

# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009 – 2010

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	<b>Page</b>
<b>Preface</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What we do</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Contributing to the Council Priorities 2009 – 2011</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Maternity Services</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What else have we done?</b>	<b>11</b>

## Preface



During 2009 – 2010, Milton Keynes Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees have continued to look in detail at how the Council works, and how the work of a number of our partner organisations has contributed to all of our lives. The Committees focussed their attention on how services can be improved for residents and provide value for money. My sincere thanks to fellow members, officers and other participants, in particular residents and 'expert witnesses', for their valuable contribution to this process.

The Council makes hundreds of decisions every day. Major decisions are made by a Cabinet of seven Councillors. Specialist decisions like Planning Permissions and Licensing applications are made by separate, independent Committees and all 51 ward councillors have a valuable role to play in representing the views of their constituents. Overview and Scrutiny Committees exist to hold the Council's decision-makers to account and proactively examine other organisations such as the utility companies, the local NHS and the emergency services on behalf of the community at large. During the year, Overview and Scrutiny Committees have continued to look at how the Council can become more efficient and cost effective in delivering services and how services can be improved to provide value for money to the residents of Milton Keynes. The focus has also been on investigating ways to reduce the effects of the economic downturn on local businesses and families.

In addition to recommending savings through more efficient services, Overview and Scrutiny Committees

have also sought to: identify improvements to the delivery of children's services across the borough; examine issues connected with the future potential growth and economic wellbeing of the Borough; scrutinise transport and train travel issues; and look in depth at the issues concerning the provision of maternity services at the Milton Keynes Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Overview and Scrutiny committees continually strive to seek and develop ways of improving the way the Council works with partner organisations. They also strive to increase levels of public involvement by taking up residents' issues that have been raised through Ward Councillors.

For this Annual Report, examples have been given of the work carried out by each of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Review Groups during 2009 – 10. Details are also given on how to obtain further information on meetings, agenda papers and scrutiny reports.

I would welcome the involvement of more and more of you in our work so please do not hesitate to contact us with your ideas and suggestions for future Overview and Scrutiny reviews.

**Councillor David Hopkins**  
**Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Management**  
**Committee**  
**March 2010**

## What We Do

Our role is to represent the people of Milton Keynes by encouraging and recommending improvements to the Borough and its public services.

Primarily, our focus will be on the services the Council delivers but our remit also extends to other services, such as health and community safety.

There are five select committees which do the bulk of this work, with a management committee working separately to coordinate the work.

More often than not, select committees will set-up smaller groups to do specific pieces of work. These groups will always be equally representative across the three political parties.

This report will look at the work Overview and Scrutiny has done in the last 12 months and how this has contributed to the Council Priorities for 2009 - 2011.

### **Children and Young People's Plan**

The Children and Young People's Select Committee helped shape the development of the Children and Young People's Plan which is the key strategic document for the Children's Trust in setting its priorities for providing services and informing policies across Milton Keynes.

## Activities & Facilities for Young People Children's Education & Skills

### **Children's Services Scrutiny Commission**

A Commission was set-up to provide an external, independent assessment of the status of Children's Services in Milton Keynes following the APA Assessment in 2007/08. The Commission was independently chaired by Councillor Gareth Barnard, Lead Member for Children at Bracknell Forest Council and made a number of recommendations which were accepted by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

### **Achievement and Standards**

The Children and Young People's Select Committee set up a review group to analyse the achievement and standards data for schools in Milton Keynes in 2009 and to seek assurances on how this information was being used to drive improvements.

### **Inclusion Strategy**

The Children and Young People's Select Committee set up a review group to monitor the development of an Inclusion Strategy to primarily improve the educational outcomes for children with learning difficulties and disabilities in Milton Keynes.

### **Economic Summit**

The Economic Development and Enterprise Select Committee devoted its meeting in January to discuss the Milton Keynes' response to the recession. The Committee received a number of reports which looked at the impact of the recession and the work the Council and its partners were doing to combat its effects. The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Cabinet with respect to the key issues which needed to be considered as part of a broader future economic strategy for Milton Keynes.

## Dealing with the Recession

### **Every Child Matters – Economic Wellbeing**

The Children and Young People's Select Committee considered a progress report on the economic wellbeing of young people in Milton Keynes. The report detailed the work the Council was doing locally to ensure that young people have the opportunity to: engage in further education, take up employment or training after leaving school; be ready for employment; live in decent homes and sustainable communities; have access to transport and material goods and live in households free from low income. The Committee asked the Cabinet to look at the opportunities currently available for apprenticeships within the Council, and to encourage other employers, especially other large employers, to offer apprenticeships to young people.

### **Housing Strategy**

In October, Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee commented on proposals to establish a Strategic Housing Partnership for Milton Keynes and develop a Housing Strategy. Members said that the Strategy should be about communities as well as houses, and that equalities, diversity and community safety should all be considered. The Committee recommended that the Strategic Housing Partnership should engage with the Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that housing and the impact that housing has is recognised when the Sustainable Community Strategy is next refreshed. It also set up a Review Group to develop a Council view of housing needs in Milton Keynes.

## Neighbourhood Regeneration

### **Community Safety**

The Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee is the Council's dedicated Crime and Disorder Committee, responsible for scrutinising the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. In February, the Committee commented on community safety issues, including domestic violence, acquisitive crime and the concerns of young people. The Committee recommended that an analysis of the work of Neighbourhood Action Groups, including the views of parish councils, should be carried out.



### **Transport Asset Management Plan**

The Economic Development and Enterprise Select Committee considered a report on the progress and development of the Transport Asset Management Plan, which has been created to link the Council's strategic objectives with its operational policies and procedures. The Committee agreed to revisit the work on the implementation of the footpath repair and maintenance policy, as well as making a number of specific recommendations to officers.

## Public Transport Road and Pavement Repairs

### **MK Trains Services**

Overview and Scrutiny continued to review train services in Milton Keynes having considered reports on improvements to services in the last two years. The Partnerships and Growth Committee called on evidence from the London Midland, Network Rail, Virgin Trains and Southern Trains detailing the work that has been ongoing to address issues such as overcrowding and the punctuality of trains.

## Maternity Services

The Health and Community Wellbeing Select Committee held a public meeting in February 2010 to discuss Maternity Services at Milton Keynes Hospital.

The meeting was called in response to a report published by the healthcare regulators, the Care Quality Commission, which criticised the standards of care on the Maternity Unit at the Hospital.

Many mothers recounted their experiences of delivering on the Unit and Hospital officials were asked to respond to the report and give assurances that steps were in place to make improvements.

The meeting was conducted in a positive and open manner and was widely covered by both local and regional press.

It was agreed that a sub-group of the Select Committee would be set-up to monitor the Hospital's action plan for improvement.

The sub-group would call on experts, midwives, mothers and other interested parties to attend a series of listening events during 2010 before reporting back to the Hospital and the Council on its findings.

## What Else Have We Done?

- Review of the Milton Keynes Safeguarding Children's Board
- Future of Milton Keynes
- Libraries and Lifelong Learning Strategy
- Joint Working Between the Council and the NHS in Milton Keynes
- Provision of GP Services
- Waste Strategy
- Cross Boundary Working
- Community Engagement Strategy

Democratic Services

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