

**IMPROVING COUNCIL MEETINGS: MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE:****Results with anonymised comments****Respondents currently a member of the following Committees:**

Cabinet	3
BMG (Business Management Group)	4
Appeals Commission	9
Development Control Committee	7
Licensing & Regulation Committee	4
Standards Committee	3
Treasury Overview Committee	3
Environment, Transport and Localities Overview Committee	5
Social Care, Housing and Health Overview Committee	5
Health Sub Committee	2
Learning, Community and Economic Development Overview Committee	5
Other overview and scrutiny groups, e.g. review groups, panels, sub- committees, etc.	2
Others (please list): Telecoms Policy Group, Crime and Community Safety Partnership, Bucks and Milton Keynes Fire Authority, CMK Partnership, MK Police Advisory Board, JNC, ALMO Board (Shadow), Rural Affairs, MK Forum against Domestic Violence (multi-agency), LEA Schools Advisory group, Schools Forum, Education Joint Advisory Group, SACRE, LSP, Joint Care and Social Health Board	

**Council meetings:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Should be themed to concentrate on particular issues.	5	9	5	2	2
Should always set aside time to receive reports on the Cabinets activities.	2	13	2	2	2
Should always set aside time to receive items from Overview & Scrutiny.	4	14	3	0	2
Should be the Council's main forum for political debate.	8	12	3	0	0
Are not needed every month.	8	1	13	1	0

**How would you describe Council meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful	0	<b>Why?</b>
Successful	3	1: Conform to agenda. Good reports 4: but only just 8: Completed agenda on most occasions. Some good contributions, but not enough from backbenchers.

Neither successful nor unsuccessful	7	<p>20: Debates can ramble on without being focused. Some people like speaking without adding to the discussion in progress. Fed up with mudslinging</p> <p>18: There is little role for 'backbenchers'.</p> <p>13: Most business can be dealt with quicker</p> <p>9: Agendas are too long. Too long spent on some items. Some councillors speak too often – they should learn not to speak on everything. Maximum time should be given to an item.</p> <p>7: I would not describe them as successful or unsuccessful. They serve a purpose, but they usually go on too long. Some people love the sound of their own voice! There should be a new (3 min) limit on time of each speech (except for mover of motion who should still have 4 mins). Only one intervention per item, and prob limit it to speaking on a certain number of items.</p> <p>6: It varies from meeting to meeting. It's only when everyone contributes in a positive manner that the meetings become successful. We have to remember that we are here to do a job – namely run the Council, NOT score cheap political points as is the practice in Full Council at present!!!</p> <p>14: too long, too little public interest</p>
Unsuccessful	6	<p>26: Council meetings are too long and are often lacking in interest and direction – this is due to the same questions being asked month after month. Members can be seen to lose interest as speaking is dominated by too few members!</p> <p>17: Meetings have become time wasting, more about press coverage and less about the public improvement of Milton Keynes.</p> <p>16: Too many items for time allocated – loss of interest when carried over. Need for control at party leaders' level.</p> <p>11: too tedious – too confrontational – too much personal abuse – too negative – too much petty party politicising!</p> <p>3: Council meetings should provide a public arena for debate and decision making. Unfortunately, all the public usually watches is a 'points scoring' match, as each party tries to outwit/humiliate the others!! The Council Meeting should be seen by the public and media as MKC at its best – but it does not!!</p> <p>2: Dominated by a few people.</p> <p>12: Too much point scoring – too little informed debate. Every party is at fault. Children in a playground have more mature debates/discussions.</p> <p>19: Majority against minority</p> <p>22: Too much time has been given over to a small number of councillors to enable them to voice their views on <u>every</u> item on the agenda! Leaving little time for debate.</p>
Very unsuccessful	3	<p>23: A lot of time is wasted arguing over the points councillors have already in principle agreed to, also the agendas are too long and should focus on what is necessary , for example if we are discussing age of transfer then this is the only major item on the agenda , this would improve the quality of the debate and ensure that the time spent was constructive. In addition a time period should be set for each of the major items for example debate will last two hours after which the vote will be taken otherwise the debate can go on all night and no other actions are completed.</p> <p>21: Ineffective chairing has led to Cllrs L and W being able to hijack the Council meeting and dominate discussions with mainly irrelevant rubbish.</p> <p>24: It has been used in the main for point scoring and as a conduit to the local press. This is not what local government should be about. Many items we all agree about should not be discussed ad nauseum!</p> <p>15: Too long, boring, insufficiently focused</p>

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about Council Meetings:**

26: Meetings should be themed and contributions need to be short and sharp with less historical reference. Effort should be made to stop the same questions being asked on routine matters at each meeting. Council should be a more open forum on themed subjects.

1: Reports should be written in plain English and be concise. This is not always the case.

23: The idea of limiting the time period for a debate would ensure that comments and debate was constructive and did not descend into a clash of personalities, it would not affect any individuals right to add to the debate but would ensure that all comments are in context and relate to the item under discussion, in addition to providing all councillors with an opportunity to constructively add to the proceedings, sometimes it is hard to add to the debate as the debate descends into chaos

21: I am a pacifist, so there is a limit to what I am able or willing to do about Cllrs X and Y! But Members need to stop abusing the democratic process and use the Council meeting constructively. I really don't know how this can be achieved, though.

18: Council meetings could use the pairing system used in Parliament

16: Possible solution would be to commence Council meetings earlier in the day, e.g. 4 p.m. or 5 p.m. A ballot of Members on this would be interesting.

13: Finish early because of the political exploitation of certain Members who shall be nameless (Cllr Y). Why should we carry on after the cut-off when we know we shall be subject to more of the same? So we end up with 2 Council meetings a month – RIDICULOUS.

11: Should be used to debate openly the big issues facing the Council.

10: On the whole "shallow" and doing little to further the strategic development of the city. On occasions, they have achieved little or nothing. I am not sure if we have a collective understanding about what Full Council meetings are for. They are not (or should not be) primarily about being a "show" or "showcase" for Members singly or collectively (or the public). Rather they should be about mature and informed political debate about key issues affecting citizens now and in the future. This is not to say that Full Council should not be the final point of challenge to day to day decisions, unless / until we can design a better forum for this. "Theming" is all very well, but by its nature tends to require advance planning, which can of itself be constricting and unhelpful.

9: Policy items need to be discussed and approved. Questions are only political points scoring – information could be given to Members in writing on queries. Speakers should stick to the point and not ramble – and there's more.

7: Themed meetings would be OK as long as URGENT items could also be taken – eg something needed by a deadline. They may possibly attract more public.

There is plenty of business to need them every month.

6: Can something be done about getting members to use the amplification system in the Chamber properly? That way, we can all hear what's being said – even the public might be able to follow what's going on! This might be totally out of line, but do we specifically invite school parties of Secondary-School age to see how Local Government operates? Just a thought!

4: Strong chairmanship: keep to strict timing for Councillor contribution. Restrict number of times a Councillor may speak on an item. Keep to business of meeting. Ensure business for each meeting is COMPLETED – therefore no need for late finish or indeed carry forward of business.

3: Council meetings should be the public culmination of ideas and policies born out of Overview, Cabinet and Cabinet scrutiny. Overview should produce policy for Cabinet to make decisions upon, Scrutiny should look at those decisions and the reasoning behind the decisions, then Full council should deliberate and deliver a verdict accordingly.

2: Meetings are too long, the business is rarely finished, and long debates are held about less important issues and not the important ones.

12: Some effort to widen the horizons and more deeply inform. Themed meetings with outside speakers with a 'how we tackled this problem' focus.

25: I feel that a lot of time is wasted on going over issues that individuals will not agree on, and these debates should be stopped and move on to the next item.

14: Four times a year, maximum

**Overview and Scrutiny:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Is a suitable forum for local issues	4	12	5	1	2
Needs a co-ordination board to allocate and prioritise work	10	6	5	2	1
Should be able to carry out more work on reviewing and developing policies	12	11	1	0	0
Should have a dedicated panel to consider call-ins	5	10	5	2	2
Should have a dedicated panel to consider council performance	4	4	6	3	5
Should have a dedicated panel to consider policy framework documents	1	9	6	4	3

**How would you describe Overview and Scrutiny committees that you have attended this year?**

Very successful	2	<b>Why?</b> 3: However, I am only judging Environment, Transport and Localities!! Other members have told me that none of the others work!! So, I am probably in the minority!!
Successful	6	18: ETAL I think has been successful, and has influenced Cabinet decisions 13l: had sub-committees reporting to Overview 11: I have only attended ETL – that works, because it has a Chairman who sets the agenda! 4: Well chaired, opportunity for debate by all. 14: Starting to get to grips with the detail behind the ‘real issues’ that affect the people etc of Milton Keynes.
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	5	26: Format of meetings does not, in my opinion, give rise to contribution from all members of the Committee. I believe the original committee system allowed greater input from individual members. 23: Agenda’s have on the whole been too long and not focused on any one theme, for example it would be helpful to hold more frequent committees but focusing on specific areas where individuals in the group serve as the “experts “ , for example old peoples care is reviewed in detail during one meeting , at the meeting the policy is reviewed the future direction , the workload etc , in this way the committee can make some decisions and move on knowing the content of its future workload , the team can then cover more areas and constructively develop the policies. In addition there is a requirement for a strong chair to ensure the debate remains on the issues and does not detract onto political issues . Finally I would suggest bi-annual reviews of progress as this will support the team and ensure the team are aware of the workload still to be addressed. 17: I think we lack a uniformed approach to Overview, with the Chairs of some committees moving forward, while others just hope things will work out. 6: See above remarks 19: Too much bureaucracy, and not enough attention to service delivery. 22: Environment Overview has had a number of successful ‘sub’ groups etc. Good chairing, and focused. LCED – weak/poor chairing. The brief of this committee is far too large. No time to discuss in depth issues relating to education.

Unsuccessful	<p>4 5: There has not been a clear focus, nor has there been any obvious framework or direction. The Committee clearly needs the guidance and help called for in the Ofsted report.</p> <p>9: In LCED, we took a long time to do anything positive. One Member was too concerned about procedure. Unsure about what was wanted.</p> <p>2: Not really got right into issues</p> <p>15: for some more than others because they are badly chaired (no preparation), not enough proactive/policy – not served well by officers – same reports to everyone – no real scrutiny</p>
Very unsuccessful	<p>5 21: We haven't prioritised the work well enough. Some overviews have been plagued by ineffective chairing. We need more training for chairs and better quality candidates to stand for election to Council in the first place.</p> <p>10: The environment committee seems to get nearest what I think we envisaged would be the role</p> <p>Too much party political point-scoring</p> <p>Nor enough respect for the O &amp; C concept</p> <p>24: It is obvious to me, having chaired many meetings this year, that whipping is taking place from within the ruling group. Until a fairer system is in place, a balanced outlook will not happen.</p> <p>7: Mostly a waste of time. The best ones have been where they have set up a panel to look at it an issue in depth and come up with some recommendations, which have helped inform the cabinet. Also good are where a specialist has been called in to speak e.g. sports in MK</p> <p>12: As with Council meetings, some Councillors are whipped. There is little genuine unfettered debate. Focusing on issues <u>before</u> Cabinet has made decisions would free Members to express valid opinions.</p>

**If you have not been to any Overview and Scrutiny committees this year what is your general impression of them?**

- 16: Still suffering from 'committee' structure – too much potential emphasis on decision making.
- 4: They will work when political preferences are not pursued. Recommendation should ultimately be for the good of the Community, without political overtones.
- 25: I have not attended any meetings and feel unable to give my impression

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about Overview and Scrutiny:**

26: The problem with Scrutiny is that it has no actual power to overturn Cabinet decisions – only to refer back. It would be much better if the Committee had more input before items went to Cabinet. Much of the discussion and questioning going on at Council should be dealt with at Overview.

5: While the Overview element has been carried out, it is difficult to discern any meaningful scrutinising of the Council’s operations within the remit of the Committee. While it is impractical to call more meetings, it is equally impractical to get through the work that needs to be done in the time allotted.

21: Again, I can see where the problems lie, but coming up with solutions is not so easy. There are others with more experience and more ability in the strategic thinking department than me, who must have ideas surely? Can we identify them and let them have a go?

11: Follow the example set by Env. Overview – and get all other overviews to work in that way!

10: I was under the impression that BMG was intended to oversee all the working arrangements of the Council and as such, should operate as a “co-ordination board” for the scrutiny committees.

The scrutiny committees will only being to work as they are intended when (a) those concerned stop treating them as an evolution of the former committee structures by overloading the agendas (often with minutiae) and (b) all concerned treat them with due respect and attention (c) it becomes clear perception that the administration majority is not being used to emasculate them. If (a) cannot be overcome in any other way, then revised arrangements need to be considered about delegation of powers and if necessary, setting up alternative arrangements.

9: It needs a firm chair. Members must contribute ideas and help to form policy. ACTION, not procedures and structures.

6: See above remarks

4: Strong chairing: good representation from all parties to avoid political pressure on less experienced Committee Members, who should be guided and their contribution to discussion sought and encouraged. How else do they learn!

3: Claire Taylor presented BMG with some quite radical proposals recently. They were, in my view, far superior in quality and depth compared with the ideas generated by Members. I believe this work should form the basis for a complete overhaul/review of the current system!! We should start with a clean sheet, and write these ideas on it!!

2: I have only attended as an ‘observer’, not as a member. I think they should do more policy development – as the sub-groups set up by Environment Overview have done.

12: It has to change. Initially, Members of Overview and Scrutiny should have access and briefings with officers dealing with the issues that are in the remit of the Committee. Although scrutiny officers have done an excellent job, I have not felt sufficiently informed to do a proper job on the Committees.

14: Still needs more budget commitment, to enable commissioning of reports, research etc, etc to make a big impact.

19: We need constructive reports and concerns of a member or members and actual facts to ensure the matters are received. This means the co-ordination of the MKC Overview Committees Officers.

15: They need strong leadership and a strong workplan, purposeful activity and not just receiving reports, encouragement to ‘scrutinise’ and not just comment on.

22: Such as age of transfer/SEN etc. Consideration should be given on ways in which to divide up the ‘workload’!

**The Forward Plan and Key Decisions:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Currently the forward plan lists Key Decisions that Cabinet will be taking. It should list all Cabinet items.	4	11	6	1	3
The Forward Plan should look forward a year, even if this is speculative, rather than four months as it does at present.	2	11	10	0	2
The current Key Decision Threshold (£50,000) should be raised. 3: <i>No – reduce it to zero!</i>	0	4	13	2	5
Individual Cabinet members should be able to make Key Decisions.	0	11	6	4	3
The current format of the Forward Plan gives me enough information. <b><i>(If you disagree please state why below).</i></b>	1	22	0	1	1
10: Too often, plays lip service to consultation proposals. No column for progress reporting. Far too many items appear far too late.					
12: I don't know if I know enough – I have no way of finding out what is being kept from me! (I'm not paranoid).					

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about the Forward Plan and key decisions:**

21: It often appears fairly irrelevant to non-executive councillors, or maybe this is just my impression.

17: Some Members may not know about items that have been kept off the Plan and why. Also, some Overview Committees have little input on items.

11: The Council does not seem capable of planning and delivering for more than a few months ahead. Therefore pointless to have a longer forward plan!

10: Forward Plan should itself be the subject of formal approval, as a quasi-policy document.

9: On the whole – satisfactory

4: the Forward Plan for 12 months would be an important guide, but open to adjustment as the year develops and the 'key' areas assessed, planned and executed.

3: Key decisions are terrible!! Officers and Cabinet Members make non-democratic decisions that affect our wards – and we have to 'pick up the pieces'. No decision should be made without being subject to the democratic process!

2: My perspective of the Forward Plan is possibly different from non-Cabinet members, as we determine what goes on it. It has improved over the last year, but there are still too many last minute changes.

12: I do not believe that all the information can be contained in one plan. Need to look at Forward Plan as it is now but with additional Plan, not an extended or expanded one.

**Cabinet:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Is achieving open and accountable decision making.	2	17	3	2	0
Should respond specifically to each recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny.	5	17	1	0	1
Should invite wider consultation and comments prior to making policy.	4	13	6	1	1

**How would you describe Cabinet meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful	2	<b>Why?</b> 17: The Cabinet meetings set the tone of public awareness in the city. It is not just a basic rubber stamp meeting. It invites public response and involvement. 3: Open and accountable!! Quite a lot of public participation (usually, however, by the same people). Cabinet appears harmonious and open to input. I personally have attended, asked questions and been listened to – sometimes even take notice!!
Successful	8	16: Decisions taken sensibly and in accordance with policy. 11: because we have already decided what we want to achieve! 2: They get decisions made – but see below 14: Format, content and preparation much improved. 22: Focused!
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	2	I have attended very few – I got a good decision on one occasion, not on the other. 15: I have no idea what the criteria of 'success' would be. It is conducting business/decision making efficiently
Unsuccessful	3	21: Difficult to say, as I have only been a member since May 2002. 10: Mainly because it is quite clear the decisions are made beforehand (which is more a fault of the Cabinet rather than of the system). 7: YES - It gets the business of decision-making done quickly, but mostly no other council members turn up (unless they've got an item on the agenda). The opposition speeches now come from the same two members of the public who always turn up, so cabinet members are responding to those 2 un-elected members of the public more than the official opposition!
Very unsuccessful	0	

**If you have not been to any Cabinet meetings this year what is your general impression of them?**

26: There should be greater encouragement for Members to attend Cabinet meetings. This could be acquired by having bi-monthly full Council and greater input from Overview before decisions are made. It would also be advisable to find other ways to involve all in fully understanding why as well as what is decided.

1: A lengthy meeting where there is more interest in scoring points rather than finding answers to the general good

20: Have not been to any, so I cannot comment

13: Decisions are only affected by public outcry. Parking is a good example. Otherwise, the Cabinet should decide and act on its lights, not phoney consultations.

24: No comment

6: If a Member can't be bothered to attend the Cabinet Meeting when an item is in some way controversial for that individual, should they then have the right to call that item in at a later stage, thereby incurring the expense of Officers' time and copying of papers for that call-in?

4: Our group receives feedback, so my impression is that the Cabinet System works, as long as those Cabinet Members know their portfolio thoroughly and are confident and comfortable with their work.

25: I have not attended any Cabinet meetings.

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about Cabinet:**

23: I note that cabinet meetings tend to be very constructive and debate is constructively entered into

10: The Cabinet system has removed a valuable forum for political debate and consensual decision making – not everything was wrong with the committee system!

9: They seem to be working

4: If and when I have the opportunity to serve as a Cabinet Member, I will comment

3: Works successfully, but could be improved by deeper thinking and more public discussion – so that we, the observers, can understand the thought processes that have led them to make particular decisions.

2: Cabinet meetings seem very 'artificial' and stage managed. The only debate is with the public!

12: Some way of cutting down the enormous amounts of paper. Could they be more focused or themed in some way?

**General issues:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Members have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements. 3: <i>It depends on the individual!! I prefer the new arrangements, many do not!! This question is meaningless – because the answers are right for some, wrong for others!!</i>	8	9	3	2	4
Officers have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements.	3	8	4	0	8
We should aim for more members of the public to attend our meetings. 10: <i>We should rather make sure the public know what is going on and make genuine arrangements for them to participate in the workings of the Council, which may very well not be by encouraging them to "attend our meetings" for the sake of it. The Council is not a form of cheap entertainment!</i> 4: <i>for a greater understanding of how the Council Meeting works.</i>	9	12	2	1	0

**New democratic arrangements have been in operation at this Council since September 2001. Thinking about all the aspects of the new arrangements in general, how successful would you say they have been?**

Very successful	0	<b>Why?</b>
Successful	3	26: Decisions are being made more quickly. However, the overview system is not totally successful.
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	4	18: Cllrs' roles not clear 17: The new councillors and the [Head of Democratic Services'] team are trying to make it work, while longer serving councillors have tried to stay in the old committee system. 6: See above remarks 2: Overview hasn't been very successful. Cabinet has been more successful. 8: Overview, except for Environment, has neither been proactive or pioneering in research or overview. 15: Still struggling in Overview, on which the vast majority of Members serve. Don't like the system.
Unsuccessful	7	23: The structure has not allowed for development , there appears to be an air of confusion as to the role of elements of the process and how constructive engagement can be implemented 13l: more time wasted 11: because there is less influence on the decision making role by ordinary 'non-Cabinet' Members. 10: See above for comments about Cabinet and about Overview and Scrutiny
Very unsuccessful	2	24: There is a view from Members, myself amongst them, that there was little wrong with the old committee system (if it ain't broke, don't fix it). 7: YES. Previously there was a whole committee of members who became experts in their area. So ideas could be thrashed around, implications discussed, views from the opposition could be heard and responsibilities could be shared more. The cabinet member now is very isolated. There are no other "experts" available – especially as there seems to be an imposed split so that even our Overview members are not supposed to discuss things with cabinet members – to such an extent that they are not even supposed to be briefed by the same officers! Ridiculous! Overview is a talking shop. It's too divorced from the work of the cabinet! 12: This may be a jaundiced view, because I never liked the idea from the start. I believe fewer councillors are closely involved in real decision-making, and yet there seem to be as many meetings.

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about the democratic arrangements at Milton Keynes Council.**

13: No input or access which old committee system gave. Monthly council is political arena BEFORE discussion forum. More irrelevant paper work created.

9: I think LCED is too large in its brief. Education should be a separate committee. I still prefer the old system. All Councillors were more involved.

24: Officers of the Council are doing their best in what for them are turbulent times. I refer of course to PPP. It must, I am sure, not knowing the direction of the Council, be very difficult for all concerned.

7: We should aim for more members of the council to take an interest in Cabinet meetings as well!

6: I think that a record of just how much is spent on Meetings called because someone couldn't be bothered to attend the appropriate Cabinet Meeting.

4: More training – Stephen Leach's Seminar was most helpful. 'New' Councillor training essential – we don't often know what to expect on procedures and protocol. Councillor training for each directorate to comprehend structure, content and Who does What, Where.

3: [The Head of Democratic Services] and his team are an absolute asset to the Elected Members. Their numbers should be augmented to allow for greater flexibility for Overview to hold more 'in-depth' public enquiries. Democratic services is absolutely essential to the Council!!

Overview should concentrate more on policy formation and less on scrutiny. [Scrutiny officers'] ideas should be introduced immediately!!

2: Apart from Cabinet Members, the new arrangements are not very inclusive or empowering for Members – this is a reflection of the Local Govt Act 2000 requirements, rather than the fault of the Council. I would support current efforts to improve overview, as I don't think the Cabinet is challenged by Overview sufficiently. Full Council is ineffective – it is used for point-scoring in the media.

12: If it were possible to find some way of incorporating the assumed slickness of decision making with a more democratic involvement and less childish behaviour, I would be happy. Don't want much, do I?!!

14: Benchmark and visit councils who claim great success for their new arrangements.

19: More money to the scrutiny function, i.e. human and financial resources not enough

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## MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS: PERCENTAGES

Percentages are shown of Members who expressed an opinion (i.e. not including 'don't knows') and who either agreed or agreed strongly with each statement or thought each type of meeting successful or very successful

### **Council meetings:** agree strongly / agree %

Should be themed to concentrate on particular issues. 67

Should always set aside time to receive reports on the Cabinets activities. 79

Should always set aside time to receive items from Overview & Scrutiny. 86

Should be the Council's main forum for political debate. 87

Are not needed every month. 39

### **How would you describe Council meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful/ Successful % 16

### **Overview and Scrutiny:** Agree strongly / agree %

Is a suitable forum for local issues 73

Needs a co-ordination board to allocate and prioritise work 70

Should be able to carry out more work on reviewing and developing policies 96

Should have a dedicated panel to consider call-ins 64

Should have a dedicated panel to consider council performance 47

Should have a dedicated panel to consider policy framework documents 50

### **How would you describe Overview and Scrutiny committees that you have attended this year?**

Very successful/ Successful % 36

### **The Forward Plan and Key Decisions:** Agree strongly / agree %

Currently the forward plan lists Key Decisions that Cabinet will be taking. It should list all Cabinet items. 68

The Forward Plan should look forward a year, even if this is speculative, rather than four months as it does at present. 57

The current Key Decision Threshold (£50,000) should be raised. 21

Individual Cabinet members should be able to make Key Decisions. 52

The current format of the Forward Plan gives me enough information. 96

<b><u>Cabinet:</u></b>	Agree strongly / agree %
Is achieving open and accountable decision making.	79
Should respond specifically to each recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny.	96
Should invite wider consultation and comments prior to making policy.	71

**How would you describe Cabinet meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful / successful % 67

**General issues:** Agree strongly / agree %

Members have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements. 77

Officers have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements. 73

We should aim for more members of the public to attend our meetings. 88

**New democratic arrangements have been in operation at this Council since September 2001. Thinking about all the aspects of the new arrangements in general, how successful would you say they have been?**

Very successful / successful % 43

## OFFICERS QUESTIONNAIRE

### Results with anonymised comments

#### Committees attended in the last year:

Cabinet	11
BMG (Business Management Group)	2
Appeals Commission	0
Development Control Committee	4
Licensing & Regulation Committee	1
Standards Committee	1
Treasury Overview Committee	5
Environment, Transport and Localities Overview Committee	7
Social Care, Housing and Health Overview Committee	4
Health Sub Committee	2
Learning, Community and Economic Development Overview Committee	6
Other overview and scrutiny groups, e.g. review groups, panels, sub- committees, etc.	4
Others (please list): Council	

#### Council meetings:

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Should be themed to concentrate on particular issues.	0	6	0	2	2
Should always set aside time to receive reports on the Cabinets activities.	1	6	2	0	0
Should always set aside time to receive items from Overview & Scrutiny.	1	5	3	0	0
Should be the Council's main forum for political debate.	2	6	1	1	0
Are not needed every month.	4	2	5	0	0

#### **How would you describe Council meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful	0	<b>Why?</b>
Successful	3	12: Views and decisions have been reached overall 7: They generally achieved the required result but I am not sure that they added any value to the decision already taken or if democracy took place
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	1	8: I have not attended any Council meetings
Unsuccessful	3	12: Generally they are not an effective use of time , and extensive (hostile) debate tends to present the Council in a unfavourable light 4: Too long and not 'strategic' or focused on community leadership
Very unsuccessful	3	9: Overly long and pre-occupied with organisations services

#### **Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about Council Meetings:**

12: More time discipline on Member contributions, both by Member and in aggregate over each item, would significantly improve public perceptions of what is going on

11: Haven't attended as there has been no need nor any route for officers to contribute at the meeting thus not a good use of Resource

**Overview and Scrutiny:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Is a suitable forum for local issues <i>7: is for all issues, not just local</i>	0	7	3	1	0
Needs a co-ordination board to allocate and prioritise work	3	1	1	4	2
Should be able to carry out more work on reviewing and developing policies	5	7	0	0	0
Should have a dedicated panel to consider call-ins	1	6	1	3	1
Should have a dedicated panel to consider council performance	0	5	3	2	1
Should have a dedicated panel to consider policy framework documents	2	4	4	2	0

**How would you describe Overview and Scrutiny committees that you have attended this year?**

Very successful	1	<b>Why?</b> 12: ETL have progressed some focussed policy reviews: an example for others
Successful	2	11: The successful meetings have been where there has been a real attempt to develop policy or a real scrutinising of a decision. They have been less successful when they are treated in the old committee style 7: results achieved, but as above re added value
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	1	
Unsuccessful	7	12: Other overviews have had less focus on priority work, and have been less coherently managed 10: Lack of clear focus, not looking at strategic issues, not clear about priorities 8: Little real scrutiny
Very unsuccessful	2	4: disorganised agendas, lacking focus and purpose. Not strategic in scrutiny role. 9: Have taken up large quantities of time for little effect. Co-optees unhappy.

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about Overview and Scrutiny:**

12: The system relies on a sound and focused agenda, Member resources to progress it, and robust meeting management/chairing to ensure delivery. None of these is always there...

11: Needs strong Member and Officer leadership. Should also be accounted for in the determination of Service Plans so that the real cost of this activity gains the proper exposure. There has to be an understanding that past a set, reasonable point this activity will detract from Service delivery if not properly managed. To be properly managed it needs to be understood – and it seems that this is a real deficit amongst Members and some Senior Officers

4: a planned and structured approach/programme as per suggestions on previous page would be preferable.

10: Need to focus on performance and strategic direction

9: Again, it needs a clear sense of purpose. It could look at things much more imaginatively and could really do some joined up thinking instead of keep returning to the familiar.

7: Meetings to discuss called in items are arranged without consideration for the officer expected to be at the meeting

**The Forward Plan and Key Decisions:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Currently the forward plan lists Key Decisions that Cabinet will be taking. It should list all Cabinet items.	1	5	2	4	0
The Forward Plan should look forward a year, even if this is speculative, rather than four months as it does at present.	3	3	3	3	0
The current Key Decision Threshold (£50,000) should be raised.	9	3	0	0	0
Individual Cabinet members should be able to make Key Decisions.	5	5	0	0	1
The current format of the Forward Plan gives me enough information. <i>(If you disagree please state why below).</i>	2	9	1	0	0

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about the Forward Plan and key decisions:**

12: Threshold should be significantly increased. This would allow issues of detail to be removed from agendas, which in turn will reduce Cabinet business

11: We must all ensure that there is a discipline maintained about the items that Cabinet should discuss. I feel that there has been the first sign of a drift recently whereby an unnecessary amount of back covering is going on by seeking decisions to be considered by Full Council when they don't have that power. Again, this is a struggle for people not to be sucked in by old ways of working. Decision making by the Cabinet Member could even allow for Cabinets to be three / four weekly if successful!!

10: Key decisions should be items over at least £1 Million and / or be about major policy change or have major impact on Council/ local community

9: Who uses it beyond our Members?

7: Forward plan is useful it needs to be more flexible in terms of changing priorities. The forward plan tends to drive issues rather than support improved decision making. The key decision of contract acceptance is particularly fraught. Does this need to be on the forward plan?

The nature of key decisions need to be clarified.

There needs to be a mechanism to make decisions in between cabinet meetings (as the old chair, vice chair delegation)

**Cabinet:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Is achieving open and accountable decision making.	1	5	5	1	0
Should respond specifically to each recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny.	0	10	1	1	0
Should invite wider consultation and comments prior to making policy.	0	3	6	2	1

**How would you describe Cabinet meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful	2	<b>Why?</b> 9: Focused and to the point
Successful	7	12: Some have dispatched extensive business in little time: effective 11: Much more ordered this year – but, irrespective of which Political Party is in control, the process is a bit of a sham and showpiece. Much better a list of decisions taken by the relevant Cabinet Member with a much more formal public question time than pretending we are making decisions on the night. 10: Well chaired and organised 8: Dealt with business efficiently 7: All as per previous comments, successful but little value added
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	2	4: One-dimensional meetings unless public interest aroused. Even then, Cabinet decisions tend to go through irrespectively. Lacks opposition!
Unsuccessful	1	12: They feel to be rubberstamping decisions taken elsewhere (group or pre-meeting), thus not in effect representing open government
Very unsuccessful	0	

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about Cabinet:**

9: Further consultation is a good idea, but must be resourced if it is to succeed. It might also move its meetings. about the borough.

**General issues:**

	agree strongly	agree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Members have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements.	4	5	2	0	1
Officers have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements.	1	7	4	0	0
We should aim for more members of the public to attend our meetings.	1	7	1	1	1

**New democratic arrangements have been in operation at this Council since September 2001. Thinking about all the aspects of the new arrangements in general, how successful would you say they have been?**

Very successful	0	<b>Why?</b>
Successful	4	12: Greater accountability of Members for decisions; fewer committees (?) 9: The Cabinet is impressive and works well. All other parts appear underdeveloped and hark back to the old style (is it the venue?). Backbenchers in particular seem to be a lost resource. Also information sharing across the whole membership is lost and the regulatory functions are detached.
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	2	
Unsuccessful	4	12: Little public engagement; Opposition limply engaged 8: Have not really made decision making quicker or more open. 7: the purpose of committee/member, opposition and officer attendance is unclear.
Very unsuccessful	0	

**Please use the space below for further ideas and comments about the democratic arrangements at Milton Keynes Council.**

11: Bizarrely I've ticked 'strongly disagree' in respect of public attendance at meetings because, for me, this is not the issue. The issue is public participation in decision-making. There are many strategies that could be employed to make this happen and, as a result, meeting attendance would not be an issue. Public attendance at Overview and Scrutiny is one arena where meaningful public input should be garnered.

7: More needs to be done to streamline the decision making process. The roles of other committees, such as the ALMO Board, needs to be factored into the process, to avoid duplication. The purpose of the Housing Board, which has a bigger attendance than Cabinet, should be reviewed, to provide a larger contribution to the democratic process

## OFFICERS QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS: PERCENTAGES

Percentages are shown of officers who expressed an opinion (i.e. not including 'don't knows') and who either agreed or agreed strongly with each statement or thought each type of meeting successful or very successful

### **Council meetings:** agree strongly / agree %

Should be themed to concentrate on particular issues. 75

Should always set aside time to receive reports on the Cabinets activities. 78

Should always set aside time to receive items from Overview & Scrutiny. 67

Should be the Council's main forum for political debate. 80

Are not needed every month. 55

### **How would you describe Council meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful/ Successful % 30

### **Overview and Scrutiny:** Agree strongly / agree %

Is a suitable forum for local issues 64

Needs a co-ordination board to allocate and prioritise work 44

Should be able to carry out more work on reviewing and developing policies 100

Should have a dedicated panel to consider call-ins 64

Should have a dedicated panel to consider council performance 50

Should have a dedicated panel to consider policy framework documents 50

### **How would you describe Overview and Scrutiny committees that you have attended this year?**

Very successful/ Successful % 23

### **The Forward Plan and Key Decisions:** Agree strongly / agree %

Currently the forward plan lists Key Decisions that Cabinet will be taking. It should list all Cabinet items. 50

The Forward Plan should look forward a year, even if this is speculative, rather than four months as it does at present. 50

The current Key Decision Threshold (£50,000) should be raised. 100

Individual Cabinet members should be able to make Key Decisions. 100

The current format of the Forward Plan gives me enough information. 92

<b><u>Cabinet:</u></b>	Agree strongly / agree %
Is achieving open and accountable decision making.	50
Should respond specifically to each recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny.	83
Should invite wider consultation and comments prior to making policy.	27

**How would you describe Cabinet meetings that you have attended this year?**

Very successful / successful % 75

<b><u>General issues:</u></b>	Agree strongly / agree %
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Members have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements.	82
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Officers have had difficulty adjusting to the new democratic arrangements.	67
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We should aim for more members of the public to attend our meetings.	80
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**New democratic arrangements have been in operation at this Council since September 2001. Thinking about all the aspects of the new arrangements in general, how successful would you say they have been?**

Very successful / successful %	40
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