



## Buckinghamshire County Council

### Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Community and Environmental Services

**Title:** Committee and Task and Finish Groups Work Programme 2005-2006

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**Relevant Portfolios:** Community Services, Deputy Leader, Strategic Planning, Transportation

**Background Documents:** Corporate Plan 2005- 2009

#### Summary

This report proposes that the Committee adopt a fourfold approach to its work over the next year. It is proposed that the full Committee consider three new reviews and quarterly monitoring of service performance against the Council's community and environmental aims. The full Committee will also consider occasional one-off items and topics that are raised by prospective Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions. The Community and Environment Task & Finish Groups will tackle single-issue topics and report back to the Committee. The Committee's Corporate Task Group members will in addition to their corporate budget work be asked to consider Performance Reviews of services and report to the Committee.

#### Recommendation

**The Committee is asked to consider, amend as appropriate and adopt the draft work programme at Appendix 1 in the light of the factors discussed in the report.**

#### Background information

- 1 The Local Government Act 2000 established a clear distinction between the role of the executive (the Cabinet) in proposing and implementing policies, and the role of non-executive members in reviewing policy and scrutinising the executive.
- 2 The roles of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) are to:
  - a. Consider and, where necessary, question, decisions made by the Cabinet, including where appropriate calling in decisions for scrutiny.

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- b. Examine significant national and local issues that are affecting or are likely to affect public services in Buckinghamshire and scrutinise the response and future plans of the County Council and its partners.
  - c. Identify whether Council policies are achieving the planned aims, priorities and outcomes and recommend changes or new policy.
  - d. Test the effectiveness of service delivery and partnerships including the performance of all partners and make recommendations for improvement.
3. In undertaking this work OSC members are first and foremost community leaders and advocates. Issues of public concern, where the OSC can make a real difference must be at the heart of all the Committee's work. The primary focus is therefore not on generating new Council work but on the impact of decisions that the Cabinet/ Council and partner organisations, have on our community. The past four years has shown in Buckinghamshire that OSCs are at their most effective when they can influence decisions 'upstream' before they are made and so ensure that the right decisions are taken in the first place.

### **Deciding the Work Programme**

4. Overview and Scrutiny is member-led. It is the Committee's collective decision which topics they review and it is the Committee members who decide how often they wish to meet, set the agenda for reviews, ask questions, gather information and decide what information and recommendations should be included in the final report. Under the Council's constitution the work programme is submitted to full Council in May each year, but this necessarily moves on during the year to reflect local issues that arise and prospective Cabinet decisions.
5. Local government has the power to consider any matter that relates to the general well being of their local population. OSCs can therefore consider matters that are not the responsibility of the local authority but which affect residents and the public services they receive. For example, a resident has raised, via their local MP, concerns about flooding in Buckingham and as Chairman I propose that this issue be considered with the Environment Agency at the December meeting as part of the annual report on Flooding. This external scrutiny role is becoming more important as the County Council continues to provide more services with partners to improve resident's quality of life through partnerships. The Committee therefore needs to have an overview of the Bucks Strategic Partnership, local Public Service Agreements and the prospective Local Area Agreement.

### **Ways of Working**

6. I consider that it is important that the OSC makes real changes and produces real results from our work. Agendas for meetings will therefore be limited to a maximum of four items – other than working group updates - so that members can properly debate the issues, arrive at considered findings and propose recommendations to Cabinet which are based on substantive evidence.
7. In addition to the main meetings, members can also work in small groups between meetings or undertake site visits (e.g. to waste sites or other local authorities) sometimes in groups and also individually. Local site visits can be a particularly valuable way of seeing work going on and meeting both Council employees and

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service users. Visits to other councils enable best practice to be identified and useful ideas to be picked up on how to improve services in Buckinghamshire. Working in Task & Finish (T&F) groups allows work to proceed more quickly and enables members to have more informal discussions with Council employees and others. T & F Groups based on the core membership for the Community and the Environment groups will therefore only deal with one topic at a time and will complete the review in no more than four or five months.

8. Findings and draft recommendations from both full Committee and T & F Group reviews will be discussed with the appropriate Cabinet Member(s), the Strategic Director and relevant partner organizations. The consultees advise on matters of fact and provide opinions on the recommendations. They have no right to change the OSC's report but it is important to ensure that there are no factual mistakes, that the recommendations are seen to have a sound basis and that there should be "no surprises" once a report finally goes to the Cabinet for consideration.
9. It is important that, once the Cabinet, Cabinet Member or any other body, has accepted an OSC's recommendations monitoring takes place to ensure that they are implemented. OSCs should include in their recommendations a requirement for an action plan to be produced and identify a date or dates when the Cabinet Member or senior managers are asked to report back to the OSC on progress. One OSC member will also act as the monitoring link with the service(s) implementing the recommendations so that they can advise the Committee if action is not being taken.

### The Proposed Work Programme

10. The proposed work programme is set out in chronological order in *Appendix 1*. The differing roles of the OSC summarized in paragraph 2 above illustrate the need for the Committee to be a 'critical friend' for Cabinet and to prioritise issues of local concern. The programme is based upon the preferences of members communicated to the Policy Officer as well as the views of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman following the OSC's June discussions with Cabinet Members and subsequent meetings.

### A Monitoring of Past Reviews

11. A full schedule of the previous work of the Environment OSC is set out in *Appendix 2*. It is proposed that the action to implement the Cabinet's previous decisions be monitored by the full Committee for the following reviews.
  - **Agenda 21 and the Council's Environmental Impact** – An assessment of the November full Council report of the Deputy Leader and how the Council is providing environmental leadership to the wider community.
  - **Emergency Planning and the Council's State of Preparedness** – An update on progress with the Action Plan to improve the Council's capacity to manage the impacts of a major incident.
  - **Drugs and Young People** – A progress review of this piece of work which looked at how the Council deals with the issue of drugs, identified just how readily available such illegal substances are and made recommendations on how they should be dealt with.

12. Subject to the agreement of the Committee that these are the past reviews that members wish to monitor in the next year, then other past reviews will not be monitored unless individual Members wish to pick them up and report progress along the lines set out in paragraph 9.

**B Whole Committee Reviews**

13. The table at *Appendix 3* ranks the topics that Members voted for in August. Of the Environment topics Housing Growth & Infrastructure was top, followed by Waste and joint third were Congestion, Public Transport & Alternatives to the Car and Speed Reviews. Congestion is the first topic for the Environment T&F Group and a Scoping Paper is to be considered under Item 8. The prospective questions for the whole Committee reviews are as follows:

*CP* **Housing Growth & Infrastructure** – Are the number of new houses proposed for Buckinghamshire sustainable given the need to provide infrastructure and services for these new and expanded communities?

*CP* **Waste** – Are residents being provided with all the information they need to understand the waste debate? Are residents being consulted on a full range of options? Are the preferred technical solutions the right ones for Buckinghamshire? The long process and technically complex issues require Members to continue to gather information about the issues, questions and options over the next year or more.

*osc* **Speed Reviews** – The Cabinet Member for Transportation is currently deciding how this area of work should be progressed (See page 12 September Cabinet papers). In advance of the autumn 2006 report on the impact of the first capital works requested by the former Environment Committee, Members may want to consider how residents and communities have been kept informed on progress and whether this can be improved? This item has not been included in the draft work programme and if the Committee wished to look at Speed Reviews before autumn 2006 then another item on the programme would need to be dropped.

*CP* = Cabinet Member/ Council Priority      *osc* = OSC Member Local Issue

14. Turning to the Community topics, Members viewed youth services as the top issue and this is also a priority in the Corporate Plan for the Community Services portfolio. In joint second were Safer Communities including Anti Social Behaviour, Drugs and Gypsies & Travellers. The potential approach to these topics and the questions which could be addressed are as follows:

*CP* **Youth Services** – Are all the County Councils services set up to engage with young people and help them get employment, be active and contribute to their community? This work would require Members to check out local youth facilities and places where young people get information. The Children’s Services OSC would be consulted on the draft report.

*osc* **Drugs** - The Drug issue is a subject that the OSC reported on in 2003. Members could review progress as proposed in paragraph 11 and also monitor progress of the Council and partner’s achievement against the prospective Public Service Agreement target.

**C Task & Finish Groups**

15. Once the **Environment** T&F Group completes their review of Congestion they could be asked to investigate the following topics and questions:
- CP* **Public Transport & Alternatives to the Car** – As a follow up to the Congestion Review all members could look at non- car transport options in their local community. The T&F Group could then investigate with reference to best practice in other areas how improvements could be made to make these options more attractive?
  - osc* **The Use of Byways by Motorised Vehicles** – A check of the impact on the countryside from the January 2004 report and subsequent change in policy would be best undertaken by the T&F Group following member site visits with officers and concerned members of the public.
16. The **Community** T&F Group could be asked to investigate and report on the following topics and question over the coming year:
- CP* **Safer Communities and Anti Social Behaviour** – Will current changes in the funding and organisation of the way local authorities approach anti social behaviour limit Buckinghamshire's capacity to tackle both low level crime and the fear of crime?
  - osc* **Gypsies & Travellers** – Is the trend towards less transient encampments and more permanent sites being tackled appropriately by the County and District Councils?

**D The Council's Change Programme, Performance Monitoring and Reviews**

17. The Committee also has a remit to look at cross- cutting issues that have an impact on the community and/or environment. At the May 2005 meeting members considered the Getting Closer to Communities (GC2C) programme and the potential organisation of Council services based on 24 local community areas. As part of the 2005-06 programme to pilot this approach in 5 areas the Strategic Director for Transportation and Strategic Planning has asked that Members review the process and progress as a 'critical friend'. It is proposed that this takes place at the six and twelve month stages of the pilots in advance of reports to Cabinet and Council.
18. Part of the role of the OSC is to make sure that the executive and their services are delivering on the aims and targets set by Council in the Corporate Plan. Day to day performance management is the responsibility of the Cabinet Members who along with their Planning Advisory Groups consider and put in place corrective action to address under performance. The OSC's role is to check that this corrective action raises service performance. In particular the OSC can add value by monitoring on a quarterly basis whether services, portfolios and the whole Council are on track to achieve the 33 'community and environment' targets in the Corporate Plan. The OSC will therefore need to have an overview of the quarterly performance reports that are submitted to Cabinet.

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19. One specific task for the OSC in the next year is to consider the result of the Audit Commission's inspection of Environment – transport, waste and planning – and comment on and monitor the action plan to address identified weaknesses.
20. As part of the Council's on going aim of providing services that are seen as Value for Money, the OSC has a role in ensuring that the recommendations for services within its remit which have undergone Performance Review are acceptable to the public. As this scrutiny task will be intermittent over the next three years it is proposed that the Committee's members on the Corporate Task Group (CTG) consider the draft recommendations from each Performance Review. If the changes to the service are seen as unacceptable to the CTG members and their alternative proposals are not taken up and/or reported to Cabinet for consideration then the CTG can report the matter to the full Committee.

### **Questions and Views Sought**

21. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Community and Environmental Services are sought on whether the above proposals and the attached appendices achieve the correct balance for the 2005-06 work programme.