

A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WAS HELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2011

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

Also in attendance:

Peter King, Community Transport Officer at Hampshire County Council (HCC)

Paul O' Beirne, Chief Executive of Community Action Fareham (CAF)

Barrie Hill, Mobility Manager at Community Action Fareham

David Miles, Chief Officer at Gosport Voluntary Action (GVA)

13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillors Bradley and Dickson.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 4th JULY 2011

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4th July 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

16. DIAL A RIDE

Councillor Forder advised the Committee that the main focus of the meeting was resolving issues related to the Dial a Ride (DaR) scrutiny. The draft report from the DaR Working Group (WG) was circulated (attached to the minutes as appendix 1). Councillor Forder introduced the three officers present and explained the procedure for that section of the meeting.

Peter King (PK)

PK gave an overview of the Community Transport Team at HCC. DaR was established in Basingstoke and Eastleigh in the mid 1980's. Soon after, the County Council established a 50:50 funding split with district councils, which is still maintained. There is great variety between the different schemes run in Hampshire, from the small, entirely volunteer run scheme in Bishops Waltham, to larger schemes run in larger towns that have paid members of staff.

All DaR schemes were reviewed twice a year by HCC, at meetings held with the operator and district/borough council.

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Schemes were put out for tender in 2008, with a capped price for each service. District Council Officers were involved in the tender process. Most contracts started in 2009; however Gosport's started in 2010, due to no suitable bid from the first round of tendering. In the second round of tendering CAF won the contract.

HCC is looking to future tenders, as current contracts end in January 2013. HCC is due to hold a meeting with District Officers later in September 2011, with a meeting for potential suppliers of the service in October 2011.

HCC believes the capped price tender to be a successful way of managing price. However in Gosport, there was a need to provide an incentive for an improvement in performance.

PK circulated comparative data on DaR schemes in Hampshire (attached to the minutes as appendix 2). The data was from the first 6 months of 2009 – 2011.

Gosport's passenger trips per operating hour were the lowest figure and had dropped from 1.95 to 1.6. This was compounded by the highest subsidy per operating hour of £21.90. PK noted that in an ideal world DaR schemes should be aiming for 3-4 passenger trips per hour, but most Hampshire DaR schemes fell short of this figure. After the introduction of the new concessionary fare scheme in April 2011, HCC expected to see a rise of users of the Gosport DaR scheme (owing to half fare being offered to pass-holders), however this had not materialised.

Gosport had seen a fall in use by wheelchair users, while some other Hampshire schemes had seen a rise.

HCC commented that the performance of Gosport's DaR service was below expected figures and had a high subsidy rate.

When asked if there were any unique aspects to Gosport, which could affect the performance of a DaR service, PK noted that Gosport was a compact town with a very good bus service. The buses were also mainly low-floor, so more elderly people were able to get around Gosport on the buses for longer, before needing to use the DaR service. The congestion on the A32 was also noted, as this increased journey times for the DaR service.

In PK's opinion, Gosport's DaR performance figures were worse than other Hampshire schemes, primarily because there were relatively few users. This meant that subsidy costs per trip were higher because of the relatively low levels of use. The operator needed to promote the service and attract more new users and keep them as regulars. The DaR service in August 2011 had disappointingly lower passenger figures than in August 2010.

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PK was asked whether HCC was happy with the data management of the Gosport DaR service. PK advised the Committee that CAF used a standard software package, which was used by the majority of Hampshire DaR schemes. There was an agreed process of inputting and transferring data to HCC. Data was received on a regular basis. HCC was broadly happy with the data management of the Gosport DaR scheme.

HCC were happy with the general service provided in Gosport. User focus groups had responded with positive comments.

In PK's personal opinion, there was a need for a DaR service in Gosport. However there was no clear cut formula to work out how many users there would be in each district. It seemed as though Gosport DaR had not tapped into its potential customers, when compared to other districts.

HCC would only consider funding a Community Transport Scheme that focused on 'individual' travel and not group travel as it already supports Gosport Voluntary Action to provide a group hire minibus scheme for lunch clubs, day care etc.

PK was asked how DaR schemes were done differently throughout the UK. PK informed the group of different ways to run a DaR scheme; Milton Keynes had a scheme where part of the funding was used for taxis, alongside a Dial a Ride service, where the specific aim was to get more passengers together on semi-scheduled routes, improving productivity and value for money.

Councillors asked how many trips were to Fareham. PK advised the Committee that approximately 50% of trips were to Fareham, with Thursday morning trips mainly going to Fareham. However he noted that many DaR schemes offered cross boundary trips and that it was not unusual to serve destinations outside district boundaries.

PK gave an overview of the Community Transport Team at HCC. DaR was established in Basingstoke and Eastleigh in the mid 1980's. Soon after, the County Council established a 50:50 funding split with district councils, which is still maintained. There is great variety between the different schemes run in Hampshire, from the small, entirely volunteer run scheme in Bishops Waltham, to larger schemes run in larger towns that have paid members of staff.

Paul O'Beirne (POB) and Barrie Hall (BH)

POB circulated a handout from CAF (attached to these minutes as appendix 3).

POB noted that the statistics from 2010 to 2011 highlighted that the use of the service was 50% higher in 2010 than in 2011. POB explained that the lack of users to the Gosport DaR service could be attributed to the small service provided in Gosport, which restricted flexibility in trip times. This in turn affected the efficiency of the service.

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POB noted that 50% of journeys were to Fareham and that this reduced efficiency because of the time it took to travel along the A32. The Gosport service also had an higher number of cancellations compared to other services.

The CAF did not have a specific budget for promotion as they believed, unlike commercial services, that good services would be used well. The Gosport DaR service had been an exception to the rule and as a result CAF had increased the promotion of the service, including banners in the Town Hall and increased printing and distribution of leaflets.

POB believed that there was a demand for a DaR service in Gosport, due to the number of elderly people in Gosport. There could also be a case for a DaR scheme through the number of people claiming incapacity benefit in Gosport. However the number of wheelchair users using the service had decreased.

When asked why the service was worse, POB replied that this was due to the lack of demand from eligible customers and inability to reach potential customers. POB noted that some elderly people were still able to get around Gosport due to the good bus service provided.

POB reassured the Committee that the data provided from CAF was reliable and that there were no errors in the data provided.

CAF felt that they had received an adequate amount of support from GBC and HCC.

POB advised that CAF had tried a range of methods to promote the service. He reported that a new method was hand delivering leaflets door to door, as potential users of the service could no longer get out and about.

POB outlined proposals for efficiency, as stated in appendix 3 attached to these minutes.

The Committee discussed the increased use of disability scooters in Gosport and the effect this may have had on the users of a DaR service.

The Committee questioned why there was no mention of the £3 return trip on promotional leaflets, as this could be an encouragement to new users. The Committee discussed a number of ways of including this in CAF's promotional material.

The Committee questioned whether the work of other voluntary groups in the Borough affected the user rate of DaR. It was noted that Gosport did have a thriving voluntary car scheme, but the majority of these trips were to and from the hospital.

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PK confirmed that cancellations were common throughout most DaR schemes, owing to the frailty and poor health of many users.

Mobility scooters had become very popular in the last few years. There was also a higher car ownership in the last 20 years, especially amongst the retired population. More elderly people were keeping their independence and for longer periods of time. These factors may account for some of the decline in Dial a Ride use in Gosport.

PK thought that the future success of the Gosport DaR scheme would be based on increasing the number of users of the service and fostering more regular users. He suggested further promotion to entice new customers, with the aim of encouraging people to start using the service soon after they register.

PK concluded that HCC was happy with the joint working with CAF and GBC.

At this point in the meeting, Peter King, Paul O' Beirne, Barrie Hil, and David Miles were thanked for their contributions and they left the meeting.

The Committee discussed the last tendering process. Officers agreed that lessons had been learned from the previous tendering process.

The Committee discussed whether GBC should terminate the contract for the DaR service. JB explained that the contract was for three years and that GBC could terminate the contract, with a 6 months notice period, by 1st October 2011 or 1st April 2012. However the contract itself ended in February 2013, when the service would be put out to tender again. The Committee agreed that it would not terminate the contract before the end of its term, but would watch the performance of the service very closely. The level of service would be reassessed when the contract was due to be tendered.

It was agreed that the DaR WG would meet one last time to finalise their report and take the final recommendations to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Chairman summarised the Committee's main concerns following the meeting:

- Performance of the service, especially the cost per trip;
- decline in number of users and ineffectiveness in the promotion of the service; and
- unreliable data.

17. REPORTS TO BE RECEIVED

(i) FUNDING OF VOLUNTARY BODIES

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Councillor Hylands informed the Committee that the Funding of Voluntary Bodies Working Group had met a couple of times and had started collecting financial data, especially concerning Citizen's Advice Bureau and Gosport Voluntary Action. The Working Group had planned to have quick, short and regular meetings in order to finish in the agreed time limit, December 2011.

(ii) GOSPORT MEDICAL EMERGENCY AND ACCIDENT SERVICES

Councillor Forder informed the Committee that the Gosport Medical Emergency and Accident Services Working Group had met last week to tour the Minor Injuries Unit at the War Memorial Hospital, and it had been a productive meeting. He advised that two further meetings were to be arranged. One with the ambulance service and the other with Councillor Edgar and the Press and Publicity Officer, who had both been involved in the Royal Hospital Haslar campaign. The Working Group anticipated completing the scrutiny in the agreed time limit, March 2012.

(iii) CONSTITUTION – REVIEW OF PART FOUR

Councillor Kimber informed the Committee that the Constitution Working Group had held its first meeting last week. It was agreed that part four, schedules 11 and 15, of the Constitution were to be examined. The Borough Solicitor would send an email to all Councillors by Friday 23rd September 2011 informing them of the one month consultation period which would be open to all Councillors on these parts of the constitution. Councillor Kimber advised that an open forum email system would be employed, to allow all Councillors to see all responses to the consultation. The next Working Group meeting would be held once the consultation period had finished. A report would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7th February 2012, with the final report referred to Full Council on 28th March 2012.

(iv) REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

The Borough Solicitor advised the Committee of the review of polling districts and polling places in Gosport. The Committee was informed that there were three proposed changes.

The first proposed change was in the Lee East ward. The two polling districts GK1 and GK3 both used Lee Community Centre for their polling stations. However GK1 had a significantly larger electorate than GK3. The Borough Solicitor recommended that the boundaries for the two polling districts be reviewed in order to create two similar sized electorates. It was emphasised that no elector would be directed to a different polling place.

The second proposed change was in Elson. The Baptist Church at Netherton Road was no longer available as a polling place (GG3). The Borough Solicitor suggested locating the new polling place at Elson Junior School, as was the case for GG1 And GG2. The number of polling districts would also be reduced to 2.

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The final proposed change was in the Grange ward. The Borough Solicitor proposed a change to the polling districts boundaries and reported that no elector would be going to a different polling place.

The Committee approved the report and agreed to set up an extraordinary meeting in November 2011 to consider any responses to the draft proposals.

RESOLVED: That the report be approved and an extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting be held in November 2011.

18. DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PROGRAMME

a) REQUESTS FOR SCRUTINY

No requests had been received.

b) WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

c) OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR SCRUTINY

No requests were received.

19. AOB

Councillor Forder advised that the Committee meeting due to be held on 12th October 2011 had been cancelled and that an extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be arranged for the week commencing 7th November 2011.

Finally Councillor Forder informed the Committee that the Democratic Services Officer was due to get married at the end of the month. The Committee wished the Officer all the best for the future.

The meeting ended at 7.57 p.m.

CHAIRMAN