

A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WAS HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

Councillors; Allen, Mrs Batty (P), Beavis (P), Forder(P), Mrs Forder (P), Foster-Reed (P), Geddes, Gill (P), Hazel, Hylands (P), Scard (P) and Mrs Wright.

It was reported that in accordance with Standing Order 2.3.6, Councillor Mrs Cully had been nominated to replace Councillor Mrs Wright for this meeting.

18. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Allen, Geddes and Mrs Wright .

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 29 JULY 2015

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 July 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

21. REPORTS TO BE RECEIVED

i. Interpretation Boards

Members were advised that the report was a provisional findings report of the Working Group, following their work on interpretation boards in the Borough. The Committee were advised that the Diving Museum were planning on taking ownership of the Board outside Number 2 Battery.

The Committee were advised of the discussions regarding the materials for the boards, giving consideration to the location, durability and the desire to match any additions to the existing boards in situ.

It was acknowledged that there be a second stage of refurbishment for boards needing lesser renovation. It was also recognised that the initial works on phase one would be funded from the capital programme.

The Working Group clarified the location of some of the boards and it was agreed that the Principal Park and Landscape Officer continue to investigate costings for the boards.

The Committee were advised that the final proposals, including costings and finishes, would be determined in the report to the Community Board.

It was clarified that boards 28-34 were the boards in the Alver Valley and would be being reviewed separately as part of the Country Park proposals.

It was suggested that an updated report be presented to the February Committee meeting to report on the progress of the installation of the boards.

Members congratulated the working Group on their report.

RESOLVED: That;

- a) the interpretation boards be renovated and upgraded from the capital programme as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- b) that the provisional findings of the Working Group be formalised into a report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and notice be given to present it to the Community Board
- c) The Principal Parks and Landscape Officer continue to investigate costing and finishes for the renovated and replaced boards.

ii. Grounds Maintenance Contract

The Head of Streetscene was invited to address the Committee to update on the contract following an initial report in 2014.

The Committee were advised that it had been a good season and that grass cutting had gone well. Members had been provided with maps of wards, both hard copy and electronically, if required, which was helping them with enquiries.

The Committee were advised that a good relationship had been established with the contractors and that a joint half day workshop took place every February.

The Communication from the contractors had improved and the real time reporting was allowing the contractors to update with any issues.

A change in equipment had led to greater reliability and less cuttings, and complaints had reduced by approximately half.

The Committee were also advised that the revision of areas had worked well.

In answer to a Member's question, the Board were advised that cars parking on grass verges was problematic to the process, but that it was hoped there would be some resolution to some of the problems identified in the near future.

Members welcomed the update and thanked officers for their work in implementing an improved procedure.

iii. Agency Staff and Consultants

Members were advised that in response to a request at the previous meeting, the Chief Executive would address the Committee on the use of Agency Staff and Consultants within the Council.

The Committee were advised that every vacancy that became available at the Council was considered by the Organisational Sub Committee, comprising Chief Officers, Personnel and Unison representatives.

Members were advised that there had been a lot of uncertainty within particular departments as to the future of the work they undertook, in particular, universal credit had

been scheduled to be introduced two years ago, but little information or implementation had taken place.

Members were advised that as a result there had been difficulty in recruiting experienced benefit assessors, those at other local authorities were reluctant to leave with so much uncertainty surrounding the process and as a result, experienced processing staff were being sourced via agencies. These staff were well motivated and delivered quality work. In addition the Council were also training benefit processors.

Members were advised that the building industry also had suffered from a skills shortage, leading to a reduction in experienced planners. The private sector of the building industry had recovered from the recession and experienced planners had moved into the private sector and were reluctant to join the public sector because of ongoing uncertainty surrounding job security and a lower wage.

The Committee was advised that Gosport Borough Council define agency staff as those who are employed by someone other than the Council, and that as a result this included the apprentices. The apprentice scheme had been very successful; people were appointed to positions at the Council on a 2 year contract. Many of the apprentices had been appointed into permanent positions.

The Committee was advised that the security officers undertaken at Agnew and Barclay Houses were externally employed through an agency to ensure a constant cover in the event of sickness and leave. The staff used as security have a specific skills set and would not be able to be covered by alternative Gosport Borough Council Staff.

The Housing Department utilise agency staff to cover Housing staff absence, similarly the skills set required for the response officers meant that, in their absence, agency staff were required.

The Committee was advised that there was a national shortage of Electoral Services Officers and that the Council had recently appointed a Head of Electoral Services who would take over from the current consultant following the election in May. Similarly an Interim Head of Housing had been appointed to undertake a review of the Department; they would be replaced upon its conclusion.

Members expressed concern that there was a problem in Gosport in attracting skilled staff, which extended to GP's surgeries and schools.

Members thanked the Chief Executive for his presentation and recognised that the use of agency staff was required at times to fill gaps that occurred.

iii. Public Access and use of Fort Brockhurst.

The Committee was advised that Historic England were planning to hold a meeting to discuss the management plan for the Fort in October. It was hoped that following this, the historic England representatives would meet with the Working Group to discuss the way forward.

Members advised that the attendance at the Fort for the recent heritage open days had been hugely successful and hoped that the report back to the working group would prevent rumours around the future of the Fort.

22. DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PROGRAMME

A. Requests for Scrutiny

A Member expressed concern at the attainment levels in Secondary schools in the Borough. It was acknowledged that two of the Schools were now academies, but concern was expressed that the GCSE results in the Borough were not as hoped. It was agreed to talk to Councillor Edgar, the Executive Member for Education at Hampshire County Council to see whether he could address the Committee on this.

B. Work Programme

The Chairman highlighted the work programme attached to the agenda for the meeting and asked for comments. It was agreed that the work programme was fit for purpose.

23. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

The meeting concluded 19:34

CHAIRMAN