SOCIAL CARE AND HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - 
ANNUAL REPORT

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1. Purpose

1.1 To review the work of the Committee for the current year and to look ahead to the coming year’s work programme.

2. Review of Meetings

2.1 This year the Committee has met on 8 occasions. Eight meetings were scheduled at the beginning of the year, no meetings have been called for special reasons. Compared to the previous year the Committee has met on one more occasion.

2.2 Members will remember that, as indicated at the first meeting of the Committee (July 2004), the new scrutiny structure and revised methods of working included an intention to deal with fewer items, improve forward planning, adopt a task and finish approach with fixed timescales and identifiable outcomes.

2.3 In the light of this the Committee sought to draft a manageable work programme for 2004/05. Again, at its July meeting, the Committee considered a report on the Council’s Priorities and considered how these Priorities would serve as a basis for the Committee’s Annual Work Programme. The Committee subsequently agreed that the Chair and Spokespersons be authorised to determine the Work Programme of the Committee for the year.

2.4 A work programme was later developed in consultation with Neighbourhood Services Divisional Management Team, Social Care and Housing Planning Group with some input directly from the Committee itself on an ongoing basis.
2.5 As a result the Committee has considered a variety of topics which has included:

- The Review of Supporting People,
- Direct Payments Strategy
- Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use strategy,
- Council’s Draft Housing Strategy
- Base Budget Information
- Integration of Intermediate Care Services
- Affordable Housing, Budget 2005 onwards,
- Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004: Implementation in Milton Keynes,
- Revenue Budget 2005-06 Onwards,
- Capital Programme 2005-06 to 2009-10,
- Housing Revenue Budget 2005-06 Onwards
- Sheltered Housing/Community Alarm Service Review Action Plan
- Programme on Improving the Housing Service
- Review of Neighbourhood Services Directorate

2.6 The programme for the year has been a mix of policy development, policy review and limited investigation of under performing areas within the Committee’s remit. The Committee has not felt it necessary to adopt Panel working as a way of doing additional work outside of full Committee meetings. However, in November the Committee requested that the idea of pairs of Councillors researching specific issues be considered by the Committee’s Planning Group and reported back. Upon consideration of this suggestion the Planning Group was minded not pursue this due to the heavy workload and commitments of Members.

3. **Achievements and Effectiveness**

3.1 Four meetings have been chaired by the Vice Chair with the other four being chaired by the Chair. Agendas items have been few in number. This has been a deliberate choice, designed to enable members to explore a smaller number of issues in greater detail.

3.2 It is difficult to objectively assess how effective the Committee has been during the last 10 months or so but one indicator could be the observations of the IDeA representative who attended a meeting in October 2004. Generally comments were favourable with the environment being described as having “business like, relaxed and informative exchanges, discussions, dialogue and questioning between Members and officers.” However, it was observed that the Committee did not meet in advance to agree objectives for the meeting or to discuss co-ordinating lines of questioning. The observer commented that “Although it was evident that Committee Members were very
knowledgeable about the issues, having a planning meeting might have lead to more focussed discussion and better outcomes.” This may be something that they Committee might wish to consider implementing in the future.

3.3 In September 2004 the Committee considered a report which provided a general introduction and overview of Direct Payments for disabled people and their carers in Milton Keynes, the implications for the Council and which recommended a strategic way forward. The Committee subsequently submitted 2 recommendations to Cabinet on this issue.

3.4 The former Social Care, Housing and Health Overview Committee had previously supported the creation of an Affordable Housing Review Group. The Committee considered this matter but subsequently resolved that the proposed creation of an Affordable Housing Review Group be abandoned, as existing arrangements were considered to be sufficient.

3.5 The Committee has again maintained an interest in a number of other issues outlined in paragraph 2.5 above. Most topics have generated good discussions and have given Members the opportunity to look for areas which they could influence in terms of developing Council policy, a point specifically made by the IDeA observer in her report. The discussion of issues has generally resulted in the Committee feeding comments and concerns directly back to officers concerned where there has not necessarily been a specific resolution of the Committee to Cabinet.

3.6 Where possible Members have continually reflected and built on learning from previous meetings; the published work programme has been regularly reviewed and updated. There has been a sense of current work linking to earlier meetings, for example, budget information was presented at an early stage, and it was agreed to revisit it at a later stage. During the course of the year the Committee has agreed to include additional items in its future work programme to ensure that Members are kept abreast of developments on topics previously considered.

4. Future Work Programme

4.1 Because there are no local elections scheduled this year, there should be continuity within the Committee, which should allow effective following up of items suggested or already worked on in the year 2004-05.

4.2 The Committee has already begun the process of identifying issues and topics for inclusion in its work programme for 2005/06. The following topics are scheduled:
(a) Private Sector Housing Strategy 2005/06
(b) Future of Adult Social Care (Green paper expected in March)
(c) Carers Project
(d) Learning Disability Day Care
(e) Quarterly Updates on Affordable Housing
(f) Updates on Homelessness
(g) Housing Business Plan
(h) Housing Strategy
(i) Developing a Vision for Older People in Milton Keynes
(j) Degenerative illness in Milton Keynes - preparations by local health services