

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXTRENAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 9 MARCH 2010**

**REPORT OF HEAD OF CHANGE AND SCRUTINY**

**Report prepared by Louise Smith**

**1. Holiday Play Schemes**

1.1 Issue for Consideration

1.1.1 To consider the provision of holiday play schemes in the Borough and establish:

- a) whether this requires further investigation by the Committee; and
- b) if so, the timescale, aims and potential witnesses for the review.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Change and Scrutiny

1.2.1 That the Committee considers the provision of holiday play schemes and agrees to:

- a) Submit the evidence gathered to date to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2010-11 with a recommendation for a major review; or
- b) Conduct no further investigation.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 At the meeting of the External Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 June 2009, Members resolved:

“That a review of holiday play schemes be carried out later in the Muncipal Year 2009-10”.

1.3.2 On 12 January 2010, Members interviewed the Assistant Director of Customer Services and Partnerships, the Sports and Play Development Officer and the Sports and Play Development Assistant with regard to the Hotfoot Play Scheme. The relevant extract from the minutes of the meeting is as follows:

The Assistant Director of Customer Services and Partnerships, Paul Taylor, stated that the intention of the Hotfoot Report was to answer fundamental questions about why the scheme was run, how it was funded, what the objectives of the scheme were, whether it offered best value and how it linked with the Sustainable Community Strategy objectives. GIS (Geographical Information System) mapping had been used to identify where people were coming from to use the scheme as location was extremely important but was limited by the availability of venues. Work had taken place during the past few years to make the scheme as accessible as possible. The subscription rate for Hotfoot was currently 80-90% and more work needed to be done to identify why this was not nearer 100%. Mr Taylor emphasised that the scheme set out to educate, inform and involve children; it was well respected and received good feedback from parents.

The Chairman highlighted that Hotfoot was not a statutory service for the Council to provide and the Cabinet was under pressure to cut costs. The report demonstrated that demand for Hotfoot, however, had been strong for the past three years, and community play schemes in rural areas were also very popular. The provision of Hotfoot and grant funding for community play schemes contributed to the Council fulfilling its commitment to community well-being and the promotion of equality. It was clear from the report that Maidstone was ahead of other Kent district authorities with regard to play schemes.

A Councillor referred to figures on the income from Hotfoot and noted that while the text stated that income had increased in 2009, the figures showed a decrease. Mr Taylor agreed to check these figures. In response to a further question on the potential savings achieved by ceasing the Hotfoot scheme, Mr Taylor stated that the figures in the report were based on projections, however the actual saving expected if the scheme stopped was £14,610.

With regard to the Ofsted inspection of the Marden play scheme, which stated that the scheme "did not meet all the requirements of the childcare register", Mr Taylor stated that this was unlikely to relate to the child protection register, however the Council was not permitted to receive all of the information about this grading.

A Councillor noted that some of the feedback from parents requested activities for children over the age of 11 and Mr Taylor confirmed that this would be provided.

A Councillor stated that there was no Hotfoot scheme provided near the Senacre Community Hall, however it would be extremely worthwhile to provide the service there. Mr Taylor stated that venues for the scheme were based on access to schools, however if the

Senacre Community Hall was considered a valuable potential venue then this would be investigated.

A Member highlighted that community play schemes charged less for places but received much less funding from the Council than Hotfoot. The Sports and Play Development Assistant, Michelle Fowler, explained that the community schemes were much smaller and they also received funding from parish councils; the figures in the papers showed only the Council's contribution, rather than the full cost. Mr Taylor stated that community schemes were only play schemes, whilst Hotfoot had more education content. A lot of money was also spent on staffing for Hotfoot which contributed to the high satisfaction levels from parents.

A Councillor suggested that as some community play schemes received the same Ofsted scores as Hotfoot, consideration should be given to allowing another organisation to provide the scheme, which could save money. Mr Taylor stated that Ofsted gave surety over the administration of schemes but the key consideration for him was feedback from parents, which was extremely positive for Hotfoot. Hotfoot had challenging aims and sought to inform children about social issues, rather than focussing only on play. He agreed, however, that this was an area that could be investigated further.

A Councillor asked why the Mangravet play scheme was not included in the report. Kate Pomphrey, Sports and Play Development Officer, stated that the report only included those play schemes that were supported by Maidstone Borough Council grants. Miss Pomphrey highlighted that any scheme was able to apply for the grants.

In response to a question, Mr Taylor stated that he believed the best option for holiday play schemes for 2010 was to keep Hotfoot and the funding for community schemes, but to reduce the number of weeks for the Hotfoot summer scheme. The summer scheme did not run at 100% capacity and the last week had the lowest take-up, so cancelling this week could save a significant sum.

With regard to a reduction in take-up of Hotfoot places in 2009, Mr Taylor stated that analysing the data available had not provided a clear explanation, therefore future parental evaluations would look for more empirical evidence. There was a possible link with the economic downturn, however this was considered unlikely as the cost of the scheme was very competitive. The report also noted that the fall in numbers could be an anomaly and a longer term view needed to be taken.

A Councillor asked about junior volunteers for Hotfoot and suggested that it could be counterproductive having 12-year-old volunteers as

they were too close in age to the oldest children using Hotfoot, who were 11. Mrs Fowler explained that junior volunteers were recruited from the age of 12, and this worked well as they were seen as mentors by children on the Hotfoot scheme. Miss Pomphrey informed Members that junior volunteers attended staff training and workshops to emphasise that they were now attending Hotfoot to work rather than play. A Councillor suggested it could be useful to advertise in secondary schools for junior volunteers.

With regard to timescales for any new scheme, Mr Taylor advised that advertising for the Easter scheme would begin shortly. Fees and charges were also due to be set in the coming weeks and any change would apply to the summer scheme.

The Committee then considered the recommendations outlined within the report and agreed that all were appropriate; it was therefore resolved:

That the Committee recommends that

- i. The Cabinet Member formally endorses the objectives and purpose of the scheme as set out in the report i.e. 'to promote the personal and social development of children with a particular focus on the child's role in respect of the wider community of Maidstone';
- ii. Further work be undertaken as part of the parental evaluations of the 2010 scheme in order to provide empirical evidence on the reasons for the apparent decline in children taking up places on the Hotfoot programme; and
- iii. The Cabinet Member consider the appropriate level of subsidy and the options in respect of the future provision of the Hotfoot play scheme as outlined in the report.

The Committee also agreed to carry out further work of its own on holiday play schemes to identify whether there was a more appropriate way of delivering them, and requested information on the total funding available for play schemes, including grants awarded by the Council, and community play scheme plans for 2010.

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for a clear and informative presentation.

**Resolved:** That

- a) The Committee recommends that
  - i. The Cabinet Member formally endorses the objectives and purpose of the scheme as set out in the report i.e. 'to promote the personal and social

development of children with a particular focus on the child's role in respect of the wider community of Maidstone';

- ii. Further work be undertaken as part of the parental evaluations of the 2010 scheme in order to provide empirical evidence on the reasons for the apparent decline in children taking up places on the Hotfoot programme; and
  - iii. The Cabinet Member consider the appropriate level of subsidy and the options in respect of the future provision of the Hotfoot play scheme as outlined in the report.
- b) The figures within the report regarding income be checked for accuracy;
  - c) Senacre Community Hall be considered as a possible future venue for the Hotfoot play scheme;
  - d) Advertising in secondary schools for Hotfoot junior volunteers be considered;
  - e) Information on the total funding available for play schemes, including grants awarded by the Council, be provided to the Committee;
  - f) Community play schemes be contacted for information on their plans for 2010; and
  - g) The Committee review the provision of holiday play schemes.

1.3.3 With regard to recommendation (b) above, it was confirmed that in 2009, there was a reduction in expenditure set against a decrease in income. Responses to recommendations (c) and (d) are attached at Appendix A.

1.3.4 Information on community play schemes is included at Appendix B. Appendix B also contains information on some of the commercially available holiday activities in the Borough. It should be noted that neither of the tables in Appendix B is exhaustive; the information is based on that provided by parish and ward councillors, along with information gathered from online research.

1.3.5 The total funding available for play schemes, including grants, for 2009/10 was:

Council Budget Easter: £5560 (including staff wages)  
Council Budget Summer: £41,790 (including staff wages)  
Grants: £13,404.48

1.3.6 Councillors also requested information on the staff cost of providing Hotfoot. The Easter scheme costs £5260, whilst the Summer scheme costs £36,560.

1.3.7 With regard to grants for community play schemes, these are advertised via contact with parish councils and an advertisement in the Downsmail (both in January).

1.3.8 The Sports, Play and Youth Development Team confirmed that at current, holiday play schemes were not co-ordinated with any provision by Kent County Council, however it was agreed that this could be looked into in the future.

1.3.9 In terms of future review, the Sports, Play and Youth Development Team will be investigating opportunities to franchise out the Hotfoot Scheme, however this would not take effect until Summer 2011 at the earliest.

#### 1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The Committee could choose to conduct a full review of holiday play schemes in 2009-10. This is not recommended as there are only 7 weeks remaining in the municipal year, during which time the Committee's review of rail services must be completed. The Scrutiny Section will also be understaffed during this period following the departure of the Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer; a new member of staff is expected to join the section in May 2010.

#### 1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The Strategic Plan 2009-12 states that the Council wants Maidstone to be "a place to live and enjoy", which includes the provision of sporting, leisure and cultural activities. The Plan also states that Maidstone should be "a place with efficient and effective public services"; therefore ensuring that the Council's spend on holiday play schemes provides value for money is important.

1.5.2 The Sustainable Communities Strategy contains the key objective to "increase the number of people (especially young people) involved in positive activities, particularly in disadvantages areas"; the provision of holiday play schemes ensures that positive activities are available to young people outside of school terms.

#### 1.6 Other Implications

##### 1.6.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal


4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management


## 1.7 Relevant Documents

### 1.7.1 Appendices

Appendix A – Hotfoot SCRAIP response form

Appendix B – Play Schemes in the Borough