LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT 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 9 occasions. Eight meetings were scheduled at the beginning of the year, one meeting was a “special” (15 March). Compared to the previous year the Committee has met on one occasion less though the previous year included 5 special meetings.

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 which specific issues, other than the strategic reviews and major projects identified by officers, it would like to be included in its work programme for the forthcoming year. A work programme was later developed in consultation with Learning and Development Divisional Management Team, Learning and Development Committee Planning Group (Spokespersons), Lead Cabinet Members and the Committee itself. It was acknowledged that it would be extremely difficult to find any time for working groups (in terms of both Member and officer time) and so, rather than setting up review groups, as has been done previously, the Committee has functioned in a manner akin to a parliamentary select committee, particularly with one topic that it has been focussing on over the last 7 months or so.

2.4 The key topic tackled by the Committee was the multi-agency response to the Laming report (Victoria Climbie Inquiry) and the Children Act 2004 – Every Child in Milton Keynes Matters. Other issues tackled have

2.5 The programme for the year has been a mix of policy development as well as some performance monitoring. The Committee has not felt it necessary to adopt Panel working as a way of doing additional work outside of full Committee meetings for the reasons outlined above.

3. **Achievements and Effectiveness**

3.1 The Committee has been chaired by the previous Chair of the former Learning, Community and Economic Development Overview Committee.

3.2 The Chair has ensured that Committee meetings are conducted in a business like fashion and has continued the practice of regular meetings between Chair, Spokespersons and Corporate Director Learning and Development to discuss forthcoming work programme scheduling.

3.3 The Committee has undertaken what, at times, has seemed like a pioneering approach to Every Child in Milton Keynes Matters. Where before, the Committee might have set up a review group tasked with investigating the issue, the Committee has instead, tackled this topic collectively and, as indicated in paragraph 2.3 above, has functioned in a similar fashion to a parliamentary select committee.

3.4 External and internal (expert) witnesses have been identified by both the planning group and the Committee. Generally this has functioned on the basis of identifying specific subject areas, such as children and health (PCT) and children and crime (Thames Valley Police). The Committee has also been contacted directly by witnesses requesting that they come before the Committee to submit evidence. It has however, become necessary to request an outline submission of what witnesses wish to submit to ensure that evidence is relevant and is aligned with the Committee’s own terms of reference and expected outcomes.

3.5 The Committee has sought to provisionally plan evidence for at least 6 months in advance. Although from time to time there have been changes due to sudden witness unavailability such forward planning has underlined the need for witnesses to be scheduled as far in advance as possible to enabling rescheduling to take place when necessary. There have been attempts to theme evidence at specific meetings however, this was successful on only one occasion.

3.6 The Committee also started to set aside time before and after meetings to discuss meeting related matters. The main purpose of pre-meetings was to plan a more co-ordinated approach to dealing with witness evidence and ensuring closer collaboration between Members on lines of
questioning. Post meeting “wash-ups” have been good opportunities for the Committee to reflect upon how meetings have run, to draw conclusions and discuss how issues might feed into future witness evidence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Members (and officers) have found these arrangements extremely useful and it is possible that these practices might be adopted by other policy development committees where appropriate.

3.7 As the initial policy development phase for Every Child in Milton Keynes Matters reaches a conclusion (March 2005), as a result of witness evidence taken over the last 7 months the Committee has been able to successfully provide a consultation response to the Children and Young People Strategy Group in February 2005. The Committee also intends to submit a report to Cabinet detailing a chronology of evidence it has received together with its resultant recommendations for future policy implementation.

3.8 Tackling the Every Child in Milton Keynes Matters agenda has been a learning experience for Committee Members, Cabinet Members and officers alike. There have been many positive aspects and other lessons that the Committee will take forward with any similar approaches to key issues in the future.

3.9 The Committee has been periodically updated with proposals relating to the corporate structures as well as, specifically, Learning and Development Directorate. The Committee particularly noted the changed role of the Director, which required an increased concentration on corporate issues and in doing so expressed concern at the potential loss of senior management time to the Directorate and questioned the effect this would have on the Directorates relationship with Partners. The requirements of the Children Bill, as a direct result of the Laming report (Victoria Climbie Inquiry) include establishment of a Director of Children’s Services. However, the Committee, noting that the proposed post of Director of Children’s Services would have a corporate responsibility and, therefore, would not be wholly dedicated to Children’s Services, has expressed concern to the Chief Executive that any future external scrutiny or inspection needed to be satisfied that the recommendations arising from the Laming report, particularly the clear line of accountability for Children’s Services, were being met.

3.10 The Committee has again maintained a close interest in the School Reorganisation and has been receiving monthly reports that have provided updates on progress on capital works that have been ongoing with a number of existing and new build schools throughout the borough. This has also included renaming of local schools, provision of schools funding and management of staffing issues. All issues have resulted in the Committee feeding comments and concerns directly back to officers concerned.
3.11 Initially, in considering the budget proposals for 2005/08 the Committee (November 2004) informed Cabinet that it should fight for the service as a whole to ensure that its major services were safeguarded. However, following the favourable settlement announced in December the Committee submitted just 2 comments to Cabinet on the budget concerning under-funding proposals.

3.12 In September 2004 the Committee was observed by a representative from the IDeA to assess the effectiveness of the Committee as well as to suggest areas that might be improved including areas such as physical dynamics, Member involvement, participation and strategic direction. Generally the Committee received favourable comments on all aspects of the meeting and was particularly commended for being engaging and enthusiastic in its work.

3.13 The Committee is grateful for the work of its co-optees over the last 9 months, for their contributions and much valued input. The Committee also appreciates the work undertaken by officers who attended meetings, especially those have supported the work of Every Child Matters.

4. Future Work Programme

4.1 With there being no local elections this year there should be a degree of continuity within the Committee and this should allow a consistent approach to work that has commenced in 2004/05.

4.2 The Committee has begun the process of identifying issues and topics for inclusion in its work programme for 2005/06. The Committee has recognised that policy development role is a cyclical process of developing, testing/monitoring, reviewing and implementing policy and with this in mind Every Child in Milton Keynes Matters will continue to be included as a standing item on the Committee’s work programme for 2005/06. The Committee recognises that issues relating to the growth of Milton Keynes may be central to the Committee’s work programme in the short and medium term future. Other issues that have been identified for inclusion within the Committee’s work programme are detailed below:

(a) an academy for Milton Keynes

(b) Youth Participation Standards – Hear by Rights

(c) Growth in Milton Keynes

(d) Roll Out of Learning and Behaviour Model (Southwood School)

(e) Youth Justice

(f) Every Child in Milton Keynes Matters

(g) School Reorganisation