Annex 4

Improvement Initiatives & Inspections
The council has now undertaken five rounds of Best Value Reviews. The outcomes of the first two rounds of reviews have been published previously. Many of these reviews have now been implemented and in many cases have been superseded by either inspections reports or further improvement planning as part of the service and team plan process.

In 2002/03 and 2003/04 a smaller number of services were reviewed in light of government advice to conduct fewer more strategic based reviews. The council has also concentrated its review work within its ChangingMK programme. The most recent reviews have been conducted in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002/03 BVRs</th>
<th>2003/04 BVRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looked After Children</td>
<td>Customer Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services To Parishes</td>
<td>Democratic Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older People</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Set out below is a progress report on the latest reviews and an update on the 2002/03 reviews.

Outcomes of Year 4 Reviews (2003/04)

Customer Services

The Best Value Review of Customer Service was carried out between January and August 2004 the main purpose of which was to:

- Examine the standard of customer service within the Council
- Examine policies and procedures which have an effect on customer service
- Focus on the broad strategic direction for service improvement
- Examine the management of customer service throughout the authority

The key findings of the review were:

- The lack of a corporate policy has fostered an inconsistent approach to customer service.
- Although senior management is committed to customer service this needs to be reflected in the Council’s stated priorities.
- The needs of customers are not the driving forces behind service design and delivery in all services.
• Staff at all levels needs to understand their personal responsibility for providing good customer service.
• HR policies do not currently reflect the importance of customer service

The main recommendations were as follows:

• That a customer service policy and customer handling strategy outlining customer service standards be drafted and implemented.
• That Heads of Service be required to demonstrate in their service plans a procedure for including customers in the design of services.
• That induction procedure is reviewed to include specific customer service elements.
• That the appraisal system be reviewed to include specific customer service targets.

Since the review was completed a customer service project team has been assembled, which has drafted a policy and handbook that are in the process of being implemented. A review of the induction procedure and appraisal system is currently underway and will be completed by September 2005.

Contact: Jane Reed – MK 253553

Democratic Services

The review of Democratic Services was completed in May 2005. The review concluded that the service was performing well however, there were a number of recommendations which will guide the delivery of, and improvements to, the service over the next 3 years which can be grouped as follows:

Resources: using staff and financial resources effectively, improving potential for career development and making revisions to the structure of the division

Customer focus: developing customer charters, reviewing the services provided to Members and targeting specific customer needs and “hard to reach” groups

Business Processes: developing improvements in the way services are provided in conjunction with other Council services

Managing information: ensuring that the division’s budget, performance targets and other management information are properly constructed and effectively managed

Contact: Justine Sismey – MK 252455
Outcomes of Year 3 Reviews (2002/03)

**Looked After Children**

The review was completed in January 2003. The review concluded that the service was performing well which was in line with the inspector’s findings published in March 2003. However a number of improvements were recommended which have now all been implemented:

- Increase consultation with service users and stakeholders
- Improve communication
- Introduce improved systems, processes and procedures for Family Support work to catch up with the amount of work now being done in this area
- Improve the organisation of administrative support to operational staff
- Consider the designation of responsibilities such as strategy and development to specific officers
- Implement specific strategies for particular areas of social work activity

Contact: Paul Sutton – MK 252334

**Services Parishes**

This review will be completed by September 2003. A key proposal was the preparation of a new charter which was agreed in October 2004 and has been formally adopted by 24 parish and town councils. Further changes are being proposed to the charter to accommodate the needs of the remaining parish and town councils. Within the charter there are a number of initiatives aimed at improving the service to parish and town councils e.g. use of council services such as human resources and payroll and closer working between community wardens. The other key recommendations arising out of the review was the joint funding of landscape services. This has now been implemented.

Contact: Martin Small - MK  252257

**Older People**

The review of services to Older People was a major undertaking involving the council, the primary care trust and Milton Keynes General Hospital. The review was completed in September 2003. The broad recommendations were as follows:

- To sign up to a vision that develops community-based services that are rehabilitative and therapy focused to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and to facilitate timely and effective discharges.
• To adopt a model of integration based on the function provided (e.g. integrated access and assessment services, multi-disciplinary therapy services) rather than single professions or services.

• To set up a project steering group, as a sub group of the Partnership Project Team, to develop and implement a detailed project plan for integrated intermediate care, access and assessment service and long term / specialist services.

• To develop a proactive programme to support change and change management.

• To develop and co-ordinate out of hours services.

• To develop a culture, criteria, protocols and an agreed approach to support older people in their own homes or sheltered housing as much as possible.

These recommendations have largely been implemented.

Contact: Alastair Gibbons – MK 253121

Other Improvement Initiatives

In addition to implementing its ChangingMK programme and progressing its PPP, the council has also made progress in other areas.

Consultation Policy

As part of its drive to improve customer service the council has undertaken a review of its approach to consultation. The review concluded the council needed a more coherent approach to consultation with better co-ordination across services.

The main recommendations of the review was the need for a council wider strategy on consultation supported a consultation tool-kit including a ‘consultation finder’, consultation calendar and central website.

The strategy and the toolkit will be available in September 2005.

Contact: Paul Robinson – MK 253326
Charging Policy

The council initiated a review of its current approach to charging with a view to understanding how charges might exclude certain groups from accessing services or being forced to pay for services they might not be able to afford. The review looked at how services currently charge and how the council assessed the impact of these charges.

The main recommendations were:

- The council agrees a council wide policy on charging based
- The council adopts corporate guidelines to ensure consistency in the approach to the various groups for whom normal charges might be a barrier to use.
- That an officer be designated as having corporate responsibility for coordination of policy and future reviews of charging.
- A more “joined-up” approach to publicity should be adopted. Information on services (and concessions offered) should be available at all points where people on low incomes are likely to visit.
- Research should be undertaken to establish at what level charges would need to be set to encourage take-up by people on low incomes. This could include questions incorporated into the next (and subsequent) Residents Attitude Survey undertaken by the Council
- That a report be submitted to the Cabinet at the time of budget setting discussions, to allow the Executive to consider the implications of proposed revisions to charges in relation to the Council’s policy objectives.
- Quarterly reports on take-up of services by excluded or disadvantaged groups be submitted to Chief Officer Board and the Cabinet
- That, following adoption of consistent approaches to concessions outlined in the first two recommendations above, the “Passport to Leisure” card be developed into a wider “Passport” which would grant entitlement to the full range of services for which discounts are available
- That this Passport be widened (as a “Citizens Card”) to all residents of the Borough of Milton Keynes

Following the report the council has initiated a first phase of work centred on establishing a council wide policy for charging. This will be completed by September 2005. Following this further investigations will be undertaken into extending the current passport to leisure scheme.

Contact: Simon Willson – MK 252694
Service Developments

The council has already focused attention on some of its weaker services such as Housing Benefits, Special Educational Needs and Recycling. Greater focus is now being given to the Housing Service which is about to undertake a major process re-engineering exercise. More broadly the council has introduced a new approach to medium term planning to extend its current approach to budget and service planning. This innovative model provides clear links between priorities, resources and performance. The model has been refined for 2005 and is proving an effective tool for driving forward the council’s performance management arrangements. The council is also introducing new performance review arrangements at the corporate level to ensure greater scrutiny is given to key service areas to identify where further improvements can be made. Performance management training for all mangers and the introduction of a new IT performance indicator system in September 2005 will support further service developments.

Public Service Agreement

The council is due to start its second public service agreement in July 2005 based on increasing social inclusion. The agreement has 12 target areas:

- Target 1: To improve the attainment level of children at Key Stage 4 in Milton Keynes secondary schools as defined below.
- Target 2: To improve pupils' skills in speaking and listening in Milton Keynes' primary schools.
- Target 3: To increase the educational inclusion for children living in three areas of high social and economic disadvantage in the borough.
- Target 4: To achieve a sustainable reduction in crime and disorder in Milton Keynes.
- Target 5: To reduce crime and the fear of crime experienced by vulnerable adults in Milton Keynes.
- Target 6: To increase the number of 4-week quitters in Milton Keynes, reduce smoking among pregnant women and increase the number of fully licensed premises that are smoke free.
- Target 7: To improve pupils' health and physical well-being in Milton Keynes schools and increase the physical activity levels of a targeted group of sedentary people living in the 20 most deprived wards in Milton Keynes through a programme of walking and cycling.
- Target 8: To reduce the transmissions of STIs and HIV/AIDS by building capacity in local services to increase the diagnosis and treatment of cases and partners.
- Target 9: To reduce the rate of live births, abortions and stillbirths for girls aged under 18 years of age in Milton Keynes and increase the number of teenage mothers engaged in education, training or employment either part or full time.
- Target 10: To improve the health of very young children with particular improvement in socially deprived wards and reduce dental decay in 5 yr olds in Milton Keynes.
- Target 11: To reduce the average length of stay for families in temporary accommodation and reduce the number of people needing to be accepted as homeless.
- Target 12: Accessible transport.
- Target 13: To increase work opportunities for potentially excluded adults with enduring (enduring here refers to the nature of illness, the intensity rather than the length) mental health problems, throughout Milton Keynes.

The scheme is being managed through he Social Inclusion Programme Board.

**Inspections and Audit**

In previous years the council has been subject to range of inspections from government bodies such as the Audit Commission, OFSTED and the SSI. In 2002/3 the council was subject to its first comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) that inspected the whole of the council. As part of the CPA process a number of ‘gap’ inspections were undertaken between 2003-4 of services that had not been previously inspected. These included the Leisure Services, Transport and Revenues and Benefits Service.

In 2004-05 the council was subject to further inspections in the areas of Housing and Environmental Services. The outcomes of these inspections are set out below. The council’s Adult and Continuing Education Service was also inspected in 2004-05. The Audit Commission also undertook some work in other areas including Partnership Work, Overview and Scrutiny and Organisational Capacity.

In 2005-06 the council will be subject to its second comprehensive performance assessment between January and March 2006. The new methodology means that key services such as Education and Social Services will be reviewed as part of this process as well as the council as a whole. This means others inspections will not be carried out in 2005-06.

**Housing Landlord**

The service was inspected in January 2005. It was judged to be a ‘Fair’ one-star service that had uncertain prospects for improvement. A number of recommendations were made broken down into short, medium and long-term actions.
Within the next three months:

- Reduce the time taken to respond to calls to the contact centre;
- Undertake an equalities audit of the repairs and maintenance service and implement an action plan to ensure that the service is non-discriminatory;
- Review the effectiveness and resources allocated to environmental work on estates.

Within the next six months:

- Improve contract management to ensure that all reactive repairs and empty property repairs are of a high standard;
- Introduce more effective checks on the quality of performance data, particularly relating to repairs;
- Implement all of the ‘path to excellence’ actions and produce a longer term plan that has greater emphasis upon value for money; and
- Establish an action plan to improve leaseholder and shared owner satisfaction levels.

Within the next 12 months:

- Ensure that the tenants’ compacts adopt the most effective means of informal consultation being piloted and set targets for different levels of informal participation;
- Review the range of performance indicators being reported and include a more detailed range of cost indicators, alongside comparisons with all councils; and
- Expand the risk register to include all housing risks and contingencies and ensure that it is reviewed on a systematic basis.

Within the next three years:


Since the inspection the service improvement plan has been revised to reflect all the recommendations outlined in the report and are now being implemented.
Environment Services

The service was inspected in March 2005. It was judged to be a ‘Good’ two-star service that had promising prospects for improvement. A number of recommendations were made:

- Strengthen the focus on waste minimisation;
- Have a more positive impact on travel planning in schools, local companies and within the council;
- Ensure that the actions in the bus strategy are delivered;
- Put a strong priority on key issues for the future including diverting waste from landfill, meeting the government office’s timetable for completing its next local transport plan and planning for the traffic impact of the expansion of central Milton Keynes;
- Focus on delivering the second local transport plan to the required timescale with targets that are challenging but realistic and consistent with the principles of sustainable development;
- Develop an understanding of the customer base for environment services and ensure that service delivery is shaped accordingly;
- Continue to identify and implement imaginative ways to build capacity;
- Consider the use of programme management techniques to coordinate current and future projects, and secure a coordinated approach to service development; and
- Develop and implement a communications plan to win public understanding of, and support for, transport infrastructure improvements and the development of public transport.

Adult and Continuing Education Service

The service was inspected in March 2005. The quality of provision was considered to be adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The leadership and management of the service was considered satisfactory and its approach to quality of opportunity good. Arrangements for quality assurance were considered unsatisfactory. The provision of courses in many areas was considered good, although the provision of foundation programme was considered very weak.

The recommendations arising form the inspection were:

- Improve quality assurance
- Use data more effectively
- Improve the quality of foundation programmes
- Develop target setting and monitoring in learning