

Scrutiny at Buckinghamshire County Council

Making a Difference

Annual Report 2017/18

Foreword

It has been a busy year across the four Select Committees and as Chairmen of the Select Committees, we are delighted to present our Annual Report for 2017/18.

The Select Committees continue to hold decision-makers to account, contribute to policy development and look at issues of concern for residents across Buckinghamshire. Our Select Committees are cross-party and non-political and our overall aim is to improve outcomes for our residents through the work of the Select Committees.

Following elections in May 2017, 17 new County Councillors were elected, many of whom became involved in scrutiny for the first time. Scrutiny Induction training was delivered over two mornings—it was interactive and inspiring and enabled the Select Committees to launch into a joint scrutiny inquiry on *Growth in Buckinghamshire* in July.

In this report you will find a summary of some of the key pieces of work and key achievements during 2017/18 from across the four Select Committees and the difference that we have made. In this shorter election year, we have completed 3 Inquiries on the following topics: Growth in Buckinghamshire, Modern Slavery and Budget Scrutiny. 2 further inquiries on Permanent Exclusions and Child Obesity will be reporting shortly. This year 100% of the recommendations we made were accepted by decision-makers and 95%* of recommendations we made last year have either been implemented or are on track for completion. (*12 mth monitoring is outstanding on 2 inquiries)

Hearing the views of the public is vitally important. This year we have received questions from the public at all Select Committees, including through the use of live public questions on twitter during the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry. In addition, the Select Committees have also heard two Call-in requests, submitted by local Members in response to the strength of public feeling about decisions being taken in the County.

We welcome and value this contribution from our communities. We hope more people will get involved by attending a meeting, watching webcasts and submitting questions or providing evidence to an Inquiry. There is more information on how to get involved at the end of this document.

Finally we would like to thank all Councillors who have contributed to scrutiny this year, Cabinet for their continued support of scrutiny and to all officers, co-optees, partners and public who contributed valuable experience and support throughout the year.



David Watson, Chairman,
Finance, Performance and
Resources Select Committee



Brian Roberts, Chairman,
Health and Adult Social Care
Select Committee



David Carroll, Chairman,
Transport, Environment
and Communities Select
Committee



Dev Dhillon, Chairman,
Children's Social Care
and Learning Select
Committee

What is scrutiny?

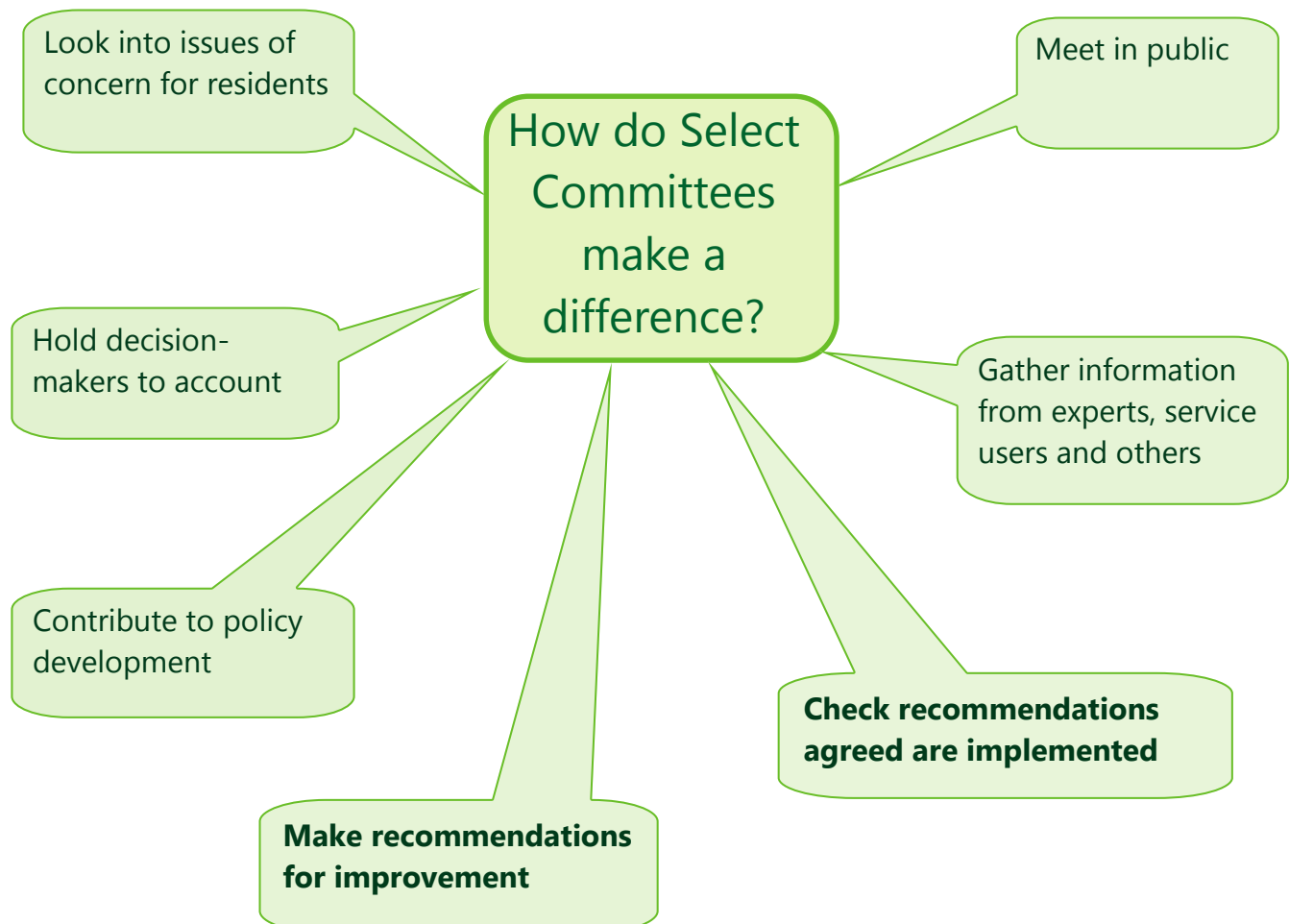
Scrutiny is an important part of local democracy and provides the legal power for Councillors to look into issues of concern for residents and to hold decision-makers to account for the decisions they are making.

Although scrutiny can't make decisions, it makes recommendations for improvement to decision-makers. Within the Council, this is the Cabinet but as scrutiny can look at services provided by other organisations, it often makes recommendations for partners.

There are also specific powers for scrutiny to hold the NHS to account ('health scrutiny')

Scrutiny in Buckinghamshire County Council is undertaken by four Select Committees. These Committees are made up of elected Councillors who are not part of the Council's Cabinet, together with co-opted representatives from relevant local organisations.

Each Select Committee has a different area of responsibility and each examines local services across the public sector.



Making a difference in 2017/18

Committees in Action



Making a difference in 2017/18

Committees in Action



Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

This Select Committee scrutinises children's social care and the education of children and adults and gathers evidence from a wide range of partners. The Committee continues to monitor closely the performance of children's social care and education services in Buckinghamshire. This year it has focussed on:

- ◇ The Educational Psychology Service
- ◇ The Independent Reviewing Officer Service
- ◇ The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding for Children Board
- ◇ Plans for preventing bullying in schools
- ◇ Plans for a new Early Help model (the Committee also heard a Call-In on this subject)
- ◇ The Implications of a new funding formula for schools and high needs pupils
- ◇ The implementation of the Children's Services Action Plan following January 2018 Ofsted Report

The Committee also heard questions from the public on the future of school-run children's centres, the January 2018 Ofsted Report on Children's Services and young carers.

Key Achievements

Hearing the Voice of the Child Inquiry — The Committee heard from a panel of children and young people when monitoring the implementation of Inquiry recommendations. The Committee was very pleased to hear that representatives from this group are contributing to the creation of a single website page (hub). This will enable children and young people to give their views more easily and quickly from their phones or computers.

Service User Engagement—The Committee has heard directly from families and children and young people. Members visited Children's Centres across the County to meet staff, parents and children and recently visited a new residential children's care home due to open in June 2018. The Committee also heard from "We Do Care" Champions about their experiences of leaving care and priority issues for care leavers

Permanent Exclusions

In February 2018 the Select Committee launched a new Inquiry entitled 'Working together to Reduce the Number of Permanent Exclusions from School'. Members have been busy with evidence gathering talking to Headteachers from primary and secondary schools across Buckinghamshire, and the Headteachers of the Primary and Secondary Pupil Referral Units, which take over responsibility for permanently excluded pupils.

In addition, we are planning to talk to parents of permanently excluded pupils to gain an insight into their experiences.

The Inquiry findings will be reported to Cabinet in Summer 2018.

Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

This Select Committee has a wide remit covering transport, environment and communities services and issues. This wide remit leads to a varied and interesting work programme.

Over the past 12 months the Committee has looked into:

- Modern Slavery Act and the Council's duty and responsibilities.
- The Prevent Duty and the approach in Buckinghamshire.
- Community Safety Partnership Plan
- Planning for the Growth Agenda in Buckinghamshire.
- The National Infrastructure Commission Report: Impact for Buckinghamshire.

The Committee has also helped with the development of strategy in key areas, such as alternative delivery arrangements for mobile library services.

Key Achievements

- ◇ **Modern Slavery Inquiry 2017/18**— During the course of the inquiry, Members were very pleased to hear of the significant development that funding had been secured to set up a pilot victim service in Buckinghamshire, provided by RAHAB, which will start in March 2018.
- ◇ **Sustainable School Travel Inquiry 2017**— The Committee was pleased to learn that as a result of this inquiry, Education and Transport teams were working more closely when planning for new developments and that the s106 policy has been amended, to ensure that costs of sustainable travel infrastructure would be met by developers.

Modern Slavery Inquiry

The Committee has recently completed an Inquiry into the Council's duty under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Councils have a key role to play in tackling and modern slavery, including identifying and supporting victims and working in partnership locally to do so

Evidence was gathered from Council officers, Thames Valley Police, the local Anti Slavery Network, and modern slavery victim support services.

The Inquiry team was reassured by the efforts that the Council, and our partners in Buckinghamshire are putting into this important policy area to drive work forward. The recommendations focus on the steps that Buckinghamshire County Council should take to demonstrate its commitment to identifying and supporting victims of this appalling crime and ensure that it is fully compliant with its duties under the Act.

The Inquiry findings were reported to Cabinet in Feb 2018, the response is due in April 2018.



Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee

The Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee looks at all areas of the Council's strategic performance, financial management and corporate issues, with the work programme driven mainly by the results of the annual Budget Scrutiny process.

In 2017/18, the Committee reviewed and challenged a number of key strategies including:

- The Growth Agenda
- Performance Management and Quality Assurance Processes
- BCC Staff Recruitment and Retention
- LASR Property Review and One Public Estate
- Project and Programme Management

Additionally, the FPR Committee reviewed the progress on recommendations from:

- The 2017 Budget Scrutiny Inquiry
- The Income Generation Inquiry

Key Achievements

2017 Budget Scrutiny Inquiry — As a result of recommendations made in the Budget Scrutiny Inquiry last year:

- Cabinet now receives quarterly reports on income generation targets
- The Corporate Management Team uses a detailed programme tracker to improve oversight of cross-cutting corporate projects
- Additional funding of £300k per annum was allocated to drainage maintenance activity

The 2018 Budget Scrutiny Inquiry

The Budget Scrutiny Inquiry examines the draft annual budget agreed by Cabinet to ensure that it is as robust as possible. Scrutiny of the budget is a priority within the FPR Select Committee's remit.

From 9th to 11th January 2018, the Council's Leader and all Cabinet Members were asked to present their 2018/19 portfolio priorities and budget proposals to the FPR Select Committee.

To optimise transparency and public engagement, the Inquiry also invited questions from residents of Buckinghamshire via email and twitter. These questions were posed to individual Cabinet Members by the Committee Chairman over the three days, and all sessions were webcast.

Following the scrutiny process, the Committee presented a report to Cabinet on 12th February 2018. 12 recommendations were made and all were accepted either in full or in part. These included:

- ***That the Council should switch to timely monthly management accounting on an accruals basis, including meaningful variance analysis/reporting***
- ***That exit interviews should be undertaken to gain insight into why staff move on***
- ***That there should be an independent review of the assumptions and cost drivers for Children's Services and Adult Social Care budgets.***

Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee

The Health & Adult Social Care (HASC) Select Committee covers all NHS services received by Buckinghamshire residents and the Council's public health and adult social care services.

This year the Committee has reviewed and challenged a number of key areas including:

- Dementia Services
- Direct Payments
- Mental Health
- South Central Ambulance Service
- Care Homes
- Public Health
- Social Care Transformation Plans
- Bucks Healthcare Trust's "Developing Care Closer to Home" pilot

Members have also visited the South Central Ambulance Service control centre, Stoke Mandeville Hospital and Wycombe Hospital.

Key achievements

- ◇ ***Child Obesity Inquiry***— An Inquiry Group was set-up in January to investigate child obesity and to review how well Bucks is tackling the issue in line with the Government targets. The report is due to go to Cabinet in June.
- ◇ ***Response to BHT's 'Developing Care Closer to Home' pilot report***— A Task and Finish Group was set-up to respond to the Hospital Trust's "Developing Care Closer to Home" report. A number of recommendations were made to help inform and shape the report on the outcomes of this pilot which will be discussed at a special meeting in April 2018.

Hospital Discharge

This Inquiry was set-up to review the Hospital Discharge process to include performance around delayed transfers of care across the whole system. The County Council, Bucks Healthcare Trust and the Clinical Commissioning Groups agreed all 12 recommendations (one partially). Some recommendations have already been implemented, including:

- A Single Joint Assessment form has been rolled out. The same paperwork is now used at the start of the patient's discharge planning.
- The requirement for Adult Social Care to pay reimbursement fees to Hospital Trust's has been removed.
- A single point of access has been established for all community referrals from Hospital.
- The Community services team now hold regular briefing sessions for matrons.

The remaining recommendations are due to be implemented over the coming months.

Joint Scrutiny

Following elections in May 2017, new Members were keen to hit the ground running when it came to scrutiny. Following two training sessions, encompassing everything from questioning techniques to how to identify and prioritise items for a work programme, the four Select Committees embarked on a Joint Scrutiny Inquiry entitled 'Is the County Council ready for Growth?'.

Each Select Committee took evidence at its Committee meeting in July, investigating with different Council departments how prepared they were for Growth in the County. This was a high level strategic piece of work, trying to ascertain how well different service areas were preparing for demographic changes and any pressures which could arise on Council services, as a result of increased housing growth.

Evidence was gathered from the Leader, Cabinet Members and Senior Officers from the different business units across the Council and from the Chief Executive of the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. The scope of the Inquiry focussed on the preparedness of the County Council with regards to the Growth agenda, so other partners, such as Health providers, were not asked to contribute at this stage.

Is the County Council ready for Growth?

The Select Committees made 7 recommendations, all 7 were agreed by Cabinet.

Recommendations included the following:

- ***The Bucks Infrastructure Plan should be promoted as a key strand of the Council's prospectus for Growth to Government to demonstrate the Council's ambition and lever additional funding.***
- ***That the Council develops a longer term Capital and investment programme to enable a more robust and strategic approach to addressing the impacts of the Growth agenda***

The Committee's also recommended improvements to internal governance arrangements to ensure that all areas of the Council were involved in discussions and plans for growth.

This joint scrutiny inquiry has also increased Members' understanding of the pressures on all services and the different responsibilities of the County and District councils. It will continue to inform the ongoing work programmes of each of the Council's Select Committees.

Democracy in Action

Public involvement in scrutiny is an important part of the Select Committee's work. This year Select Committee's have received questions from members of the Public on topics ranging from local GP surgery provision to support services available to young carers. The Finance, Performance and Resources Committee also received live questions via twitter during Budget Scrutiny which were then posed to the relevant Cabinet Member.

Call-in Process

The Select Committees have an important role to play in the County Council's Call-in process. The call-in process is a statutory mechanism to enable a challenge to be made to Council decisions in exceptional circumstances. At Buckinghamshire the way that the call-in process operates is that any three County Councillors can make a call-in request and the case is heard by the relevant Select Committee. Whilst the call-in process is underway the decision which is being challenged is put on hold.

This year there have been two Call-ins and both were centred on concerns of local Members and residents about consultation. The first call-in was heard by the Finance, Performance and Resources Committee in September 2017, in connection with the proposed closure of the Bucks Sports and Social Club. The Committee upheld the Call-in and referred the decision back to the Cabinet Member and requested that further consultation should take place with local residents and users of the Club. The Cabinet Member for Resources agreed to the Committee's request for further consultation.

The second Call-in was heard by the Children's Social Care and Learning Committee, as it concerned the Early Help Strategy decision which had been taken by Cabinet in January 2018. This Call-in request was rejected by the Committee.

On both occasions, the meetings enabled local members to present their case and there was high public interest and press coverage. The call-in meeting in September 2017 was well-attended with a full public gallery. The call-in meeting held on 2nd February 2018 was viewed by over 250 people via the webcast.



Public Engagement

The Council welcomes the public's involvement in scrutiny because public services are provided to help improve local lives. There are a number of ways in which anyone who lives, works or studies in Buckinghamshire can get involved in the work of scrutiny at the County Council.

Get Informed

Come to a meeting

Select Committees are open to the public and anyone interested simply needs to turn up at the meeting. Dates of all meetings are on the Council's website.

Watch a webcast

The Select Committees are webcast and can be watched live or up to six months after the meeting on the Council's website.

Get Involved

Contribute to an inquiry

Scrutiny work is improved by the involvement of local people. To have your say on any current scrutiny inquiry, please email democracy@buckscc.gov.uk

Ask a Public Question

Public Questions is an opportunity for the public to put their question or point of view on any issue that has an impact on their local community or the county as a whole. For more information, visit the Council's website (which also gives information on other routes for individual issues).

Follow us on Twitter  @BucksDemocracy

