

A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WAS HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2014

Councillors Allen (P), Beavis (P), Mrs Cully (P), Farr (P), Forder (Chairman) (P), Mrs Forder(P), Foster-Reed, Geddes(P), Hazel, Mrs Hook (P), Hylands, Scard (P)

22. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Hazel.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

24. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 September 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

25. REPORTS TO BE RECEIVED

25i. ALLOCATIONS POLICY

A verbal presentation was given to the Committee. The Committee were advised that the policy changes had been agreed in late 2013 and that the main policy change to be reviewed was the introduction of qualifying criteria. Including local connection, suitable behaviour, and financial criteria and armed forces connection.

The introduction of qualifying criteria had led to a reduction in households on the housing register and a reduction in the number of bids on each property.

Members were advised that there had been very few complaints over the introduction of the qualifying criteria. Members were advised that properties in most demand were two bedroomed properties, particularly bungalows.

Members were advised that the possibility of placing homeless applications straight into properties that were not attracting bids was being investigated.

The Committee were advised that the review of the allocations policy had allowed for a reorganisation of the team to allow a more personal casework approach to allocations. This included advising households of suitable properties available.

Members were advised that there was the possibility of looking at amending eligibility to allow those with two children, under 10 of opposite sex to apply for 3 bedroomed properties, but it was important to acknowledge that any housing benefit contribution would only cover a two bedroomed property. There would also be potential to consider review age limits on properties.

It was recognised that qualifying criteria for properties designated for the elderly with medical needs should not be changed.

Members were advised that there were no proposals to amend the capital limit from £16,000.

Members thanked the Officers for their update.

25ii. BUS SERVICES WORKING GROUP

The Committee were advised that report of the Working Group would be referred to the Policy and Organisation Board for approval.

Members were advised that the Group had found a number of key points over the duration of the Scrutiny, these included:

- That First Bus are a commercial company and that unprofitable routes can not be run
- That the introduction of the busway had changed the approach to bus services in the Borough
- That the Eclipse service had increased the number of passengers using buses in the Borough
- That services had improved for some residents in the Borough, but that when changes are made often the only publicity received was negative.
- That Bus Service providers preferred a simpler network with more frequent services with less reliance on timetables, similar to the tube services
- That improvements were being made to buses, with the introduction of hybrid buses, Wi-Fi and next stop displays
- There had been cuts in the subsidy of buses by Hampshire County Council
- That concessionary bus passes damage the viability of services, they are often unviable due to the small amount of recompense received for concessionary bus passengers

Members recognised that the document providing details of alternative transport services was useful and requested that it be made available to members of the public; Members also welcomed further promotional material to aid residents of Bridgemary.

The Committee recognised the willingness of first bus to engage with the working group and the ongoing engagement with members of the public.

RESOLVED: That;

The Committee regard the recent Hampshire County Council reductions in subsidy to local services as regrettable and encourage those with authority in this matter to resist further reductions;

The issues identified at 4.2 and 4.15 be addressed it is recommended that the

Council host a meeting with the voluntary sector designed to develop a better understanding of how they can work alongside commercial and subsidised services and explore ways of providing enhanced services to those at risk of isolation;

The Working Group endeavour to report back their findings and recommendations to members of the public who have participated in the Scrutiny;

Gosport Borough Council, Hampshire County Council and First Bus continue to explore ways of improving communication and sharing information;

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee ask First Bus to clarify the issues raised at 4.5 of the report; and that

The report of the Bus Services Working Group be referred to the Policy and Organisation Board for consideration.

25iii VISITS TO GOMER INFANT SCHOOL AND THE HAVEN

Members advised that they had visited the Haven Nursery School and Children's Centre and Gomer Infant School and had found the visits uplifting and encouraging.

25iv VISIT TO CEMAST

Members advised that they had visited CEMAST and had been impressed with the facilities and the courses available.

25v POLLING PLACES REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor and Deputy Chief Executive updating the Committee on the responses to the draft proposals and to consider proposals for recommendation to Full Council.

Members were advised that no response had been received to the draft proposal and that a proposed change to the Polling District for 1 Stokes Bay Road had been suggested to reduce the distance travelled to the Polling Station by electors. Members were also advised that properties that were constructed after the publication of the initial proposals would also be included in the final report.

RESOLVED: That the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places set out in appendix 1 of the report of the Borough Solicitor and Deputy Chief Executive be recommend to Council subject to the inclusion of any new properties as advised by the Returning Officer before the Council meeting on 28 January 2015.

26. DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PROGRAMME

A) REQUESTS FOR SCRUTINY

A request had been received from the Gosport Society to scrutinise the interpretation signage boards in the Borough. It had been noted that some boards were missing, some information was incorrect. Members were advised that there was funding in the capital programme for the renovation of the boards and that a council officer would be in place to support this. Councillors Mrs Hook, Mrs Forder, Mrs Cully and Councillor Scard agreed to form a Working Group.

A letter had been received from a Member of the public expressing concern at the limited opening hours and availability to the public of Fort Brockhurst. Members agreed to form a working group to discuss the evidence received. Councillors Forder, Scard, Allen and Beavis agreed to sit on the Working Group.

A request had been received to scrutinise whether the Allotment Association could take on ownership of the allotments. The Committee felt that the Allotments Stakeholders Consultative Group was already in place to address such matters. The Chairman agreed to attend the next meeting of the consultative Group.

B) WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was discussed and updated. It was acknowledged that a response had still not been received with regard to vascular surgery.

C) OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR SCRUTINY

Following the visit to CEMAST it was requested that Philip Walker at Hampshire County Council be contacted to address the Committee on the provision of vocational post 16 education in the Borough.

27. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

The meeting concluded at 7.38pm

CHAIRMAN