

MP for Gosport Caroline Dinenage officially opened the Gosport Employment Access Centre in the newly refurbished Old Chapel at St George's Barracks, Gosport, on Friday 5 November.



In a joint initiative between Wheatsheaf Trust and Gosport Borough Council the Old Chapel, empty since the Army left the barracks in 1991, has been renovated to provide a centre offering free facilities to enable unemployed and low-paid people search for work and training opportunities. The initiative builds on the successful Fastforward pilot project that was operated by the Wheatsheaf Trust on behalf of the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire.

Caroline Dinenage: *"I am absolutely delighted to be invited to open this Access Centre. I think it will prove to be an incredibly valuable resource for the people of Gosport."* Among the guests attending were Cllr Mark Hook, Leader of Gosport Borough Council, and Cllr Michael Lane, Chairman of Economic Development at Gosport Borough Council, representatives from local business, partner agencies, and colleges, who were able to see the facilities on offer at the centre and talk to Wheatsheaf clients.

Staffed by qualified employment and training advisors, the Employment Access Centre has banks of computers, an information library, plus a training room from which Wheatsheaf runs programmes and courses focusing on job and training issues.

Jonathan Cheshire, Chief Executive Wheatsheaf Trust: *"The Council's contractors have done an outstanding job on the Old Chapel, making it into a superb resource to support local people through the tough times ahead, while preserving its character as a unique listed building and an important part of Gosport's heritage. We are very grateful for all the skilled work that has gone into this project."*

Councillor Michael Lane, Chairman of Economic Development at Gosport Borough Council: *"Wheatsheaf Trust has been in partnership with Gosport Borough Council at the Chapel since June 2009. It is a delight, and a reflection of the value of what goes on here, to be at the re-launch of this important building as a resource for the people of Gosport. The work done to improve the Old Chapel will enable even more support to be offered at a critical time for job seekers and those seeking to access training. I wish the staff and all users success for the future."*

The Gosport Employment Access Centre is open Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 9am-12 noon, 1-4pm and has already attracted good attendances. Client Sam Kellie: *"Coming to the centre has been really useful and has really helped me over the last few weeks. I've been doing things like writing CVs and covering letters. I wish I'd been able to come here sooner."*

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