LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT 2003/04

Introduction

The Council's constitution, introduced in December 2001, provides that each of the scrutiny committees reports once a year to the Scrutiny Board and the Board reports once a year to the Council. This is the third annual report of the Scrutiny Board.

The Board

During the year covered by this report the Membership of the Board was as follows:

Chair	Councillor Roden
Vice Chair	Councillor Mead
Member	Councillor Bashir
Member	Councillor Harris
Member	Councillor Hoyle
Member	Councillor A. Hussain
Member	Councillor McGarvie
Member	Councillor Siederer

The terms of reference of the Board include the powers of the scrutiny committees. In addition the Board has the role of overseeing the work of the scrutiny committees. The Board approves, reviews and monitors the work programmes of the scrutiny committees.

Mentors

The Scrutiny Board appointed the following Councillors to oversee the work of the scrutiny committees:

Scrutiny Committee	Appointed Member	Reserve Member
Environment and Non-Executive Functions	Councillor Siederer	Councillor A. Hussain
Lifelong Learning	Councillor A. Hussain Councillor McGarvie	
Performance, Resources and Assets	Councillor Bashir	Councillor Hoyle
Regeneration and Citizenship	Councillor Roden	Councillor McGarvie
Social Inclusion	Councillor Mead	
Children's Services Scrutiny Panel	Councillor Siederer	

The Role of the Scrutiny Board

The role of the Board is to plan, organise, monitor and review the work of the Committees and panels and to evaluate the effectiveness of the scrutiny process. The Board can also exercise the power of scrutiny in its own right.

Panels

Members of the Scrutiny Board serve on the Best Value Scrutiny Panel, the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel and the Swimming Pool and Leisure Facilities Panel.
The Best Value Panel was formed in July 2003 to advise the scrutiny committees on the best value reviews at their various stages and to keep a watching brief on reviews in progress. The Board also delegated to the panel the approval of the annual programme of reviews.
The Children's Services Panel was formed the previous year initially to consider the outcomes from the report by Lord Laming on the enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbie and the actions required of the Council and other public bodies. Subsequently the Panel has contributed to the Council's response to the Government's proposals set out in the green paper 'every child matters'. The panel has also considered information about the Council's performance in looking after and protecting children.
The Swimming Pool and Leisure Facilities Panel was set up in October 2003 in response to a request from the Executive to Regeneration and Citizenship Scrutiny Committee to review the issues in particular affecting the Wardown Swimming and Leisure Centre and all the Council's other leisure facilities. The Panel will be considering the application of the recommendations of the previous Leisure Panel to adopt the trust model as the preferred vehicle for managing, operating and financing the Council's leisure services and the recommendations from the best value review of Sport and PE against the backdrop of the failure of the Council's bid for Lottery and PFI funding for a new swimming pool.

The Bedfordshire and Luton Joint Health Scrutiny Committee
The arrangements for joint working with the Bedfordshire County Council were agreed in principle by the Board last year and implemented following formal approval by the Council's Constitution Committee. This authority's representatives on the joint committee were Councillors Pedersen, Timoney and Titmuss. The most significant piece of work carried out by the joint committee was to respond to the proposals of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Strategic Health Authority set out in their consultation paper 'Investing in Your Health' and to support their preferred option. This involved participating in a special joint committee with neighbouring counties and north London Boroughs in relation to the impact of the proposals on Mount Vernon Hospital. The outcome was a decision to implement the proposals that represent a step change in the quality and delivery of health services in the two counties including Luton.

The Scrutiny Process
Following a review of the approach to scrutiny undertaken by the Board at the December 2001 meeting, the committees and panels were advised to adopt a five stage process involving:

- Scoping, planning etc
- Evidence and information gathering
- Analysis of evidence and information
- Draw conclusions and formulate recommendations
- Report

and to apply this process to a small number of important topics (the 'big issues').
As will be seen from the appended annual reports of the committees they have done this and there appears to be a consensus that this approach is much more effective than the relatively unplanned and superficial approach that had applied previously. In order to facilitate this approach the committees were advised to continue to nominate groups of three Members to appraise best value review reports and to nominate Members to examine performance indicator statistics so that reports on service delivery performance would only be called for if the nominated members felt that there was an issue that was not being adequately addressed or that was not responding to treatment.
The committees have made considerable progress with topics in their work programmes and those that have not been completed will continue into the next municipal year.

Work completed

The Board has met five times during this last municipal year.
The Board approved a work programme for the year for the scrutiny committees and has monitored changes to the work programme through the course of the year.
The Board has been kept informed about progress on implementing the Government's decision to give Social Services authorities the power to scrutinise local health organisations and has kept under review the arrangements to undertake health scrutiny jointly with Bedfordshire County Council. The Board has kept the arrangements for training Members and officers in the work of scrutiny under review.
The Board's recommendation to separate Lifelong Learning from Social Inclusion and consequently to have five instead of four scrutiny committees was implemented and has proved a success.
The restructuring of the staff team has also proved a success although one post was vacant until virtually the end of the year.

Future Work

The Board will keep under review the effectiveness and suitability of the arrangements for implementing overview and scrutiny of local NHS bodies through the joint committee with Bedfordshire County Council. The Board will consider the proposals submitted by the scrutiny committees for any additions to their work programmes for the new municipal year. The Board will continue to monitor the work of the scrutiny committees and will undertake a further review of the effectiveness of the scrutiny process at their meeting in January 2005.

Appendices

Attached are the annual reports of the five scrutiny committees approved by the Board.

Councillor Sheila Roden

Chair of the Scrutiny Board

14th April 2004