

# POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY

## ANNUAL REPORT 2006-07

Welcome to the second of this format of Overview and Scrutiny annual report to Council. Once again this is the opportunity to look at the past year's work and summarise it in terms of achievements and challenges. These are set out in the following pages with an entry for each of the Committees and Panels.

The Council year started with two key changes to the Overview and Scrutiny structure. As signposted in last year's report the audit committee function was assigned to a separate committee, independent of Overview and Scrutiny, leaving the performance review function as a Panel in its own right. A further split created Health Scrutiny and External Scrutiny as separate entities – the latter primarily to address growth issues – in order to ease the congestion of work programmes and meeting agendas.

While these separations have helped alleviate pressures on the former Performance Review & Audit Panel and the External (including Health) Scrutiny Panel, there have still been problems where other Committees have struggled to accommodate all the topics suggested or offered for their work programmes. Solutions such as extra meetings (specials) and more review group activity have had to be accommodated with the same resources as last year. Indeed this has been a continuing

discussion in Chairs' Group as the O&S Team has struggled to support more Committees and an increased demand for review group activity.

Once again the Chairs' Group – now expanded to 9 – has met regularly to deal with work programme co-ordination issues and to supply guidance on new directions for Overview and Scrutiny. The Group debated possible new ways of doing budget scrutiny before agreeing to see how Corporate Policy Development Committee's Budget Review Group might work out. The Chairs' Group has also led on a response to CPA criticism, resulting in an agreement with the Audit Commission to secure the assistance of a peer member to help members find ways to improve O&S.

Chairs have continued to explore ways to engage with the public and increase involvement. These have included the continuation of Three Counties Radio broadcasts, a Health Scrutiny stall at the MK Health Fair, articles in LiveMK, and publication of O&S reports on the Council's website.

This coming year we will be keeping a close watch on the progress of the new Local Government Bill to better understand what "strengthening Overview and Scrutiny" means and how "Community Calls to Action" will work.

# CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



## Review of meetings

This year, the Corporate Policy Development Committee (CPDC) has met on eight occasions.

Work programme management has been carried out by the Chair and Spokespersons, and they have based their planning on the Council's Priorities and the Forward Plan, with further input from the Parishes Assembly, Governance and Finance and Strategy and Performance DMTs and individual Members.

The Chair and Spokespersons have succeeded in keeping the agenda for each meeting to no more than a few items, allowing time for considered discussion. Subjects considered have been an interesting mix of the inward and the outward facing, ranging from a review of the Council's Anti-Fraud and Whistle-Blowing Policies to how the expansion of Milton Keynes should affect how it is governed.

Representatives of Parish and Town Councils have again made an important contribution to the work of the Committee this year. They were key witnesses when the Committee considered the effectiveness of the Parish Charter and the redistribution of non-domestic rates.

They also met with the Committee and the Chair of Milton Keynes Partnership recently to discuss

Expansion and Engagement and the Future of Local Government.

The Committee does not have the resources to support a great deal of review group work, but has used working groups effectively for both one-off meetings, as with the Parishes Review Group that considered the effectiveness of the Parish and Town Council Charter, and longer term work. The Budget Review Group carried out a more intensive and sustained piece of work, meeting nearly twenty times between July and November in 2006 in order to be able to publish its report at the end of the calendar year.

## Achievements

The Committee considered the Council's Base Budget and the Directorate position in November and the Cabinet proposals in January. On both occasions, it looked beyond the next year's budget to consider the Medium Term Plan. It has also carried out a large piece of work on the budget for the medium term through the four Members of the Committee on the Budget Review Group.

The Committee has also continued its piece of long term work into the future of local government in Milton Keynes, concentrating on the three areas of e-government, the expansion of the city and engagement with the democratic process. The Chair and Spokespersons also took part in a second Three Counties Radio phone-in to encourage engagement.

## Future Work Programme

The Committee will draw together its work on the future of local government into a final report.

The Budget Review Group will work on a small number of large, strategic, cross-cutting issues in 2007, chosen on the basis of their cost and importance to the Council and potential for improvement. The

major research will be into Crime Reduction and Community Safety.

## And finally...

The Chair of Corporate Policy Development Committee, on behalf of its Members, would like to thank everybody who has attended its meetings and contributed to its work, whether as witnesses or representatives of other bodies or the public.

## ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



### Review of Meetings

This year the Committee has met on seven occasions.

Work programme management has been achieved through the Chair and Spokespersons working as a planning group, pioneering the use of telephone conferencing for this purpose. Input to the work programme planning process has come from the Council's Priorities, the Forward Plan, advice from Environment DMT and individual Members.

The Committee tries to hold its meetings in venues other than the Civic Offices occasionally, to make it more convenient for local people to attend to discuss issues that are important to them. In January, it

held a special meeting in Bletchley to consider the implications of the severance of Tavistock Street, and many local people took part, including residents of that and neighbouring streets and representatives of local businesses and town councils.

Although the greater number of scheduled meetings and Committees/Panels in the current structure means a reduced ability to support review group activity, the Committee has set up two review groups this year. The first, the Community Transport Review Group, was set up to assess the new Community Transport service and make recommendations to improve it. After meeting three times and taking evidence from Council officers, Cabinet Members and user representatives, it published its report in January.

The second, the Committee's Planning Services Review Group, has begun to assess customer experience of planning services and will report later in the year.

## Achievements

The Committee has continued to take a keen interest in the progress of the new waste collection and disposal contract, which will be the largest contract that Milton Keynes Council has ever entered into. It has received an update on this at each of its meetings, and in July, the Chair travelled to Cornwall County Council to consult on best practice, reporting to the Committee in September.

This Committee, like the other Policy Development Committees, considered that part of the Budget relevant to its remit in two stages, the Base Budget and the Directorate position in November, and the Cabinet proposals in January. On both occasions, it attempted to look beyond the next year's budget and consider the Medium Term Plan.



## Review of Meetings

The Committee welcomed a new Chair for this year who has brought recognised Social Care expertise to agenda items received by the Committee.

As with last year, agenda items have been few in number to allow time for issues to be fully

## Future Work Programme

Suggestions for items to be considered in the coming year have been provided by the Committee's Chair and Spokespersons, Members of the Committee, other Members and Environment DMT. The Committee intends to hold an off-site meeting in Wolverton on parking and transport there and a special meeting on the environmental consequences of the growth of Milton Keynes. The Committee is also likely to review street cleaning, systems thinking in the Environment Directorate and its structure and the 'joined up resources map of Milton Keynes'.

## SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

considered. In line with this no more than 3 items were placed on the agenda for each meeting.

In addition to Committee Members, the work programme has been informed throughout the year by issues that have been highlighted in the press and are meaningful to the borough's residents.

This year the Committee met on 6 occasions. Six meetings were scheduled at the beginning of the

year; no meetings were called for special reasons.

The Committee considered a number of other topics during the year, including:

- Quality of Life Strategy for Older People Review
- The Supporting People Inspection
- The Health & Social Care White Paper
- Revenue Budget 2007-08 Onwards
- Housing Revenue Budget 2007-08 Onwards
- Homelessness Updates (quarterly)
- Sustainable Communities Review
- Management of the Housing Voids Service
- Vanguard's Systems Thinking

## **Achievements**

The most substantive piece of work this year was on the Quality of Life Strategy for Older People. This was

carried out by a review group, consisting of Councillors and service users. Evidence was heard from a good balance of officers, service users and service providers. The input of service users was highly valued by the Committee, and although their involvement in the policy development process is still in its infancy, the Committee recognises the importance of their contribution and is keen to develop their role further in future.

Now that this Committee has entered a period of stability, members and officers can allow for planning ahead, with an effective contribution to the development of the Council policies within the Social Care and Housing areas. In addition to increasing the involvement of service users in its policy development, over the coming year the Committee also intends to continue with the good joint working it has undertaken with the PCT.

## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



### Review of meetings

The Committee has met on a total of seven occasions this year, one of which was a special meeting arranged to consider budget information and a presentation on the academy proposals for Sir Frank Markham Community School.

Most of the Committee's work has focused on key areas arising from the Joint Area Review of Services for Children and Young People and work carried out towards the Children and Young People's Plan. To these areas has been added:

- Proposals for an academy at Sir Frankham Markham Community School;
- Cultural Strategy Review;
- ACE funding 2006/07;
- West Bletchley Review of Schools;
- Integrated Services for Children with disabilities; and
- Budget consultation

The Committee has continued to hold planning group meetings

consisting of the Chair and Spokespersons to discuss work programming, which has included advice from the Head of the Learning and Development Directorate. The Committee has also been mindful of the Forward Plan to define issues where it may have a role in developing policy.

The Committee has continued to hold pre- and post meetings to encourage positive outcomes and management of items and to provide an opportunity to reflect on discussions and consider further work programme items in light of discussion.

The Committee has struggled this year to cope with the demands on its work programme and will need to be clearer in defining its priorities to ensure that meaningful outcomes can be obtained in meetings. The Committee has received a large number of information items which highlights the need for a defined structure to provide Members with Directorate information outside of meetings without them being placed on the Committee agenda.

There needs to be more efficient use of the Forward Plan by officers to enable effective planning and identification of key priorities ahead of meetings. The Panel has received little input from external witnesses due to the inability to forward plan a large proportion of their items.

## Achievements

The Committee undertook a detailed piece of review group work on the Cultural Strategy. The Review was informed by a variety of witnesses resulting in a report being presented to Cabinet on 7 November 2006. It was considered that the Cabinet adopted a more balanced strategy as a result of the review.

Work on the West Bletchley Review of Primary School places was considered at the Committee's meeting on 19 September 2007 and centred on the options, which were to proceed to consultation. The Committee's recommendations were presented to Cabinet and shaped the options that the Council consulted on.

The Committee has received regular updates on the proposals to replace Sir Frank Markham Community School with an academy. A special meeting was also held on 3 October 2006 to question witnesses including the sponsor Development Director and the future head teacher.

The outcomes of this meeting provided detailed concerns which it is hoped will inform discussions as proposals for the academy develop, the Committee will return to review any actions taken as a result of these concerns being raised.

The Committee has considered several issues during the year where regular updates have been required to assess progress against targets agreed in the Children and Young People's Plan. There is a good process in place for reviewing performance against plans such as the Joint Area Review, which the Committee should continue to develop.

## Future Work Programme

The Committee will continue to develop its work programme in consultation with Spokespersons, Cabinet Members and Learning and Development Directorate DMT and will determine priorities for items throughout the year.

## HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL



### Review of meetings

The panel met on six occasions throughout this year.

A wide variety of health issues have been examined including Smokefree MK, NHS Service Charges, Obesity – Nutrition and Physical Activity, Reconfiguration of the Strategic Health Authority and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) budget. The Panel have also commenced a review of the Mental Health Services provided in MK, and are currently meeting with

Public awareness of the Panel has been raised considerably this year through a number of channels. Articles on the diabetes review were published in a local magazine and newspaper, and the findings discussed during two Three Counties Radio phone-in shows attended by the Chair. Also discussed during the shows were other health inequalities issues considered by the Panel this year, including smoking and alcohol misuse. The Panel also ran one of 60 stalls at a Milton Keynes health fair to promote their achievements.

The Panel continues to respond to current issues of public concern by

stakeholders to discuss finite details for review

### Achievements

The Panel continues to build on its good relationships with the local NHS and Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) Forums. The local NHS continues to approach the Panel for consultation on a wide variety of issues and the Panel has resolved supported the retention of a PCT co-terminous with the Council boundaries during the current consultation on Trust reconfigurations. Comments on Trusts' performance were also submitted as part of the Annual Health Check, introduced last year to replace star ratings.

The Panel have also co-opted the Chairs of the Hospital and PCT PPI Forums onto the Committee to establish a more formal association, examining such controversial topics such as the Sexual Health Strategy for Milton Keynes, the provision of a Parkinson's Disease Nurse, Dentistry and the PCT budget.

A continuing constraint is the volume of health issues the Panel is asked to consider. Some headway has been made towards establishing a better balance between health items, as it has been necessary to respond to some health consultations outside of the scheduled meetings this year. The need for further thought on how to better prioritise next year's workload still appears to be indicated.



## Future Work Programme

The work programme will continue to be planned by the Chair and Spokespersons with input from Panel members, co-optees and officers. Consulting with wider groups such as the PPI Forums

worked well last year and will be repeated throughout this year. Suggested topics for 2007/08 include updates on, Health inequalities, Mental Health Service redesign, Trusts Annual Health Check, Alcohol Misuse, Nursing and Reconfiguration of the Ambulance Trusts.

## EXTERNAL SCRUTINY PANEL



### Review of meetings

The External Scrutiny Panel has met on a total of seven occasions this year, one of which was a special meeting arranged to consider the process for consultation on the 2031 Growth Strategy for Milton Keynes.

Due to the establishment of the Health Scrutiny Panel, this has been the first year the External Scrutiny Panel has been able to focus on scrutinising external agencies and in particular issues surrounding the growth of Milton Keynes. Previously the Panel's work programme had been constrained by the number of health related issues it had to consider.

The Panel started the year by receiving a context setting presentation to increase the

awareness of the structures relating to growth in Milton Keynes and it has continued to develop knowledge of the structural relationships of bodies and teams that deliver growth locally. This presentation has been consolidated by a series of site visits throughout Milton Keynes to see those areas most prominently affected by growth and regeneration.

To the key issue of growth the Panel has also added the following themes;

- Thames Valley Police and Police Authority;
- Anglian water's Emergency Planning procedures;
- Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority;
- the Local Strategic Partnership.

The Panel has also received a regular update from the Council's representative on the Police Authority regarding current issues.

The Panel has continued to hold pre- and post- meetings and has also programmed regular briefing sessions to clearly define meeting aims and to develop a co-ordinated response to scrutinising witnesses.

The Panel has been proactive in defining its priorities and those

areas of concern that they wished to consider in meetings. It has continued to have a good relationship with MKP receiving information from a variety of witnesses including Jane Hamilton on a number of occasions and Sir Bob Reid at its meeting on 31 October 2006.

## **Achievements**

With several new members on the Panel this year members awareness of key issues has risen quickly and the Panel has been able to define its own priorities in relation to growth focusing on specific areas that it felt required more detailed scrutiny. These have included:

- Consultation and decision making structures;
- Regeneration; and
- The Central Milton Keynes Project Board.

The Panel's meeting on 24 August 2006 provided the opportunity to undertake a detailed piece of work on concerns regarding the consultation process for the Growth Strategy to 2031 where the Panel received evidence from a variety of witnesses, representative bodies and councillors. A report was supplied to Cabinet on 17 October 2006, which detailed the evidence that was received and made recommendations regarding the way the Council undertakes consultation and integrates with other regional local authorities.

Reports on other key growth issues have also been presented to Cabinet and Milton Keynes Partnership Committee (MKPC) along with summaries of evidence to be taken forward as part of the growth process. MKPC resolved at

their meeting on 5 December 2006 to establish a mechanism for reviewing recommendations and providing a full response to the scrutiny panel. It is hoped that through the consideration of these recommendations that the processes for growth will be delivered more effectively.

The Panel has received evidence from a variety of external witnesses throughout the year, which has promoted effective scrutiny of key issues, and promoted positive outcomes from meetings.

The Panel undertook a detailed piece of review group work on MKP's Development Control processes. The review was informed by witnesses who had specific knowledge of elements of the development control process as well as officers from the Council and MKP. The Group's report will be presented to both MKP and the Council with a view to improving efficiency specifically within the administration process and in communication between the Council, MKP and the public.

The Panel has also established a process for receiving regular updates on outcomes from its meetings. This has permitted Members to analyse responses to specific recommendations and identify areas where further action may be required. Recommendations have been distributed to various external stakeholders with responses being received in a majority of cases.

## **Future Work Programme**

The Panel will continue to focus on growth issues in Milton Keynes as a key priority and has presently

scheduled the following key themes for consideration;

- MKP Communication Strategy
- Strategic Partnerships

- Local Area Agreements
- Community Strategy.

## PERFORMANCE REVIEW PANEL



### Review of meetings

The big change for the Panel this year has been the loss of the Audit function to a separate Committee. This has freed up the meeting agendas and allowed the Panel to concentrate usually on just one substantive topic per meeting. Topics have been related to Council priorities and during the course of the year have included:

- Conclusion of Licensing Act work
- Park and Ride service
- Complaints handling
- Crime reduction
- Local Transport Plan progress
- Best Value satisfaction survey
- Landscape Maintenance performance.

The Panel began the year by concluding a piece of work on the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 which it had started on 8 March 2006. Interest was in how the Council had performed in gearing up for this new legislation and what the effects had been in Milton Keynes. The Panel was able

to establish that MKC had coped well with the volume of new applications and that the feared outcomes of increased disorderly behaviour and 24 hour drinking had not been evident.

Improving public transport is a Council priority which is a huge subject to tackle in one session so the Panel is breaking it down into smaller aspects. This year it has looked at the Park and Ride service and progress against the Local Transport Plan.

The Panel felt that a key element in “improving the experience of our customers” was to look at the handling of complaints across the council. A number of issues were identified and the Panel made a number of recommendations which it will follow up.

Perhaps the Panel’s most ambitious investigation was triggered by the poorly performing crime indicators. Although this is a story in itself the Panel invited a range of witnesses to present their views and experiences on crime reduction. Having already had a 2 hour briefing meeting a week before meeting witnesses, the Panel had to have two full meetings to fully hear all the witnesses. Although hearing valuable and interesting evidence the lack of focus made it difficult to define a set of recommendations. The learning point here is to break down crime and community safety into smaller issues for future study

– and this indeed is one of the recommendations being made.

## **Achievements**

The Panel has retained the regular, monthly supply of performance indicator information based on the “basket” produced by the Council and the monthly KPI data produced by the Council’s partner organisation, HBS. The Panel agreed one of its Members to be the lead on performance information and for that Member to establish meetings with the performance team in the CEO office. This has been done.

This Panel has augmented the work of its regular, calendared meetings with some work outside of that schedule. Service sampling or observations have been carried out in support of the Panel’s items on Licensing Act, Park and Ride, and Crime reduction. Small groups

## **Future Work Programme**

This Panel tends to be more reactive than some in deciding its work programme. Obviously this can be influenced by current performance and the monitoring arrangements for receiving this information will continue.

of Panel Members have joined operations in the Theatre District, looking at aspects of Licensing Act implementation, and a Safer Communities operation in a local area. Feedback for the Park and Ride item was from 3 Members who visited the Coachway and rode the bus observing and interviewing along the way. Some of the observations were encapsulated in the Panel’s recommendations for short-term improvements, some of which have been implemented.

The Panel has also undertaken a Review Group looking into Planning Enforcement. Its report published at the end of January considered three aspects –adverts and signs, retrospective planning permission refusals, and houses in multiple occupation – upon which to base its recommendations.

Suggestions have already been logged for a look at libraries, public transport information and a start on a review group looking at literacy.

Nor will the Panel’s work to date be overlooked as the progress of its recommendations will be followed up to see not only how many are accepted but how many are acted on.

## EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY PANEL



### Review of meetings

This Panel differs from all other Overview and Scrutiny bodies in that it has no defined work programme but meets solely to hear called-in decisions as and when required. The Panel thus has clarity of purpose and, unencumbered by other agenda items, can fully explore the

arguments for and against the decision being challenged. The Panel has developed a framework for conducting its hearings that can be adapted to suit particular circumstances, for example, if many witnesses attend. Hearings have a structure that assures the Panel takes an even-handed approach before reaching its conclusions.

The Panel has met to hear three called-in decisions so far this year. This compares with five during last year. Two out of the three were called-in by members of the public, a constitutional provision offered by only four other English authorities besides Milton Keynes.

The subjects for call-in follow no particular pattern and are summarised in the following table:

Subject	Called-in by	Outcome
Decision to adopt the Liberal Democrat Manifesto as the basis of the Cabinet's strategies and policies for 2006/07	Councillor	Decision referred to Council. Cabinet decision no longer required in view of Council decision to adopt the Council Plan 2006/09
Future of catering services to staff	Public	Decision not referred back
Replacement of Sir Frank Markham School with an Academy	Councillor and Public	Decision referred back to Cabinet.

The fact that Milton Keynes Council's constitution allows members of the public (20 or more) to call-in Executive decisions has been noted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) in a recent survey

of local authority scrutiny arrangements. Of the five authorities making this provision, 4 have received public call-ins but only Milton Keynes has changed a decision as a result.