encourage staff to come forward and discuss issues informally. Some suggestions had already been received e.g. the existing boiler was now becoming old and, should the Nursery continue, further investment would need to be made.

The methods of working were now better than in the past but there was still room for improvement.

As part of the scrutiny it was intended that the Working Group would visit the Bournemouth Borough Council Nursery to gather information on how it was managed and what investment had been made.

The Scrutiny was scheduled for completion by the end of November 2010.

(v) MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

The Chairman advised that he had spoken to a number of organisations including the Local Government Association, Hampshire County Council, the Improvement and Development Agency and INLOGOV at Birmingham University. All contacts appeared ultimately to lead to South East Employers who were responsible for the Member Development Charter and Charter Plus, whereby if the Council fulfilled certain requirements, recognition would be received.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman would be visiting Mr Mark Palmer of South East Employers in Winchester with a view to inviting him to speak to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the scheme.

17. DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PROGRAMME

A) REQUESTS FOR SCRUTINY

No requests had been received.

B) WORK PROGRAMME

With regard to the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, Members were advised that it was possible that the government would confer additional powers on local authorities, although no decision had yet been made. The General Election in May 2010 had changed the programme. The Borough Solicitor would be reporting to the Committee around the end of the year, should there be any further developments in this area.

With regard to petitions received and replied to by the Council, approval had recently been given to an appeal mechanism whereby a request could be made for a petition to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The E-Petitions provision was due to be introduced in December 2010 but this may change.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

C) OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR SCRUTINY

No requests were received.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to discuss.

The meeting ended at 7.11 p.m

CHAIRMAN