

# **2014/15 Annual Report of Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committees**

**Buckinghamshire County Council**







April 2015





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# How Scrutiny works at the County Council

The role of the Select Committees is to hold decision-makers to public account, providing a check and balance on the power of the executive. Scrutiny is a statutory responsibility and at the County Council the Select Committees work by conducting Inquiries into issues and making evidence-based recommendations for improvements.

At the County Council the majority of significant decisions are taken by the executive (Cabinet). Under this system of governance, scrutiny is a key way in which the other County Councillors—the non-executive—can improve the quality of life for Buckinghamshire residents by influencing the development of policy and practice.

The scrutiny function is carried out at Buckinghamshire County Council by four Select Committees. These consist of non-executive County Councillors and provide cross-party independent challenge.



## **Val Letheren**

Chairman  
Education, Skills and  
Children's Services  
Select Committee



## **Warren Whyte**

Chairman  
Environment, Transport  
and Locality Services  
Select Committee



## **Brian Roberts**

Chairman  
Finance, Performance  
and Resources Select  
Committee



## **Angela**

## **Macpherson**

Chairman  
Health and Adult Social  
Care Select Committee

## Involving the Public

Select Committees aim to provide a voice for the public and involve residents in different ways. This includes:

A facility for the public to ask questions at Select Committee meetings.

- ⇒ Enabling the public to suggest topics for Inquiries.
- ⇒ Involving the public in Inquiries—for example this year the Education, Skills and Children's Select Committee gathered views from teachers across Bucks on how to improve internet safety.
- ⇒ Making meetings accessible for public viewings. All committee meetings are open to the public to attend, except in exceptional circumstances where confidential information is discussed. All Select Committee meetings are also webcast.
- ⇒ Engaging with our 400 followers on Twitter, enabling them to find out the latest news about the work of scrutiny.

## Education, Skills and Children's Services

The Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee considers policies and services relating to education, skills, children and young people.

It comprises of eleven County Councillors, along with representatives from the primary and secondary school sectors, and representatives of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

The top priority for the Select Committee has this year been supporting the Council's response to the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services in light of the inadequate rating. Our work has included:

- ⇒ Regular monthly public Select Committee meetings holding decision-makers and senior officers to account for the development and delivery of the Improvement Plan.
- ⇒ Engaging with Council partners on joint working, in particular via the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB).
- ⇒ Observing informal project work stream meetings to ascertain progress in delivery of the Improvement Plan.
- ⇒ Holding an urgent emergency meeting of the Select Committee in November 2014 to consider the draft Improvement Plan. The Committee meet and made immediate recommendations to Cabinet highlighting the need for some changes. In particular, the need to clarify the actions for the BSCB.

### Looking ahead 2015/16

The Committee will continue to monitor the performance of the new Children's Social Care and Learning Business Unit, including regular oversight of progress in Children's Services.

### Key achievements:

- ⇒ Since September 2014 holding regular sessions to hold the executive and partners to account on implementing the Children's Services Improvement Plan, following the Ofsted Inspection.
- ⇒ Making a short report with recommendations to Cabinet on changes to strengthen the draft Improvement Plan in Autumn 2014, some of which were taken into account in the revised draft agreed by Cabinet.
- ⇒ Making an Inquiry report and recommendations to Cabinet and partners on Child Internet Safety.
- ⇒ Ensuring that there is public accountability for public services even when these are delivered by external providers, for example examining the services delivered by the Bucks Learning Trust.
- ⇒ Holding a special meeting to publically hold grammar school headteachers to account for the 11 Plus results and methodology.

### Inquiries 2014/15

- ⇒ Children's Services Improvement Plan Inquiry (completed)
- ⇒ Internet Safety Inquiry (completed)

A new Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation will be launched to examine preventative action in Buckinghamshire.

## Children's Internet Safety Inquiry

The Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee carried out an in-depth inquiry into Children's Internet Safety to consider how local partner agencies, including the County Council, promote children and young people's safe use of the internet. The Inquiry received evidence from local partners and national experts and through drawing together the evidence it has received aims to flag some of the examples of local practice and put forward recommendations to contribute to this important agenda for the protection of children. The Inquiry set out to consider how the key messages around cyber safety are being delivered to children, young people, parents and professionals and explore some current examples of good practice.

During the Inquiry Members of the committee were able to visit the McAfee Cyber Security Exhibition and tutorial centre at Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire and seen first-hand the training facilities and training facilitators available to young people and schools to promote cyber safety awareness. Members of the Select Committee also visited schools and spoke to school leaders and see some of the activities first hand, including visits to Stoke Poges School in Buckinghamshire.



*Members of the Select Committee visit the McAfee Cyber Security Exhibition at Bletchley*

### Membership

- Mrs M Aston
- Mr J Chilver
- Mr D Dhillon (Vice Chairman)
- Mr P Gomm
- Mr P Irwin
- Mrs V Letheren (Chairman)
- Mrs W Mallen
- Mr M Shaw
- Mr R Stuchbury
- Mr D Watson
- Ms K Wood

### Co-opted Members

- Mr D Babb, Church of England Representative
- Mr M Moore, Roman Catholic Church
- Ms M Nowers, Primary School Sector

# Environment, Transport & Locality Services

The Environment, Transport and Locality Services (ETL) Select Committee carries out the scrutiny functions for policies and services relating to environmental sustainability, planning & development, transportation, road maintenance and locality services. ETL Select Committee is also the local authority's designated statutory crime and disorder scrutiny committee.

## Membership

- Mr. B Bendyshe-Brown
- Mr T. Butcher
- Mr. Carroll (Vice-Chairman)
- Mr. B Chapple OBE
- Mr. D Dhillon
- Mr. P Gomm
- Mr. S Lambert
- Mr. W Whyte (Chairman)

## The year in summary

The ETL Select Committee has scrutinised and monitored a range of local services and topic areas over the last year. These include Transport for Bucks recommendation monitoring, the Community Safety Partnership Plan, External Funding Opportunities, S106 governance, processes and negotiations, Trading Standards joint service delivery model, Carbon Management and Energy Strategy, the Library Service and Flooding.

## Key achievements:

- ⇒ The ETL's public transport Inquiry has resulted in the Council adopting a more integrated commissioning approach to transport delivery going forward, achieving better value for money for the Council and residents.
- ⇒ The ETL's Inquiry into the Council's internal processes and approach to s106 agreements has highlighted the need for clearer accountability, transparency and a coordinated approach across the Council to ensure it gets best value from developer contributions and appropriate mitigation measures are sought on behalf of residents.
- ⇒ Robustly monitoring the TfB inquiry recommendations, ensuring progress towards improvements. At the 12 month review the Committee were pleased to conclude that in their view 10 of the 12 recommendations made had been successfully implemented.
- ⇒ The Committee has contributed to the development of the vision for the Library Service by holding an informal workshop and feeding in views.

## Inquiries:

- ⇒ S106 (completed)
- ⇒ Public Transport (completed)



## Public Transport Inquiry: Scrutiny influencing and informing policy development and future commissioning.

**What was the purpose of the inquiry?** The ETL Select Committee conducted an in-depth Inquiry into public transport provision which looked strategically at all public transport provision, policy, financial support, and the role of community transport alternatives in order to consider how best to support an effective, affordable and sustainable transport network across the county towards 2020 and beyond.

**Key Findings and Recommendations:** The Committee held a 2 day evidence gathering session hearing from over 30 contributors, providing a wealth of views and experiences. The recommendations are designed to help the Council achieve a strategic and joined-up approach to future commissioning of public transportation, to ensure transport needs are met in the most effective way and the Council achieves value for money in the services it provides. The recommendations focused on:

- **Integration:** Members concluded that establishing an Integrated Transport Unit with integrated commissioning is the best way forward.
- **Policy:** Current policy is fragmented resulting in a correspondingly fragmented approach to the allocation of resources. To rectify these deficiencies the Committee made recommendations to improve the overall evidence-base of understanding the real needs of Buckinghamshire's residents.
- **Transport Solutions:** The Committee recommended that the current de-facto policy prioritising buses as the best transport solution for improving accessibility over other alternatives should change to achieve better outcomes and better value for money. In particular, the Council's should strengthen its approach to supporting the development of community transport solutions.

### What changed as a result of scrutiny?

- ◆ The scrutiny Inquiry raised visibility of the transport issues and challenges the Council was facing with reducing budgets, applying a holistic overview.
- ◆ It drove a gear change to review the current policy, management and commissioning of public transport services encouraging a change in speed at which the issues were reviewed.
- ◆ It encouraged a more integrated and cross cutting approach to the consideration of the issues rather than silo reviews within service areas/Cabinet Member portfolios, and a more needs based approach.



*ETL Members examine s106 Governance and Processes*

### **S106 Developer Contributions Inquiry**

Early in 2014 Members raised concerns around the efficacy of the Council's internal arrangements for the management, delivery and commissioning of s106 negotiations and contributions. A number of key areas were highlighted for inclusion in the scope for further Inquiry work. These fall within the following categories:

- Internal governance, policy, and processes for the creation and monitoring of agreements.
- Member engagement and local insight and influence in future requirement of s106 funding .
- Delivery and Commissioning, developing an effective programme and management of delivery.

The Inquiry working group has now concluded its evidence-gathering and will be making recommendations to Cabinet in May 2015.

### **Looking ahead 2015/16**

The ETL Select Committee will monitor the implementation of its Public Transport recommendations and will continue to have oversight of a wide range of Council services and policies. The committee held a work programming workshop to highlight areas they will examine in the forthcoming year. These include; scrutinising the crime and disorder partnership plan and exploring the issue of 'Legal Highs', alternative delivery models for country parks, and the council's approach to developer works, to mention a few. Committee items may lead to shorter Inquiry areas being identified for further work within these topic areas. The committee's next Inquiry will be a detailed review the council's response to flooding , exploring lessons learnt from winter flooding issues, and the partnership working and response to dealing with flooding across the county.



## Finance, Performance & Resources

During the year the Finance, Performance & Resources (FPR) Select Committee has looked at many strategic important issues facing the Council. It has maintained a regular watching brief on the Future Shape Programme and it has developed questioning Cabinet Members and senior officers on different aspects. It has also looked at other important issues where there has been a significant financial element, for example in the Autumn we considered the in-year children's services financial pressures. The Committee has worked closely with other Select Committees to look at issues where these issues are cross-cutting for instance in scrutinising the Council's contract on grass cutting jointly with the ETL Committee.

### Membership

- Mr. B Chapple OBE (Vice-Chairman)
- Mr. T Egleton
- Mr. S Lambert
- Mr D Martin
- Mr. B Roberts (Chairman)
- Mr. D Shakespeare OBE
- Mr. A Stevens
- Mr. D Watson

### Key achievements:

- ⇒ Scrutiny of the 2014/15 budget within a tight timescale.
- ⇒ Production of the hard-hitting crisis support Inquiry report.
- ⇒ Oversight of the Future Shape programme, which has transformed the way in which BCC operates.

### Inquiries

- ⇒ Emergency Crisis Support Inquiry (completed)
- ⇒ Budget Scrutiny (completed)

### Crisis Support in Buckinghamshire Inquiry

A key piece of work for the FPR Committees this year has been an in-depth Inquiry into Emergency Crisis Support. This was a wide-ranging inquiry looking at all types of emergency crisis support for Buckinghamshire residents. In particular, the Inquiry looked at ideas for how the Council's funds could be used effectively to prevent as well as support those in crisis. Recommendations were made for improving the accessibility of information for those in crisis, access to credit unions and emergency support.

## Budget Scrutiny Inquiry

As in previous years, the budget scrutiny process involved questioning each Cabinet Member in a number of hearings held from mid-December through to early January. Members of the Finance, Performance & Resources Select Committee were able to question Cabinet Members on their planning, assumptions and contingencies, with a particular focus on whether their objectives were properly funded by the proposed budget.

The work benefitted from valuable input from Citizen's Advice Bureau and Community Impact Buckinghamshire, each of which fielded representatives that gave an insight into the budget proposals from their organisation's perspective. They were also able to articulate the views of other organisations that they were involved with. The process resulted in 9 recommendations that were presented to Cabinet in early February.



*Mr. Brian Roberts and Budget Scrutiny chairman Mr. David Shakespeare.*

## Looking Ahead

A new inquiry into the issue of the public being able to access Rent in Advance has been launched. This is a follow-on Inquiry as a result of concerns being raised to the committee on this issue from the voluntary and community sector. The Committee will also be looking at the issue of prudential borrowing and other financial matters in the year ahead.



## Health & Adult Social Care

The Health & Adult Social Care (HASC) Select Committee performs the statutory local authority health scrutiny function, covering all NHS funded health services received by local residents; it also covers public health and adult social care. These Council services form the largest area of the local authority's spend (almost 35%), with its share of the budget set to grow further in future years. The challenge for the committee is to maintain an oversight over this broad remit whilst prioritising specific issues and topics to focus on in greater detail, through its meetings and inquiries.

During the year the Committee scrutinised the following issues:

- ⇒ The plans for the takeover of Heatherwood and Wexham Park NHS Trust by Frimley Park NHS Trust.
- ⇒ Progress in improving Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust services in light of it being placed in special measures.
- ⇒ Developments at Milton Keynes Hospital as many north Buckinghamshire residents rely upon their services.
- ⇒ How the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is being recommissioned for 2015 by a sub-group.
- ⇒ Ambulance service performance, and have raised concerns with the provider and commissioners regarding response times in the county.
- ⇒ Looking at the work of the Better Healthcare Fund via a sub-group. We want to see the improved integration of services delivered at pace, and result in real improvements in health outcomes and quality of life, particularly among elderly groups.

### Key achievements:

- ⇒ Completing the GP Services Inquiry with recommendations for improvements.
- ⇒ Looking at a variety of service issues relating to hospital provision across the county.
- ⇒ Scrutinising a variety of health services including the performance of the Ambulance Service.

### Membership

- Mrs. A Macpherson (Chairman from Dec 2014—previous chairman Lin Hazell)
- Mr. Adams
- Ms. S Adoh – Healthwatch Bucks
- Mrs. M Aston
- Mrs. J Blake
- Mr. N Brown
- Mr. D Carroll
- Mrs A. Davies
- Mr. A Huxley
- Mr. T Green - Wycombe District Council Representative
- Mrs. W Matthews - South Bucks District Council Representative
- Mr. R Reed (Vice Chairman)
- Mrs. F Roberts MBE - Aylesbury Vale District Council Representative.
- Mr. B Roberts
- Mr. N. Shepherd - Chiltern District Council Representative
- Mrs. J Teesdale

## General Practice Services Inquiry

The HASC conducted an Inquiry into GP services prompted by concerns at appointment waiting times and variable patient experience. Evidence was gathered from service users, commissioners, regulators, GP representatives and front line staff at 12 practices across the county. GP service provision is a complex area affected by funding levels, GP contracts and labour supply largely determined and influenced at a national level. Practices operate largely independently from each other, and service demand has increased significantly in the last decade.

The HASC made recommendations in a number of areas where it felt there were issues, and which could result in better and more consistent patient experiences of services. These areas included transparency over local service funding, stronger patient participation groups, better NHS engagement in land use planning, enhanced data and benchmarking of practice appointment waiting times, more coordinated demand management, and plans for how GP providers will be supported to deliver potentially radical future changes in the model of service delivery and investment in premises. The committee followed up this Inquiry with an item on the Primary Care Strategy at their March meeting, and will monitor how their Inquiry recommendations are implemented.



*HASC Members visited Haddenham (left) and Cherrymead (Loudwater) GP surgeries as part of their evidence-gathering.*

## Looking Ahead 2015/16

During the year ahead the HASC will increase its focus on the scrutiny of adult social care services. At their February meeting the HASC agreed to undertake an Inquiry into local community services for adults with learning disabilities. They will report on their findings in 2015/16.

Some of the other issues that the Committee will be looking at are Adult Mental Health Services, the council's adult social care service trading company 'Buckinghamshire Care', the new CAMHS service, Better Care Fund progress, and the Council response to the Care Act requirements.

## The Year Ahead

Each Select Committee has its own priorities for issues that it will be scrutinising in the year ahead. To support the scrutiny function work effectively here are some of the team priorities:

- ⇒ Supporting Members with getting timely information to be informed and hold decision-makers to account.
- ⇒ Supporting Members to have the knowledge and skills for example in organising the Annual Scrutiny Conference.
- ⇒ Ensuring that each Select Committee has independent policy advice support for research in conducting Inquiries with reports and recommendations to decision-makers for changes.
- ⇒ Ensuring that Select Committees involve service users and residents in their work. The benefit of this is to ensure that Select Committees are gathering evidence from outside of the Council on service delivery and community issues so that any recommendations are evidence-based.



### Scrutiny Staffing Support

The new HQ Member Services team provides administrative, procedural and policy support for all four Select Committees and the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel (host authority). All the team support the scrutiny function. The current lead Committee Advisers for each Committee are:

- ⇒ Education, Skills and Children's Services: Reece Bowman
- ⇒ Environment, Transport and Locality Services: Kelly Sutherland
- ⇒ Finance, Performance & Resources: Clare Gray
- ⇒ Health & Adult Social Care: Kama Wager

To find out more about Scrutiny at Buckinghamshire County Council, please visit our webpages [www.buckscc.gov.uk/democracy](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/democracy)

or Follow our new twitter account @Bucksdemocracy

Email: [democracy@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckscc.gov.uk)



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