

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

June 2023



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*Front Cover: Members of the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee and the Project Management Team visiting the recently completed Glebe Farm School, the first purpose built all-through school in Milton Keynes*

## Foreword by the Chair of the Corporate Oversight and Scrutiny Management Committee

Emerging from the impact of COVID, our attention has turned to addressing the cost-of-living crisis and scrutinising cross-cutting initiatives. I have also been pleased to continue the good work of my predecessors, creating consolidated metrics with detailed analysis, with the aim of efficiently presenting and understanding every aspect of the council's work, to inform our scrutiny work.

During the year, we were pleased to understand the work of the Cost-of-Living Board and we made recommendations to ensure they consider a variety of methods to communicate how to access support, particularly for groups that may not have access to our online services, such as the elderly and those whose first language is not English.

Specific task and finish groups have also been established to thoroughly examine access to GP surgeries and dentists, and to identify the types of affordable and social housing the Council needed to build, acquire, or get built by others, to meet the needs of Milton Keynes residents.

The Scrutiny Management Committee has placed greater emphasis this year on the overall delivery plan of the Council. Furthermore, the committee has actively sought input from all members on how to enhance the effectiveness of the committee in the coming year through an in-depth participation forum.

The Chief Executive and various Directors have attended meetings to allow committee members to drill down in greater detail to areas of concern, highlighted through performance indicators and resident experience. The support of the Corporate Leadership Team in terms of attending committee meetings and supporting each of the Planning Groups to develop their work programmes is appreciated, particularly by the Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Officers for the work they have carried out this year to support the scrutiny committees and members and to all the officers and external witnesses who have been involved with the scrutiny process in the last year. In particular, I would like to thank Roslyn Tidman and Lisa Beckett in their steadfast support for the Scrutiny Management Committee and my Vice Chairs, Councillor Hume and Councillor Ferrans.



**Councillor Manish Verma**  
**Chair, Corporate Oversight and Scrutiny Management Committee**



## Introduction

### What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Milton Keynes City Council operates an executive form of governance, which means that most strategic and policy-based decision making is taken by the executive (a Cabinet made up of the Leader of the Council and up to nine other members) either by the Cabinet collectively, or by individual Cabinet members acting under powers delegated from the Leader.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees are not decision making bodies but are there to monitor and influence those that are. The Overview and Scrutiny role, carried out by non-Cabinet members, is designed to support the work of the Council by:

- ✓ reviewing and scrutinising decisions taken by the Cabinet and acting as a 'critical friend';
- ✓ considering aspects of the Council's performance;
- ✓ assisting in research, policy review and development;
- ✓ providing a means of involving the community in the Council's work; and
- ✓ involving itself with external organisations operating in the city to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working.

Milton Keynes City Council operated seven Scrutiny Committees in 2022/23:



### Task and Finish Groups

Other scrutiny work is undertaken by Task and Finish Groups, made up of a small number of councillors (usually five or six) which are appointed to look in depth at particular issues. Their recommendations, who may suggest a change in policy or service provision, are usually presented to the Corporate Oversight and Scrutiny Management Committee before presentation to the Cabinet.

### Scrutiny Highlight

In June and September, the Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee looked at a range of Housing Policy documents, including a revised Tenant's Handbook and the Council's Tenancy Policy. By reviewing these documents prior to their adoption by the Cabinet, a number of improvements were made, in particular in relation to the style and readability of the Tenant's Handbook.

## Scrutiny at Milton Keynes City Council

### Work Planning

Each scrutiny committee has a planning group made up of the Chair, Vice-Chairs, Scrutiny Officer and the lead director(s) associated with the committee. The groups generally meet quarterly to review the forward plan of executive decisions, any items the director is aware may be coming forward and to consider whether they would be appropriate subjects for pre-decision scrutiny. Members can also request items for scrutiny at this point and by engaging senior officers and members in this discussion, items can be more effectively prioritised for consideration on the work programme.

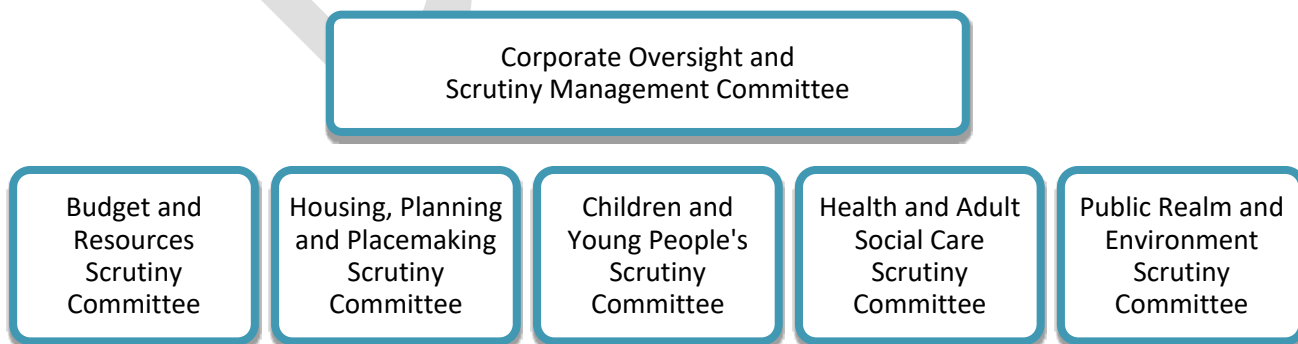
### Structure

Towards the end of 2022/23 proposals were developed to streamline the Council's scrutiny structure, to better align with directorates, and to provide more targeted scrutiny of corporate performance, the Council Plan and the Council's emerging local plan.

This led to a proposal to Council to dissolve Regeneration and Renewal Scrutiny Committee and change to the terms of reference of the following committees:

- (a) Scrutiny Management Committee was renamed **Corporate Oversight and Scrutiny Management Committee** with a focus on overall delivery of the Council Plan, corporate performance, significant projects, partnerships and community safety;
- (b) Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee was renamed **Public Realm and Environment Scrutiny Committee** with responsibility for highways, landscaping, transport, climate change and waste;
- (c) Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee was renamed **Housing, Planning and Placemaking Scrutiny Committee** with responsibility for planning, the local plan, housing and regeneration.
- (d) Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee to assume responsibility for the scrutiny of the allocation of Council and Registered Provider housing, commissioning, provision and supply of supported housing and homelessness.

The Council's revised scrutiny structure for 2023 / 24 is:



## Scrutiny Highlight

The Access to GP and Dentistry Task and Finish Group convened and worked rapidly over 2 months in the autumn and winter of 2022/23, to evaluate a wide range of evidence, undertake site visits and hear from witnesses.

This work has had a range of benefits for newly established local health structures, from improving understanding and the flow of information between the council and NHS, to a commitment from the Integrated Care Board to take up the Group's recommendations on improving the supply of dentists for the city.

## Looking Forward

During the year, all scrutiny councillors were surveyed for their views as to the effectiveness of scrutiny at the Council. This led to a series of actions that were identified for the scrutiny team to focus on in 2023/24 including:

- 1 a greater focus on pre-decision scrutiny;
- 2 developing clearer mechanisms for monitoring actions and recommendations;
- 3 opportunities to scrutinise external partners / organisations; and
- 4 improved training for members and Chairs.

It is clear from the scrutiny dashboard and the appendices to this report that a lot of detailed scrutiny work was undertaken in 2022/23, and we will continue to work with Chairs and Vice Chairs to encourage committees to work strategically and identify work where scrutiny councillors can add real value.

Our final aim for the coming year will be to continue to encourage residents in Milton Keynes to engage with overview and scrutiny, both in terms of participation at meetings and when considering scrutiny topics.

**Roslyn Tidman**

**Committee Services Manager / Proper Scrutiny Officer**

## Scrutiny Highlight

In September 2022 the Budget and Resources Committee completed review work on the Glebe Farm all-through school, which will provide education for children in south-west Milton Keynes from reception through to 6th Form.

The Committee had commenced the review in March 2021 to understand and oversee a single and significant capital project from start to finish and received six monthly updates, culminating in a site visit to the completed school just before it opened to its first intake of pupils in September 2022.

During the review the committee worked through issues such as limited supply of building materials and increased costs, but ultimately the project was delivered on time and under budget, providing learning and insight for future capital projects.

## Scrutiny dashboard

	2022/23	2021/22
Meetings held in public	47	39
Agenda items	97	83
Referrals to Cabinet	79	49
Referrals to officers	134	146
Referrals to partners	28	8
Other meetings (planning groups / site visits)	37	33
Reports to Cabinet	3	2
External witnesses	44	34
Meetings with public participation	7	9
Public views on YouTube	2,125	2,119

### Executive call-in

Executive decisions can be called-in for review, prior to implementation, by two ward councillors, a parish council, or 20 members of the public. Where this happens, mediation is available to the call-in parties and the decision maker, to try and resolve any issues. If this is unsuccessful the decision is considered by a by a scrutiny sub-committee.

During 2022-23 one executive decision (21 March 2023, Saxon Court Property Disposal Contract) was called in, by two separate parties.

- One call in was resolved at mediation and a notice was published to reflect commitments agreed by the decision maker.
- The second call in proceeded to a Budget and Resources Scrutiny Sub-Committee, after mediation. The sub-committee considered detailed information and ultimately did not ask the decision maker to reconsider the decision. Separate recommendations were however made by the scrutiny committee about the delivery of the project and how future proposals could be developed to reflect likely cost / material inflation.

## Appendices – Reports of Scrutiny Committees

### 1. Scrutiny Management Committee

This Committee manages the scrutiny work programme, appoints and agrees the scope of any Task and Finish Group, monitors the overall performance of the Council’s services and acts as the Council’s Statutory Scrutiny Committee for the purpose of the Councillor Call for Action.

**Members:** Bowyer, Cannon, Crooks, Ferrans (Vice-Chair), Fuller, D Hopkins, Hume (Vice Chair), Mahendran, Priestley, Raja, Taylor and Verma (Chair)

SCRUTINY THEMES	SCRUTINY ADDED VALUE / IMPACT
Annual Report	Reviewed the draft Scrutiny Annual Report prior to submission to Council
Work Programmes	Agreed the scrutiny committee’s work programmes.
Task and Finish Groups	Agreed to establish Task and Finish Groups on the provision of NHS GP’s and Dentists; Green MK; and adoption issues in new estates. Received interim and final report from the GP and Dentist Task and Finish Group and interim reports from the Housing Needs Task and Finish Group.
Quarterly Performance Reports	Scrutinised the Council’s quarterly performance reports and made recommendations for service improvement to Cabinet members and officers.
Impact of Task and Finish Group Recommendations	Scrutinised whether there had been any impact from the recommendations of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group on the Council’s Sustainability Strategy and progress towards carbon neutrality.
Cost of Living Crisis	Scrutinised the Council’s response to the cost of living crisis and the ‘Winter Plan’.
Annual Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Local Area Commander	Received the annual report of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Local Area Commander and provided an opportunity for all members to scrutinise particular issues of concern around crime and community safety.
Effectiveness of Scrutiny at MKCC	Carried out an all member survey on the effectiveness of scrutiny and highlighted areas of improvement for 2023/24.
Review of Terms of References	Carried out an annual review of the Terms of References for each Committee to ensure they are kept up to date.
Reports from Chairs	Received quarterly updates from the Chairs of Committees



## 2. Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee

The Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee provides scrutiny of the Council's budget, financial processes, and the wider, back-office support services.

**Members: Hume (Chair), Cannon, Clarke (Vice-Chair), Geary, Imran, M Khan, N Khan, Taylor and Wardle (Vice-Chair)**

The past year proved to be one of the most difficult financially for the Council in recent years, with a great deal of uncertainty affecting all aspects of the Council's finances.

Financial circumstances locally, nationally and internationally changed unrecognisably during the year. Just as the world appeared to be emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, global economic shock waves were caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, whilst the fluid nature of the national government has been linked to a more than doubling of energy prices, rising interest rates, and raising inflation to the highest level for forty years. Coupled with that, there has been a general increase in the cost of living, which in turn has impacted on the goods and services the Council buys in, with a consequent knock-on effect on the cost of services provided by the Council.

Due to the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth on 8 September, the Committee lost its September meeting, as it was scheduled to take place during the official period of national mourning. The September meeting of the Committee is often critical to the process of pre-budget scrutiny as it provides the Committee with an opportunity to look at background information, such as the forecasts set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for the next 3-4 years, advance information on any proposed government initiatives, such as the reform of social care provision, which might have an impact on the Council's finances or perennial areas of financial concern, such as the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Committee picked up some of this work during the October meetings, although scrutiny of the Council's Capital Programme and the rolling HRA update, which should have been scrutinised at the September meeting, were deferred to later in the year.

Some key themes that the Committee has had to consider this year include the impact of inflation, the increasing demand on both adult and children's social services, the impact on the Housing Revenue Account of the government imposed cap (at 7%) on social housing rents, the impact of inflation on the cost of raw materials on what can be achieved through the Capital Programme and how to protect frontline services.

Traditionally the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee has met weekly in October to take a preliminary look at the following year's budget proposals, with an equally intensive period of work in January to consider the more detailed proposals. For 2023/24 the Committee will be trialling a different approach, by meeting on a regular basis throughout October, November and December, with just a couple of follow-up meetings in January to tie up any loose ends and finalise the report on its work which will be presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2024.

Unlike other scrutiny committees, much of the work of the Budget and Resources Committee is cyclical, with a number of regular items being scrutinised annually. During 2022/23, this included reviewing the 2021/22 Budget Outturn Report, the Annual Treasury Management Report and the impact of the Local Government Funding Settlement 2023/24 on Milton Keynes. During the year, the Committee continued to monitor the progress of the Capital Programme project to build a new, all-through school at the Glebe Farm development, which culminated with a site visit to the almost complete school by some members of the Committee in September.

Milton Keynes City Council is one of only a handful of councils which put their budgets and other financial matters, both in-year and in future preparation, under such intense scrutiny. I know this involves many meetings for just one committee, however, I believe that in the long term it pays off as one of the contributing factors to the Council's finances continuing to be in a much better state than many other local authorities.

A point that was well made by Councillor Geary during the January 2023 meetings was that when scrutiny is done properly, it is beneficial to the Administration, leads to the delivery of good services by the Council and improves everyone's understanding of the issues involved.

Hopefully that is what the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee has achieved during 2022/23 and will continue to do so in 2023/24.

On behalf of all councillors, the Committee would like to thank the Council's finance staff, particularly Steve Richardson, Director of Finance and Resources and the Council's Section 151 Officer, the two Heads of Finance, Anna Rulton and Natasha Hutchin, and their colleagues, for their hard work, dedication and expertise in handling the Council's finances in what is becoming an increasingly difficult and uncertain financial climate for local authorities, and for keeping not just the Cabinet and senior officers, but all councillors, up to date with the Council's financial position. They should also be thanked for the clarity of their presentations and reports to the Committee during the year and their helpful explanations in response to questions from the Committee.

I am also grateful for the diligence and patience of Elizabeth Richardson in managing the Committee through a difficult year, her work in producing agendas, minutes and Outcomes sheets for the Committee, as well as her work in producing two comprehensive reports for Cabinet which reflected both the work carried out by the Committee and its views.

During the year, a number of councillors acted as substitutes for colleagues who, for whatever reason, were unable to attend meetings, most notably Councillor Long substituting for Councillor Nas Khan during the January Challenge meetings. The Committee would like to thank all the substitutes for their support and contributions to the work of the Committee.

Finally, as Chair, I would also like to thank Councillors Wardle and Clarke for their vital input and support as Vice-Chairs.



**Councillor Ed Hume**  
**Chair, Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee 2022/23**

SCRUTINY THEMES	SCRUTINY ADDED VALUE / IMPACT
2021/22 Budget Outturn Report	Recommended that underspend on concessionary bus fares be allocated to increase the bus subsidy to support more routes
Overview of Treasury Management and Key Regulatory Features	Finance Team to monitor interest rates to maximise returns on the Council's investments
Capital Programme Update	Committee to receive quarterly updates
Medium Term Financial Plan – Latest Outlook	Update on position of Council's reserves requested
Social Care: A Fairer Cost of Care & Charging Reform	Noted
Home to School Transport	Recommendations to be included in Committee's report to Cabinet on 01/11/22
Update on Council's Waste Management Contracts	Recommended that work be done on how green/organic waste can be processed more sustainably
2023/24 Draft Budget Pressures	Report to Cabinet on 01/11/22
Local Government Funding Settlement and Update on Medium Term Financial Plan	Committee to receive update on changes to the pressures in the 2023/24 draft budget since October for January meetings
Capital Programme Update	Noted but presentation and format to be improved
Draft Council Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27	Report to Cabinet on 07/02/23

### 3. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the provision of services, the achievement of targets and the provision of resources to support the creation of positive outcomes for the children and young people of Milton Keynes.

**Members:** Councillors M Bradburn, A Carr (Vice-Chair), Fuller (Chair), D Hopkins (Vice-Chair), V Hopkins, Mahendran, McQuillan, Muzammil, B Nolan, Oguntola and Rolfe

**Co-optees:** T Long (Oxford Diocesan Board of Education Representative) (from September 2022), D Main (Catholic Diocese of Northampton Representative) and I Oduku (Parent Governor Representative)

**Youth Cabinet (Observers)** L Di Mauro, P Hegde, D Nalli and C Yeomans

After two long years, during which the Covid-19 pandemic dominated our lives and severely impacted work in so many areas of Children's Services, 2022 finally saw an easing of restrictions and allowed a return to relative normality. The first meeting of the new year, in July, began as the last meeting of the old had finished, considering the November 2021 Ofsted Children's Services inspection, and scrutinising the plans and progress made thus far by the department, following the disappointing "requires improvement" outcome. Members of the committee welcomed the progress being made but noted with concern the increasing demands on the service and the difficulties the department was experiencing in recruiting experienced social workers. The rising demand on Children's Services was a theme that occurred regularly throughout the year, driven at least partly by the cost of living crisis, as annual inflation broke the 10% barrier for the first time in decades and energy costs spiralled, making life difficult for millions, and plunging many into poverty. Poverty and financial problems lead to increases in stress, anxiety, and mental health problems, leading in turn to increased pressure on already stretched Council services.

Also in July, the Committee considered the changing landscape of education in the city, with a focus on the changing relationship between schools and the council. Historically, grant maintained schools came within the purview of the local authority and allowed the Council to integrate other child related activities into that environment, for example child protection, and to coordinate activities across the school estate. In 2022 over half of the school population in Milton Keynes attended academy schools, receiving their funding directly from the Government. This has led to a more arms-length relationship between academy schools and local authorities, diminishing the Council's influence. At the present time the relationship was working well, but as more schools become academies there are concerns that this could undermine the Council's ability to coordinate policies uniformly across the education sector in the city.

In September the Committee scrutinised the City Council's response to rising poverty, and in particular the effect that it was having on the City's children and young people. It was estimated that 22,000 children in Milton Keynes were living in poverty, but we heard from officers and other witnesses that resources were limited and there was no magic bullet solution. The support provided to residents must, of necessity, be carefully targeted at those most in need of it (a theme that occurs frequently in a time of local authority funding reductions).

The City Council was working closely with community and voluntary sector partners, with the focus being on community larders and other direct support with shoes, clothing and school uniform. A project to provide free meals to pupils outside of the school term had successfully delivered to 27,000 children over the summer, through the "Summer of Fun".

In November we heard from the Youth Cabinet, who presented the findings of their survey on mental health and young people. Mental health problems are on the rise amongst our young people, both nationally and locally. The Covid-19 lockdowns, school closures and restrictions has led to young people experiencing increased isolation and increased stress and worry at the impact on their education and consequently their futures. The omnipresence of social media and its idealisation of body image leads to insecurities, and cyber-bullying is a very real and frightening experience for many school pupils. Young people are often unsure where to turn for help and can find long waiting lists when they do. This creates a situation where these anxieties and stresses can lead to more deep-seated mental health problems. The Youth Cabinet has identified a series of measures to improve the lot of young people suffering with their mental health and has formulated recommendations to implement those measures. The committee will be working with the Youth Cabinet (now the Milton Keynes Youth Council) over the coming year to lend their support to the recommendations.

We finished the year considering the changing demands on Children's Services, putting into context the many approaches adopted by the department to support young people and families to help those at risk from becoming a looked after child, or from becoming embroiled in criminality, exploitation and gangs. This includes initiatives such as Targeted Early Help and Community Support, the Contextual Safeguarding Team and the adoption of the Edge of Care, early intervention approach to child protection. Children's education was also frequently on the committee's radar throughout the year, and, amongst other matters, we scrutinised the support provided to school leadership teams and governors in September, and the city's special needs provision in November.

I would like to close this report by extending the thanks of the committee to the management and staff of the Children's Services department. They work diligently in challenging and often stressful conditions to support and improve the lives of our children and young people, and we are grateful to them for the work they undertake on our behalf.



**Councillor Donna Fuller**  
**Chair, Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 2022/23**



SCRUTINY THEMES	SCRUTINY ADDED VALUE / IMPACT
Children's Services Ofsted Inspection Action Plan	Members provided endorsement of the plan proposed by Children's Services and put in place measures for ongoing scrutiny
The Changing Landscape of Education in Milton Keynes	A better understanding of the interaction between Children's Services with maintained and academy schools to aid community understanding
Child Poverty Update and Challenges	Members provided suggestions to improve participation and identified best practice to be shared amongst partner bodies
Edge of Care	Improved understanding of the methodologies underlying care and safeguarding work with families and children
Governorship, Leadership and Staff Support in Schools	A consideration of and commitment to continued support for school governors to help them grow in their role and maintain the high standards practised in MK schools
Youth Cabinet Mental Health and Wellbeing Campaign	A better understanding of the mental health challenges facing young people, supporting councillors in their community role. A commitment to work with the Youth Cabinet to support them in their campaign to improve the support offered to young people
SEND Provision in Milton Keynes	An improved understanding of the role of SEND schools in the wider education framework, and the plans to grow the service to accommodate the expanding population of MK, to be shared in the community
Family Support and Children's Social Care Demand	Highlighting the challenges faced by Children's Services in a context of growing demand and changing societal expectations of the responsibilities of those involved in child protection
Targeted Early Help and Community Support	An overview of the mechanisms by which Children's Services are alerted to potential and actual problems within families, and the opportunities for intervention to prevent escalation.

## 4. Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee

The Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the planning and provision of housing services in Milton Keynes, including support for rough sleepers, and the Council's role as landlord, as well as other housing matters. The Committee is also the Council's statutory scrutiny committee for crime and community safety.

**Members: Ferrans (Chair), Balazs (Vice-Chair), K Bradburn, Bowyer, Hearnshaw, Hume, M Khan, Long (Vice-Chair), Montague, Nazir and Wallis**

Once again, the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee has had a busy year and only scratched the surface of all the things it would have liked to have scrutinised.

The meeting scheduled for 8 September had to be adjourned as this was the day the death of HM the Queen was announced. Due to the adjournment, key witnesses were not able to attend the resumed meeting later in the month, resulting in some major re-working of the Committee's Work Programme and not catching up with some items until the meeting held in March 2023.

During the year, the Committee was able to scrutinise proposed revisions to a number of key housing policies and strategies, namely the *Housing Tenancy Policy*, the *Housing Tenancy Strategy* and the *Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy*. These were all early drafts of the said documents, enabling the Committee to make significant contributions to both the content of each policy/strategy and how they would be presented to the wider public.

Other work included scrutinising proposals for improving the Council's engagement activity with its tenants at the July meeting, including a review of the new *Tenants' Handbook*, with a follow-up session in March on the level of tenant involvement and how this was being encouraged with a variety of initiatives.

A major item of good news for all those concerned with delivering safe, warm and secure housing for the Council's tenants was the success of the bid for funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), which will enable the Council to upgrade the insulation of 304 homes on the Netherfield estate, improving the overall quality of the housing and ultimately reducing the cost of heating bills for tenants. The Committee scrutinised the plans for carrying out the upgrades commending the Council's contractor, Mears Group, for their success in bidding for the funding, their detailed plans on how the work will be carried out and their very positive and successful engagement programme with the residents of Netherfield. Since that meeting, the Council, in association with Mears, has been successful in securing a second tranche of funding from the SHDF which will enable insulation improvement works to be carried out to an additional 380 homes in Netherfield and works to a further 788 homes across 4 other estates.

The Committee also scrutinised the performance of the Repairs and Maintenance Service and was pleased to note the level of improvement and tenant satisfaction with the service since the last time it had considered this item 2-3 years ago. The Repairs and Maintenance contract is due for renewal in 2024 and the Committee discussed with the Director Environment and Property, and ultimately endorsed, innovative proposals for how it could be reprovisioned when the time came.

Finally, as part of its community safety remit, the Committee received a presentation at its March 2023 meeting from DCI Donohoe, a member of the Thames Valley Police Force Area

Command Team for Milton Keynes, on the level of crime in Milton Keynes, how this compared with other parts of the Force's area of operation such as Aylesbury and South Buckinghamshire. He also updated the Committee on a number of new initiatives, such as the deployment of local response sergeants who know Milton Keynes well and the Force's wrap-around approach to disrupting major crime across the TVP area by working with local authorities, public health teams and other bodies including community safety groups.

On behalf of all members of the Committee I would like to thank staff from the Adult Services and Environment & Property Teams for their exemplary support to the Committee over the past year, their reports and presentations and their positive engagement with the Committee during meetings. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions to the work of the Committee made by the external witnesses from the Mears Group and Thames Valley Police who attended a number of meetings and shared their expertise with the Committee.

A number of Committee members are retiring as Councillors or moving to other roles in the Council this year, and I would like to thank them for their service on the Committee, sometimes for many years. And last, but definitely not least, I'd like to thank Liz Richardson, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, for her excellent work in researching topics for us and liaising with witnesses as well as preparing agendas and minutes.



**Councillor Jenni Ferrans**  
**Chair, Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee 2022/23**

SCRUTINY THEMES	SCRUTINY ADDED VALUE / IMPACT
Council and Tenant / Neighbourhood Engagement Activity and Draft Tenants' Handbook	Approved but with a number of suggested amendments
Housing Tenancy Policy and Housing Tenancy Strategy	Both endorsed by the Committee with a recommendation that they be reviewed for clarity of meaning and presentation
Benchmarking and Performance of the Repairs & Maintenance Service	<p>Recommendations made on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving communications with tenants about repairs and maintenance works;</li> <li>• improving the sharing of information about possible vulnerable tenants between the Council and contractor;</li> <li>• improving benchmarking of the ratio between minor and major voids</li> </ul>
Reprovision of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Contract in 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee endorsed suggested hybrid approach to the new contract</li> <li>• Contractor commended for its social value initiatives in the repairs and maintenance sector</li> </ul>
Netherfield Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Programme	Positive engagement programme with tenants by the contractor commended. Recommendation that the approach used be used as a blueprint for other projects.
Crime in Milton Keynes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress in disrupting organised crime in Milton Keynes noted;</li> <li>• Concern about the number of vacant PCSO posts in Milton Keynes raised with Thames Valley Police</li> </ul>
Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	Draft strategy endorsed and progress made by Council to support rough sleepers noted and commended
Tenant Involvement Campaign	Recommendations made re the content and presentation of the draft leaflet on Tenant Engagement

## 5. Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee undertakes the Council's statutory scrutiny role in respect of any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the city, the achievement of targets and the provision of resources to help improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Milton Keynes.

It also scrutinises the provision of health and adult social care services to the residents of Milton Keynes by the Council, health service providers and their partners.

**Members:** Councillors Andrews, M Bradburn (Vice-Chair), Cryer-Whitehead, Hearnshaw (Vice-Chair), Jenkins, Long, Oguntola, Priestley (Chair), Walker

**Co-optee:** T Keech, Healthwatch MK

This committee year saw, if not the end, then at least a reduction in the threat of Covid-19 to the population. We began the year considering the current position, with a particular focus on testing and vaccination, but also considered the rise of Monkey Pox (now called Mpox). We've stayed on top of developments over the year, but thankfully it seems that the worst is over.

2022 has seen a major positive change in the way that health and care services are funded and delivered at a local level, with the implementation of the Health and Care Act 2022. The old CCG has been abolished and replaced with an Integrated Care Board (ICB), overseeing the health and care needs of the populations of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes. Whilst the new systems are only now starting to take shape, it is becoming clear that MKCC has an increasing role to play in policymaking in this important area.

The items looked at by the Committee over the past year reflect the health and care concerns of so many of our residents in their daily lives. We considered palliative and end of life care in June, and as a result raised our concerns around funding and service priorities with the Secretary of State. In September our attention was drawn to the ageing population of Milton Keynes, and the increasing demand on dementia services. We learned about the diagnosis and assessment work commissioned from Central and North West London NHS and carried out at the TOPAS centre in Bletchley. We also heard in September about the work of MKCC in suicide prevention in the city, and the collaborations with bodies such as the NHS and MIND.

The Better Care Fund is a major source of funding for Adult Social Care work and pays for services such as the Admiral Nurses, employed to support dementia patients and their families living in the community. The Committee scrutinised the spending plans for the year ahead and considered what support they could provide to ensure that funding continued in future years.



In December the Committee heard testimony from survivors of domestic abuse, and of the support they had received from MK-Act, a charity working in collaboration with MKCC. In addition to the shelter and space for survivors that MK-Act has offered in Milton Keynes for many years, we learned of the outreach work, the 'women in work' programme, and the counselling and training services offered. In the same meeting we heard from Carers MK and from families supported by them. It is estimated that some 10% of the city's population were carers, including both adults and children, many of whom are 'hidden' from sources of support. Carers MK provided much needed support to carers and their families, including outreach work at Milton Keynes hospital, breaks for carers, counselling, and opportunities to share experiences and concerns with others with the same and similar responsibilities.

At our last meeting of the year, we invited representatives of the City Council and the Integrated Care Board to join us to consider and discuss the changes brought about by the Health and Care Act, and how scrutiny can feed into and support the decision-making process of relevant bodies, such as the Integrated Care Board and the Health and Care Partnership. As I've touched on already in this report, the development of integrated health and care represents a major change in the way that these services will be delivered to residents, along with opportunities for us as councillors to play an important role in ensuring that services are better tailored to the needs of our residents. Scrutiny will be an important part of that.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people that gave up their time during this year to appear as witnesses to the Committee. Many of them work tirelessly to support, educate and nurture our residents to lead better and healthier lives, and to help rebuild lives damaged by ill health and adversity. As Councillors we are proud of the support provided by MKCC, and we will continue to use our influence and experience to support them in every way we can.



**Councillor Moriah Priestley**  
**Chair, Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee 2022/23**

SCRUTINY THEMES	SCRUTINY ADDED VALUE/IMPACT
Infectious Diseases Public Health Update	Regular updates on the impact of Covid-19 and other infectious diseases on the local community.
Palliative and End of Life Care for Adults in Milton Keynes	Recommendations to Officers and other Council bodies, and HM Government to improve the services available.
Dementia Support in Milton Keynes	A better understanding of the support available to advise and signpost residents in need of help.
Suicide Prevention in Milton Keynes	An improved understanding of the work of MKCC and its partners in this area, to identify need and provide guidance to residents seeking support.
Use of the Better Care Fund	Scrutiny of the work enabled by this important stream of funding and a commitment to support its maintenance into the future
Healthwatch Annual Report	Each year the Committee receives and scrutinises the Healthwatch Annual Report.
Domestic Abuse Partnership Update	Scrutiny of the support of MKCC to bodies providing support to survivors of domestic abuse. A better understanding of the support available with which to signpost those in the community at risk and in need.
Unpaid and Hidden Carers in Milton Keynes	Scrutiny of the work of MKCC and its partners in supporting those with caring responsibilities in MK.
An Overview of the Integrated Care System in Milton Keynes	An opportunity for the Committee to learn about the changes brought about by the Health and Care Act 2022, and to consider and discuss the role of scrutiny in the system

## 6. Regeneration and Renewal Scrutiny Committee

The Regeneration and Renewal Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the planning and implementation of the Council's Regeneration and Renewal Programme in Milton Keynes, to ensure that it provides good quality, affordable accommodation for both the Council's tenants and those in private sector housing (owner-occupiers and rental sector) and other benefits within the regeneration and renewal areas, creating a positive sense of place for all residents.

**Members: Crooks (Chair), Balazs, De Villiers, Fuller, D Hopkins (from February 2023), M Khan, N Khan (Vice-Chair), Oguntola, Verma (Vice-Chair from March 2023) and Walker (Vice-Chair to February 2023)**

This year's meetings of the Regeneration and Renewal Scrutiny Committee have followed a similar pattern to last year's with the agenda for each meeting being divided into Items for Discussion and Items for Information, which were not normally discussed.

Although it's been a busy year for the Committee, as the financial situation for everyone, individuals, companies and the Council became increasingly difficult, culminating in a government imposed rent cap of 7% on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties, much of this year's work has been following up and monitoring the progress of existing projects rather than being able to advise on and encourage the bringing forward new projects.

The Committee met four times during 2022/23. There has been an encouraging amount of public involvement in our meetings and the Committee welcomes this grass-roots feedback on its work and that of the Council.

This year the Committee had planned to carry out some site visits to estates where work on their Regeneration and Renewal Projects has started. The first of these should have been a visit to the Lakes Estate in September. However, as it was scheduled to take place during the period of official mourning following the death of HM Queen Elizabeth, it was agreed to cancel the walkabout. As, of necessity, due to the many work commitments of the members of the Committee, site visits need to take place in the evening, it hasn't been possible to reschedule the visit during the winter months.

### 23 June 2022

The first meeting of the year was very much a catch-up session, providing an update on active projects since the Committee's last meeting in March 2022 and an introduction for new members to the Council's current priorities for Regeneration and Renewal and the forthcoming "pipeline" of agreed schemes.

The Committee also discussed how Regeneration fitted into the new Council Plan and how these objectives would be achieved in the accompanying Delivery Plan, referring a number of issues it had identified during the meeting to Cabinet.

The Committee receives a lot of interest in its work from a local group called Residents of Renewal Estates (RoRE). Concerned at what they perceived to be the Council's lack of progress the Group had prepared the report, *An Overview of Renewal: A High Level Assessment*, setting out its concerns and making a number of suggestions on how the regeneration programme might be taken forward, and how residents could be more involved in the process.

Councillor Darlington, Cabinet member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities, had responded in writing to the report and her response was considered alongside RoRE's paper.

## **21 September 2022**

At its September meeting the Committee received an update on the Regeneration and Renewal Delivery Plan. It asked that future versions of the Plan included more quantitative data, including clarity of timescales and progress against those timescales. It felt that progress might better be shown by estate, rather than themes, and that it should be linked to the objectives set out in the Council Plan. The Committee also sought clarity from the Cabinet on the future of the other estates initially earmarked for regeneration.

A progress report was made on the Fullers Slade Renewal Project during which a number of concerns were raised by residents. These included issues such as communication, rising inflation and the level of resource now available to the project. The Committee asked that these be taken on board by officers as the project progresses.

A brief presentation was also made on the Lakes Estate Renewal Project.

## **15 December 2022**

In December, the Committee carried out its Annual Review of the work of the Estate Renewal Forums (ERFs), receiving live, detailed updates from both the Lakes and Fullers Slade ERFs. Both groups were making progress with their resident engagement activities, organising a variety of well attended events over the past year. Both ERFs were working hard to improve two-way communication and engagement between themselves and the Council and both thanked the Community Engagement Manager and his staff for their input and support into the work of the ERFs.

The Committee also noted that progress was being made to establish an ERF for Bradville and it was hoped that this would be up and running in the new year. It was also informed of the plans to establish ERFs on the Beanhill, Coffee Hall, Netherfield and Tinkers Bridge estates and their possible relationship to Woughton Community Council.

On the grounds that Council strategies should be regularly scrutinised to ensure that they remained relevant and fit for purpose, the Committee reviewed the Council's *Community-Led Regeneration and Estate Renewal Strategy* which had been prepared during 2019/2020.

The Committee also discussed a report prepared by Councillor Crooks which made suggestions as to how the strategy could be updated and the Regeneration and Renewal Programme taken forward to other estates across Milton Keynes, putting forward a number of suggestions on how this could be progressed to Cabinet.

The final item considered at the December meeting was how a range of possible statistical indicators could be used to measure progress against various aspects of the Regeneration and Renewal programme, including budget, health and education as well as housing.

The Committee discussed a report prepared by the Housing Delivery Team which set out details of possible Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which could be used to measure the progress of regeneration projects, making a number of suggestions as to what else could be included in any statistical measures.

## **8 March 2023**

The Committee met in March for the final time in the 2022/23 cycle of meetings.

The first item was an update from the Head of Finance on the 7% rent cap on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties and the impact this would have on the ability of the Council to borrow against the HRA in order to fund regeneration and renewal projects. The rent cap and current inflationary pressures have drastically reduced the Council's financial headroom and some difficult decisions as to which projects could be proceeded with during 2023/24. The Committee noted that Phase A of the Lakes Estate, to provide replacement housing for the residents of Serpentine Court would go ahead as planned but other projects, such as the redevelopment of the Cripps Lodge site in Netherfield would have to be put on hold until the financial position improved. However, work on Part 1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project (ie improved insulation) would be proceeding as this was being partially funded by government grants.

The Committee then scrutinised the updated Regeneration and Renewal Projects Delivery Plan and approved the new layout of listing projects by estate, rather than by theme. Two members of the public also asked to speak on this item.

The Committee considered that there were two important points which needed to be made about communication with residents on the progress of regeneration projects, namely that effective communication and engagement with tenants needed to be maintained in order to allay fears about Council improvement programmes being "done to" them rather than "done with" them and that tenants needed to be listened to when expressing their needs, as they were more likely to engage with the Council over services they want, rather than those the Council might think they need.

### **Information Items**

As part of each agenda pack, the Committee receives a range of information items such as the Chair's regular reports to the Scrutiny Management Committee, any responses to referrals to Cabinet, news items relating to Regeneration and Renewal in Milton Keynes and project updates. These items are not for discussion but mean the Committee can keep up to date with the progress being made with projects and schemes which don't require further scrutiny, but which remain of interest to the members.

### **Thanks**

Thanks go to Nas Khan and Alex Walker for their support and advice as Vice-Chairs, and to Emily Darlington, the Cabinet member, for her engagement with the work of the Committee and for her positive and helpful responses to all the recommendations the Committee has submitted to Cabinet this year. Alex Walker's resignation from the Council meant that the Committee had lost a member since the Committee's inception, whose institutional memory had always proved valuable.

Will Rysdale (Head of Housing Delivery), Stuart Proffitt (Director Environment and Property), and Zulf Awan (Community Engagement Manager) were always unfailingly helpful; thank you for all your reports and updates.



Thanks also to all the other witnesses who have given evidence at meetings this year, particularly Natasha Hutchin for keeping the Committee up to date with the finances of the Regeneration and Renewal programme and to the ERF representatives, parish councils and members of the RoRE Group (Residents of Renewal Estates) who have all contributed regularly to meetings and sharing the views of local residents and other stakeholders with the Committee.

Finally, the Committee would not be able to carry out its remit so successfully without the consistent support, advice and administrative acumen of our Scrutiny Officer, Elizabeth Richardson.



**Councillor Sam Crooks**  
**Chair, Regeneration and Renewal Scrutiny Committee 2022/23**

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## 7. Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee

The Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the Council's Public Realm Services, including highways, transport, waste collection and disposal, Development Control and strategic planning matters and critical partnerships involving the Council. It is also the Council's statutory scrutiny Committee for Flood and Water Risk Management.

**Members: Councillors K Bradburn, Cannon (Chair), Crooks, Geary, Hall, Hussain, Legg, McLean, Muzammil (Vice Chair), Priestley, Smith (Vice Chair)**

We returned to the topic of Highways at the beginning of 2022. The tender for a new Highways, Street Lighting and Network Infrastructure was under consideration and officers sought the views and opinions of members of the Committee on any shortcomings or failings of the existing contract. Members pointed to reported delays, compounded by communications issues on the part of the contractors, and urged officers to ensure that the new contract strengthened the service level requirements, and obliged contractors to priorities liaison with affected residents. They also considered the pros and cons of a single versus several different contracts and suggested that consideration be given to insourcing of the work.

At the June meeting the Committee also reviewed the Planning Peer Challenge report. They welcomed the improvements made within the team over the past couple of years and urged them to continue to build on that strength, whilst learning from the lessons of the past.

October's meeting was devoted to scrutinising an issue of huge significance, the development of the Milton Keynes Local Housing Company, an ambitious project to disrupt the local housing market and increase the availability of affordable and social housing for residents of the city. Members of the Committee scrutinised the proposals in detail, including the financial and economic modelling, corporate accountability and oversight, the diversity of the LHC Board, and future plans for ongoing management and maintenance of the housing. At the end of a useful and informative discussion the Committee formulated a list of recommendations for the ongoing consideration of officers and the LHC Board.

In January 2023 the Committee turned its attention once more to the oftentimes contentious subject of the place of the car in Milton Keynes, specifically the future car parking strategy in Central Milton Keynes. Car parking patterns in the centre have changed in recent years, partly as a result of the pandemic and partly due to changes in work and shopping practice. The net effect to MKCC is a reduction in car parking revenue, and officers sought the advice and opinions of members on the correct response to these changes. A lively debate considered many issues, sometimes competing, but we concluded that the issue must be considered as part of the wider context and could not be resolved by tinkering with the charging regime. Central Milton Keynes has a huge number of car parking spaces, far in excess of neighbouring towns, cities and shopping centres, and this was a product of the city's early history as a "City of the car". The ease of use of motor vehicles is an important factor in the city's economic development, with low levels of congestion and abundance of parking, but also potentially problematic in terms of the city's sustainability and carbon reduction commitments. The Committee urged officers to fully consider the use of new technologies in their future considerations, including the use of ANPR for emissions based charging and the integration of solar into car parking land use.

It should also be considered as a part of the wider transport plan, including proposals for mass rapid transit and carbon zero ambitions.

Members also considered progress on the New City Plan, to replace Plan:MK. The final draft is expected to be ready for late 2024, but officers have put clear goals in place including extensive consultation with residents through an online portal. Recent Government proposals for an amended National Planning Policy Framework had added some unexpected complexity, which had yet to be fully digested. Members asked officers to take on board the diversity of the city, and other demographic changes revealed by the 2021 census, in their future considerations. Current progress was welcomed, along with the realistic timetable and the comprehensive consultation plan.

Our last meeting of the year, in March, considered the implementation of the new environment and waste contract. This is a big change for residents of Milton Keynes, with the introduction of wheelie bins, but one that has presented problems to some households with limited space to store them. This contract will also see the adoption of new technology which will allow collection standards to be closely monitored, and customer enquiries dealt with swiftly and accurately. In addition to waste collection the contract covers general landscaping maintenance and street cleaning. The Committee scrutinised the implementation plans in detail and shared their thoughts and recommendations with officers responsible for delivering the rollout.

Finally, I'd like to thank members of the committee and officer and other witnesses for their contributions over the course of this year. The Committee considers issues that impact the daily lives of our residents, and I hope and believe that we have managed to articulate the voice of the resident in our scrutiny of the many items that have come before us.



**Councillor Peter Cannon**  
**Chair, Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee 2022/23**

SCRUTINY THEMES	SCRUTINY ADDED VALUE/IMPACT
Highways Commissioning Proposals	Review of lessons learned from the current contract and the need to improve the customer facing side of the future contract.
Planning Peer Challenge Report	Members welcomed the peer reviews findings that the service had considerably improved in recent years and urged officers to continue to learn from mistakes and continually improve the service.
Development of the Local Housing Company	An in-depth review of developments and plans to date, resulting in a series of recommendations to officers and the LHC Board to ensure viability and accountability in development proposals.
Central Milton Keynes Car Parking Strategy	Car Parking in CMK is not a standalone issue, but must be considered in the context of wider plans for the city, in particular those concerned with land use, sustainability goals and transport policy
New City Plan Progress Update	An endorsement of the plan and progress to date. Emphasis must be on a detailed consideration of the city's demographics, and extensive consultation with residents to understand their views and opinions
Environment and Waste Commissioning – Outcomes and Implementation	A detailed consideration of the impact on residents of the new contracted service. Councillors able to present resident concerns and identify potential problems for action by officers.

## 8. Access to GP and Dental Services Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group convened in October 2022, to undertake a detailed investigation into the delivery of GP and dental services in the city. Difficulties in accessing these services was causing huge problems for city residents, with long waits in Accident and Emergency and dental patients living with tooth pain for long periods. The group visited a surgery in Bletchley, and met with patients, general practitioners, dentist and NHS commissioning managers to build a comprehensive picture of the current state of these vital services. This revealed a mixed picture. Some GP surgeries are going above and beyond what is expected of them, working with social prescribers, physiotherapists, pharmacists and other health professionals to provide a wide range of health and care services, in addition to supporting community-based initiatives to improve physical and mental wellbeing for their patients.

Unfortunately, others are engaging less well, communications can be poor, and patients are struggling to get timely appointments. It became clear that problems in the appointment process were at the heart of resident dissatisfaction with their GP, with people needlessly losing working days through inability to get a timely appointment for them or for their children, not to mention delays in getting important health and care advice and treatment. NHS dentists in the city are in decline. Although some patients were happy with their dentist, often having been a registered patient over many years, there were no dentists open to new adult patients and no appointments to be had for many residents. We were assured by NHS commissioners that those requiring emergency treatment would always be cared for but heard that in practice this could mean journeys for patients at surgeries many miles away from Milton Keynes and out of reach for those without access to a car. Following the Health and Care Act 2022, responsibility for these services was shortly to be delegated to BLMK Integrated Care Board (ICB), which in fact happened in April of this year. We met with representatives of the ICB to discuss the existing problems and to explore how these services can be improved.

We reported in January, with the recommendations including that GP surgeries improve their communications with patients, including the better use of online systems, and provide training schemes for receptionists. The challenges in NHS dentistry are more deep-seated and reflect national difficulties, however fluoridation of the water supply would make an immediate impact in reducing cavities in children. There is also scope to work with partners, such as NHS Health Education England and the City Council to grow the number of dentists locally and to encourage dentists to establish themselves here.

The nature of task and finish groups means that we were able to carry out in-depth analysis of the current position, and to spend time building strong relationships with both providers and commissioners that have continued beyond the TFG. Our final report has helped councillors understand better the issues faced by residents, and our engagement with the ICB is improving the flow of information and understanding between the City Council and the NHS. As a result of this we've been able to help councillors talk to the right people in the health and care system, helping them with their casework and helping to improve the provision of those services to residents. As a direct result of our recommendations the Council has made partnering with the ICB to improve access to NHS dental services a priority for the year ahead.

**Councillors Amber McQuillan (Chair), Liam Andrews, Marie Bradburn, Joe Hearnshaw, and Shanika Mahendran**



## 9. Housing Need Task and Finish Group

The Housing Need Task and Finish Group was established during the 2021/22 council year by the Scrutiny Management Committee to identify the types of affordable and social housing the Council needed to build, acquire, or get built by others, to meet the needs of Milton Keynes residents, together with the most appropriate route for delivery, as councillors were concerned that this need was not being adequately met by current house building programmes.

This has proved to be a wide ranging and difficult topic to scrutinise, set against an ever-changing backdrop, not least the constantly changing housing policies from central government and the current financial crisis which has meant a 7% cap on social housing rents, greatly reducing the Council's income into the Housing Revenue Account and its ability to borrow against it in order to take its plans to increase its housing stock forward.

The Group plans to present its final report to the Corporate Oversight and Scrutiny Management Committee in the summer and then to Cabinet in September 2023.

SCRUTINY THEMES
Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA)
Housing Allocation Scheme – Demand & Need Overview
Causes of Housing Need
Local Housing Allowance
Housing Benefit Levels
Work of MKDP to Deliver Affordability
Housing Delivery
Supply & Acquisitions
Working with the Private Sector
HEDNA Update

**Councillors Ed Hume (Chair), Scot Balazs, Jenni Ferrans, Donna Fuller, Leo Montague, and Manish Verma**

