

# STOIC MEETING – NOTES & INFORMATION

## Age Concern Hall, Linden Road – Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2009

The planned topic for discussion at this meeting was ‘non-clinical’ services in hospitals and our guest speaker was to have been Peter Holloway, the head of non-clinical services at Southampton General Hospital. However, we had to make a very late change to our agenda as Peter had been urgently called away due to an unscheduled external compliance review at the hospital by the Department of Health. Peter offered his sincere apologies and will make every effort to attend our next meeting.

In his place we were very fortunate and grateful to have secured the services of **Councillor Mark Cooper** at late notice as our new guest speaker. Our intention had always been to invite Mark to one of our meetings later in the year so this was just brought forward! Mark in his role as Town, Borough and County Councillor is in a unique position to offer a three dimensional view of local government and to explain the different ways in which each council works and interacts together right through from ward to borough to county.

Mark initially explained how his role works in practice on a day-to-day basis across the 3 different types of council and his representation and involvement in adult services, children’s services and highways. Some 95% of all calls and emails that he receives specifically relate to highways issues i.e. roads, lighting, drain covers etc and he gave some interesting ‘case studies’ on how some of these issues were actually progressed and eventually resolved.

For the benefit of the audience he gave the following breakdown of how our council tax is actually made up and where the money goes:

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| County Council      | 75% |
| Police Authority    | 10% |
| Test Valley BC      | 8%  |
| Fire Authority      | 4%  |
| Town/Parish Council | 2%  |

(above numbers rounded up/down)

Mark then gave some background on himself starting in 1986 when he first became a councillor for Abbey Ward right through to representing Tadburn Ward as he does now. As a member on the Planning Authority he is heavily involved in planning matters for Romsey where he reviews all planning applications submitted (some 300+ per year) and often gets involved in any resultant issues and also advises on planning matters at the county level. He recommends that if you are involved in a dispute e.g. with a neighbour over such issues then your local councillor is often best positioned to offer valuable advice, guidance and representation on your behalf. Test Valley Borough Council will be able to give details of your local councillor if you are unsure. He went on to explain the various workload commitments associated with each of the councillor roles e.g. a local town councillor would be expected to commit about 10-12 hours per week of their time, whereas a county councillor role is more time-consuming with around 25 hours per week.

Mark was pleased to say that especially in today’s financial environment, Test Valley Borough Council is actually debt-free with a healthy bank balance having previously

sold off its council housing stock to Testway Housing. As a result of this there is a 'relatively low level' of council tax contributions for Romsey residents. He also pointed out that for every 0.5% fall in interest rates Test Valley Borough Council's income falls by £300k, increasing the pressure on existing budgets and increasing the potential need for cuts in existing services.

Romsey Town Council is unusual in that it's treated as though it's a Parish Council due to its modest size, characteristics and demographics. Test Valley Borough Council was created in 1973 and comprises of: Andover, Andover Rural, Romsey, and Romsey & Stockbridge Rural. Romsey Town Council helps to generate revenue and to promote civic involvement across the community. At the heart of Romsey Town Council is **its** Town Mayor, Councillor Karen Dunleavey. The Town Council also runs the Town Hall and its staff, an excellent facility which is available for bookings throughout the year.

Mark finished off by giving his version of the Queen's visit to Romsey on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2007 as part of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of a royal charter to the town.

Then followed a number of questions from the audience on the following topics:

- **any conflict of interest from doing all 3 councillor roles** (town/borough/county)? Mark's main priority and focus is Romsey which means at times he has to 'declare an interest' in debates and voting from which he then withdraws to an 'observer' role. His involvement in the planning process actually enhances and adds value across all 3 of his roles.
- **political and democratic nature of TVBC and HCC**
- **Romsey Good Neighbours**
- **new housing developments in / around Romsey and demand for housing**
- **'rules' for driving electric scooters**
- **purpose of the Senate in HCC on Hampshire-wide issues**
- **roles and potential growth of unitary authorities in Hampshire**

### A.O.B.

Anne Meader mentioned that by the next meeting we hope to have prepared a **newsletter** on behalf of STOIC.

Anne brought up the topic of **mileage reimbursement for volunteer drivers** and the Government's response to an 'e' petition asking the PM to rate the reimbursement rate for charities from the existing 40p per mile to 50p recognising the increase in fuel costs. The Government's response was to say that it's the decision of the charity or voluntary group concerned as to how much it pays its own volunteer drivers and that the amount is not limited by regulations. Also that any reimbursement of the volunteers out-of-pocket expenses is not taxable, however, volunteer drivers must keep detailed records of their actual expenses. *(The full text of the Government's reply is available on request from STOIC).*

**Our next STOIC meeting will take place on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> March at the Age Concern Hall, Romsey from 2.05 to 4.00pm.**