



ANNUAL REPORT

OF

**THE CHAIR OF THE CO-ORDINATING
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
COUNCILLOR ALISTAIR DOW**

TO

CITY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 7TH DECEMBER 2010





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Preface

Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) is a major arena in which two thirds of the City Council's membership play a part in the governance of Birmingham, influencing improvements in services and the plans to improve conditions for our citizens. So while this sixth annual report of O&S to City Council is in my name, to a degree it allows Councillors to summarise for each other, as well as the public, an account of the work many of us have undertaken throughout the year. It also highlights some of the key areas on which we intend to focus in the year ahead.



We have had active O&S Committees and a strong team of Chairmen throughout the year, both before and after changes made at May's Annual Council Meeting. Of the previous Chairmen, former Councillor Margaret Sutton stood down from the City Council, whilst Cllrs Karen Hamilton and Mark Hill retired from their portfolios. Cllrs Timothy Huxtable and Len Clark both moved across to the Executive, where they continue to use their scrutiny skills to good effect. But our team is by no means any weaker as a result, with Cllr Neville Summerfield joining us from the Cabinet as Chairman of the Vulnerable Children O&S Committee; Cllr Jerry Evans taking on the new combined Transportation and Regeneration portfolio; and Cllr Fergus Robinson becoming the first Chairman of the Finance O&S Committee. I have long supported the idea of a full committee looking at financial affairs; the need for this in the current economic climate is surely self-evident.

At officer level, this year saw the retirement of O&S Director, John Cade, who had led the team since the function began ten years ago. The Scrutiny Office is currently headed by Nick Partridge as Acting Director, and despite a gradual reduction in numbers, the staff continue to deliver work of exceptional quality and high productivity. This dedicated resource is complemented by the team of link officers, senior managers from across the Council, who bring their professional advice and expertise to many of our inquiries; and of course by the Committee Managers, part of the Legal and Democratic Services Division.

This year has been a successful one for our Scrutiny Members in terms of recognition beyond the city. The first notable achievement occurred in February, when Cllr Deirdre Alden was named 'Scrutineer of the Year' at the Local Government Information Unit Cllr



Awards 2010, for the former Health O&S Committee's work around 'Swine Flu preparedness'.

In June we received further recognition, with Cllr Len Clark winning the 'Raising the Profile' category at the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Annual awards. In addition our recently retired Director, John Cade, was short listed for 'Practitioner of the Year'. We are now the only local authority O&S function to have won a CfPS award in each of three consecutive years. We believe we can say that O&S in Birmingham is leading the way nationally.

Through O&S work, Members of the Council can represent the views and needs of their constituents, help Birmingham through the economic and financial difficulties by being hard-headed in the pursuit of better value for public money, and tackle the inefficiencies caused by silo working not only within the City Council but, increasingly, between the Council and other public services. The idea of bringing public services and their budgets together - known variously throughout the year as "Total Place", "area-based budgeting" and "community budgeting" - holds great promise. On the one hand, success in this should bring radical improvements to living conditions in Birmingham at lower costs. On the other, finding robust ways of bringing together public organisations with different aims, cultures and lines of accountability will be very difficult and take time. The City Council's executive, through the BeBirmingham partnership, is trying to foster this relationship. For our part, we have brought together in a scrutiny group elected Members who are experienced scrutineers with representatives of partners such as the police authority to look at progress and barriers from a non-executive view.

Like all other activities, O&S needs to be judged on its outcomes to see whether it is successful or not. The results of our work on Total Place lie in the future. But as regards our investigations over the last twelve months, readers of this report will be able to make their own assessment.

Councillor Alistair Dow



INTRODUCTION

The basis of O&S work, as set out in the City Council's constitution, is that operating through all-party committees we analyse performance and make suggestions for policy development so as to add value to the work of the Council's Executive and also of the Council's major partners.

There is potentially so much that could be examined, so we have to choose topics for investigation very carefully, and be very clear which subjects require an in-depth inquiry. The foremost priority this year has been to ensure that Birmingham has been able to manage the difficulties resulting from the national economic situation and emerge from the recession, generate recovery and growth, and continue to improve outcomes for its one million residents. To do this we have focused on a number of cross cutting themes such as:

- increasing efficiency and value for money;
- promoting effective partnership working;
- seeking to improve services, through Business Transformation and other means;
- improving the local economy and tackling worklessness;
- supporting Birmingham's longer term growth agenda.

This report provides a short account of the work we have carried out during 2010 and what is currently underway. It is structured under the headings of moving the city forward; responding to people's concerns; and moving the Council forward as an organisation.

Overview of the year

Overall, O&S Committees have reported on 13 major inquiries (overviews or reviews) this year, resulting in a total of approximately 140 recommendations and other suggestions to Council. In addition to their regular work programmes, 9 reviews are currently underway across the O&S Committees.

Recommendations are tracked for progress once they are accepted by City Council to ensure that the Executive is acting on the advice provided. Committees are finding that recommendations are generally not completed to suggested timescales, but good progress is made. Of the recommendations tracked this year, 27% were signed off as



having been achieved, although a third of these have been achieved beyond the expected deadline.

Occasionally Members have considered that they may be a case for asking the Executive to reconsider a specific decision. There have been 6 occasions this calendar year when an O&S Committee has considered whether a decision should be referred back. In only 1 of these 6 instances did the Committee decide to ask the Cabinet to reconsider.

The above highlights just some of the valuable work Members have undertaken. The following are some further examples of key work undertaken by O&S this year.

MOVING THE CITY FORWARD

The economic challenge Birmingham faces, along with the rest of the country, is significant. The Government is clear that business is the driver of economic growth and innovation and urgent action is needed to boost enterprise. Much of the work undertaken by O&S Committees has been focused to varying degrees on how Birmingham can come out of the recession in the best possible position and be well placed to grow throughout the recovery. It has also emphasised the importance of partnership working, which has formed a significant aspect of the various investigations undertaken.

Driving forward recovery

To support the City Council in setting the right conditions for growth and innovation, the Transportation and Regeneration O&S Committee, led by Cllr Jerry Evans, this year commenced a scrutiny review of 'Supporting the Recovery' in Birmingham. This is of course potentially a very broad subject, but the starting point for Members was talking to businesses within the city to better understand how the City Council can ensure that Birmingham is an easy place to do business. There are two parts to this:

- exploring what businesses believe are ideal conditions in which to start and expand a business;
- understanding what businesses want from the City Council in terms of services.

Members are particularly interested in looking at how the City Council ensures that inward private investment is attracted to the city and then linked to increasing



employment levels in Birmingham. A key aspect is understanding what the Council's role is in this and ensuring that we are focusing our limited resources on what the Birmingham economy actually needs. With this in mind, Members are speaking to a range of local and locally based businesses, such as Rolls Royce Goodrich Engine Control Systems, the Green Transport Company and Wesleyan insurance.

Given the range of portfolios this affects, Members will take any emerging views and ideas back to relevant Cabinet Members and senior officers to explore practical ways in which the City Council can facilitate these conditions and provide relevant services. The Committee will present a report in April, focusing down on how the City Council can encourage private investment in the city to increase employment.

Encouraging growth in the city

Cross committee information sharing has proved valuable and will continue to increase in the coming year. For example to supplement the work of the Supporting Recovery review, and to look at progress on its own review, the Co-ordinating O&S Committee have this year been examining progress on the recommendations in their 2009 Growth Agenda report. This report highlighted several themes which should be considered in promoting growth, including education and skills, sustainability and quality of life issues such as housing and transport. With such a wide range of topics to cover, the Committee has focused on a particular theme at each meeting to allow sufficient time for each area to be investigated in depth.

Members were interested in hearing from those working across the city, whether private businesses or partners of the City Council, to find out what was happening on the ground and what the perceived pressures and possible solutions are in the current climate. The first of these sessions covered digital technology and its impact on quality of life factors. Representatives from the Digital Birmingham partnership and UK Broadband, a company who are working with Birmingham City Council and partners to install a 4G city-wide network, attended to outline their progress and vision for the city. A second session on Skills and the Economy was held, in which members met with the Managing Director of Birmingham Science Park Aston and a representative from the Birmingham Future network to discuss how Birmingham supports its innovators, graduates and entrepreneurs. The transition Birmingham is witnessing towards a knowledge based economy highlighted for Members the importance of Science and Technology in education. In addition the discussion highlighted the need to develop a set of core skills in the city's graduates, potentially by linking universities more closely with businesses to deliver work experience and other schemes to boost graduate potential.



Promoting Birmingham

Several of the O&S Committees have been separately examining topics key to the city's growth agenda. This includes how inward investment and growth can be generated through Birmingham's appeal both as a business and cultural destination – is it somewhere people want to come and live and work? We know the answer to that is a resounding yes, but how do we persuade others, those who do not know the city as well as we do, to come here to live and invest here?

To assist with this, the Regeneration O&S Committee (now the Transportation and Regeneration O&S Committee) embarked on an Overview of the city's Destination Management Partnership – Marketing Birmingham. Birmingham is the second most visited city in Britain and has an excellent track record for attracting inward investment. Understandably the Council is keen to build on this to improve business investment and tourism in the city.

The Overview, which commenced in June 2009 and was reported to City Council in February 2010, found that Marketing Birmingham was making a significant contribution towards raising the profile and reputation of Birmingham as a visitor destination for both leisure and business visitors, and was also bringing an economic impact from this work for the city. However, a number of areas where all partners could improve were identified. These included:

- Marketing Birmingham should be given the responsibility and freedom to create a consensus of approach with key organisations, such as the NEC Group and the Airport, and smaller bodies, to develop a valued brand and set of key marketing messages;
- That the roles and responsibilities of Marketing Birmingham and the City Council's inward investment team - Locate in Birmingham, should be reviewed and aligned.

Since O&S undertook the Overview in 2009/2010 progress has been made, namely the transfer of the City Council's inward investment function to Marketing Birmingham and a new four year Service Level Agreement being put into place. This included a rebalancing of Marketing Birmingham's spend to give greater emphasis to inward investment.



The Committee will continue to receive updates on this to see what tangible benefits result, particularly around bringing the city through economic difficulty by improving tourism and inward investment.

Addressing care needs

The above highlights the importance of working together in partnership, whether it is between public sector partners or with private businesses. We have received evidence this year which shows that partnership working is being used to tackle some of the city's significant problems. In December 2009 Birmingham was issued with a red flag for 'Delayed Transfers of Care' within the Comprehensive Area Assessment. This has been a problem within Birmingham for many years. In an average week, about 150 Birmingham residents remain in hospital when they are considered medically fit for discharge. This issue affects both the Council and a range of partners across the city.

In many ways this problem highlights where health and social care intersects, as the volume generated by the trusts (in terms of beds which have been occupied), meets the resources available to assess and place those with on-going social care needs. Since 2003 acute hospitals have been entitled to effectively 'fine' a Local Authority by levying a daily charge for persons delayed from being discharged where the local authority is responsible for the delay.

Therefore it is not surprising that the newly merged Health & Adults O&S Committee, led by Cllr Deirdre Alden, decided to look at this as their first review. This is an area where a strategic approach across Birmingham is needed and involves NHS Trusts, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), and the City Council. Regular reporting to the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership will be necessary in order to move the city forward. In many ways the response of the constituent organisations will be a measure of the effectiveness of the partnership working across Birmingham.

The evidence gathering for this review was carried out in a short timescale with intensive meetings being held during August and September. The report will go to Council in early January 2011.

Improving outcomes for young people

Other aspects of growth include qualities which make people want to live, work and stay in the city. Education, especially for those in primary and secondary schools is one of these. In order to ensure that the UK workforce was equipped to meet the needs of the



business world, the previous Government introduced a new series of qualifications in English, Maths and ICT called “functional skills”. These were intended to create a platform upon which to develop other important abilities like communication, team working, presentation, and problem solving.

Members of the Children and Education O&S Committee were concerned about the perception, particularly from several business leaders, that some young people were leaving school without the necessary skills in English and Maths to engage successfully as citizens, progress in further learning, or secure good jobs within the city. Therefore the Committee undertook a piece of work to clarify how Birmingham would ensure that the introduction of Functional Skills qualifications would help all young people leave school with at least basic levels of literacy and numeracy.

Committee members spoke to local colleges, employers, schools and young people to find out their views on the matter. They also visited Nechells and Brandwood for two rewarding and eye-opening sessions with young people who had emerged from school with little in the way of qualifications and were using NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) programmes to gain a second chance for themselves.

The report was presented to the City Council meeting in September of this year and provided a series of suggestions. Members felt very strongly that there was a need to set a challenging city wide target to raise the attainment of young people in functional skills. They also wanted to see closer working between schools and further education colleges and felt that more could be done to support schools capacity to deliver these new qualifications. Finally they suggested stronger linkages between schools and businesses should be developed to ensure that enhanced work experience opportunities for young people are developed.

In the future the Children and Education O&S Committee will focus on the pressure on primary school places as a result of a continuing increase in the number of births. It is not possible simply to increase the number of schools in the city due to a variety of land, property and funding constraints. The solution to this problem has to be to expand existing primary schools within particular areas of the city. This approach creates a range of issues for both head teachers parents and pupils. Members will be meeting with staff and governors of these schools to identify and then explore in greater detail the issues arising from the expansion programme in particular concerns regarding the following topics:



- The effects on existing physical space within the school i.e. playground, staff car parking etc;
- Implications for workforce remodelling (additional teachers, non-teaching staff etc);
- Concerns raised by parents and the wider community.

Sustainability and growth

The 'green' agenda has been recognised as a key area of work for the Council with the Executive creating a Cabinet Committee on Climate Change. This is also an area in which O&S has invested considerable time.

Most of the Council's focus on recycling and waste is on domestic waste – an important service which residents expect from the Council and a key environmental issue. However, domestic waste is by no means the majority of the three million plus tonnes of waste generated in Birmingham each year. Most comes from businesses, construction and demolition.

In October 2009, Members of the then Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee, led at that time by Cllr Karen Hamilton, commenced evidence gathering to determine if there was more the City Council can and should do to increase levels of business recycling, reduce waste and increase reuse of "waste" materials across the city. The review aimed to investigate whether there were benefits to businesses, as well as the city as a whole, in greater involvement of the City Council. The review supported the City Council at a time of change and budget pressures, as waste is a cost for the City Council in terms of fly-tipping. Recycling waste can help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions which can contribute significantly towards the City Council's objective of reducing carbon dioxide across Birmingham. Members also noted the cost of waste to business, and looked at what would help small businesses to manage this pressure.

The key to meeting this objective by the City Council was to encourage businesses to follow the waste hierarchy of prevent, reuse and recycle waste where possible. Members learned that the City Council can also play a role in promoting recycling to businesses and advising and signposting businesses to ensure that legal responsibilities relating to disposal of waste are met. On the whole, the Committee agreed that there were areas where the City Council could play a greater role.



A final report was presented to City Council on 12 October 2010 at which all the recommendations were agreed. The Committee will receive an update in June 2011 on progress made on recommendations relating to the development of anaerobic digestion to stimulate the recycling of food waste, partnership working and the development of a reward system for businesses that promote waste minimisation and sustainability.

Providing affordable housing

One of the impacts of the downturn has been the slowing of the housing market, a major drop in house building and a more challenging environment for those seeking mortgage lending. The restrictions on public funding to support housing are also becoming clear. All of these factors have created specific challenges for the provision of affordable housing in Birmingham at a time when the need is rising.

The Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee (HUROS), chaired by Cllr Emily Cox, heard evidence that over 70% of residents could not afford to purchase an average sized property on their existing income. As a result the Committee chose to undertake an Overview exercise to explore whether the City Council and its partners were doing all they could to maximise the provision of affordable housing in the city. They also aimed to provide City Council Members with a guide to the options open to those people who currently find themselves on the various housing waiting lists.

To understand what the public perceived as 'affordable housing' and how much they knew about the options in Birmingham, a focus group was held comprising a mixture of housing association and local authority tenants, private tenants and existing shared owners. This provided valuable evidence. It confirmed that whilst most people want to own their own home, many are unable to afford it and the biggest barrier to property purchase is the large deposit of 10-25% now required to obtain a mortgage. Local housing options from private rented and social housing through to shared ownership, shared equity, and housing co-operatives were explored. A range of partners were invited to give evidence, including those involved in the provision of affordable housing in the city, including such groups as St Basils and Bromford Housing.

The findings included:

- The banking sector confirmed that high deposits and conservative lending criteria would be a feature of mortgage lending for the foreseeable future;



- Birmingham Municipal Trust was leading the way towards sustainability with properties built to high standards, incorporating the latest energy saving measures;
- Ground breaking work is being done in Birmingham to increase the supply of affordable housing. This has been achieved through the positive partnership between the City Council, the Homes and Communities Agency and the City Housing Partnership;
- Despite the recession, 933 new affordable homes were delivered in Birmingham in 2009/10, against an LAA target of 800.

Recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Housing included exploring the use of modular construction methods as a means to reduce the construction time and building site costs, the potential for extending co-operative housing in Birmingham, as well as bringing forward alternative sources of private sector investment for affordable housing, such as attracting investment from pension funds.

In the coming months, the Committee will also explore the impact of the changes in Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance on Housing services in the city. In particular an in depth monitoring of homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation will be undertaken.

Pooling our resources

Providing such things as affordable housing involves a range of key players and in the future partners will need to come together more closely to achieve improved outcomes. In 2009, the BeBirmingham Partnership published figures showing the total public expenditure in the city – not just the City Council's spending, but including all the local public agencies. These figures are immense. For example, in 2008/9, the City Council accounted for £3.6bn; the Health Service, through Primary Care Trusts, for £1.9bn; Jobcentre Plus for £700m; the Police £239m and the Fire Service £50m. With other smaller contributions this amounted to £7.3bn in total.

Collecting and publishing these totals immediately started a serious debate over whether, through agreements between various partners, services could be redesigned to provide better results for service users and increased value for money. The importance of moving this on from debate to action, in this time of current and future constraints on public spending, is clear.



The Government has agreed that Birmingham will be one of sixteen areas piloting the idea of “community budgets”, which will pool budgets and allow the City Council and its partner’s greater flexibility to work across boundaries in health, policing, worklessness and child poverty.

As part of this, the Coordinating O&S Committee has established a task and finish group including Members plus representatives of the Police Authority, the voluntary sector and the Chamber of Commerce. This group will look at how firm partners’ understanding of and commitment to a clear set of joint priorities which they all work to actually is and how these priorities could link to budgets – by which we mean unambiguous amounts of money to be used by partners to deliver those priorities.

An important aspect of this work will be to test that this approach is not merely one where headquarters staff talk to each other and reach agreement, but that people who actually deliver services are able to put into practice their ideas for how co-operation between public bodies can lead to real improvements for customers.

RESPONDING TO PEOPLE’S CONCERNS

There are key issues of concern for Birmingham residents which span the range of communities we have in the city. We have undertaken investigations on these key issues and there have been occasions where O&S has been strengthened by the participation of residents and service users becoming involved in our work.

Providing an excellent customer service

Over the year Members have raised concerns from their residents about the way in which the Council provides its front line customer services. Investigation into the progress of the Customer First Business Transformation programme was originally the responsibility of the Finance and Performance Sub-Committee, but since May, the Coordinating O&S Committee now examines this issue. The Committee this year has chosen to look at some priority aspects of customer service to assess the degree to which the investment made through the programme is delivering improvements to service users.

Members wanted to understand how the service looks to the Council’s customers – those who phone our customer contact centre to request a service or to report a



problem. There have been longstanding concerns about whether two-way information flows between front and back offices are accurate and timely. By undertaking visits to the customer contact centre and to the “back offices” where requests for help are processed, Members have seen the whole process – from initial phone call by a customer to resolution.

Initial findings show that there is room for improvement. Members uncovered a number of cases that are not being dealt with to a high standard. The final stage of evidence gathering will be to speak to senior officers from relevant services areas and those within Customer First to identify where the blockages are and how they can be resolved. A report with recommendations for improvement will then be submitted to the Executive.

Both the Local Services & Community Safety and Coordinating O&S Committees have examined the location and operation of neighbourhood offices, which provide a valuable service to many residents in the city. The future location of these offices and closure of others has caused concern for some residents and raised anxiety about the impact on some groups in the community. Much of the discussion in both O&S Committees related to channel shift (being able to use services in other ways such as telephone rather than attending a neighbourhood office). The approach taken around data analysis in making decisions was also examined. This will contribute to the Executive’s future plan for neighbourhood offices and will continue to be a focus for Members in the future.

Tackling worklessness and unemployment

Birmingham has a high proportion of the working age population who are workless (20.2%). This is higher than the rate for England (13.2%).¹ The Transportation and Regeneration O&S Committee, and previously the Regeneration O&S Committee, have worked intensively to assist the City Council and partners in addressing worklessness in Birmingham. This has included:

- Reviewing progress against implementation of the recommendations contained within the Committee’s Scrutiny Review into the Effectiveness of Employment Strategies. In response to Members’ concerns, a ‘Client Tracking System’ was developed after the review, so that the City Council and partners will have improved information on the individuals participating in employment schemes in Birmingham and what happens to them;

¹ February 2010 worklessness figures published in August 2010



- Scrutinising the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) in relation to the £46m allocated to the Birmingham Economic Development Partnership (BEDP). This includes locally commissioned employment and skills interventions (Neighbourhood and Constituency Employment and Skills Plans). The WNF is due to cease in March 2011 and the Committee is reviewing exit strategies;
- Receiving regular updates on the progress made against the West Midlands ESF Co-Financing Plan, which has a budget of £113.4m for the period 2007 to 2010. Previously administered by the City Council, the Skills Funding Agency is now the accountable body. The Committee remain concerned about the lack of performance data available for Birmingham, contract management arrangements and the lack of opportunities for third sector organisations to bid for work. The Committee expects these issues to be addressed in the next phase, the 2011 to 2013 plan.

The Committee remains concerned about worklessness and the City Council's role in tackling it. A number of issues reoccur: the need to track individuals who undertake job training or other courses to understand better the outcomes; co-operation with partners (in particular data sharing) and how new developments and growth are linked to employment. This latter point is a critical issue in the Scrutiny Review of Recovery.

The community base of sports provision

Birmingham has one of the lowest participation rates in sport and recreation in the country – less than 20% of adults are taking part in active sport and leisure. This has a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of residents. The benefits of increasing participation are well documented in terms of mental and physical health, creating stronger and safer communities, benefits to children and young people as well as strengthening the economy. Sport England, the Birmingham Sport & Physical Activity Partnership and the City Council are all working to increase participation in Birmingham. Priority areas have been established across the city for promoting active sport and in many of these areas team games are very popular.

The Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee is undertaking a Scrutiny review into the issues, opportunities and problems of increasing participation in a team game, especially in the priority areas of Birmingham. A particular focus will be on the role of community organisations in sports provision including their role in becoming partners in developing new ways of managing playing pitches owned by the Council. The implications of the Government's Big Society ideas for sports development will be



examined, using cricket as a case study. It is hoped that new ways of working will be developed. As part of this review, the progress of the Birmingham Sports and Physical Activity Partnership is also being examined.

The review began in September 2010 with evidence gathering by a sub-group of the Committee, led by Cllr Paula Smith. Written representations were requested and a morning of site visits took place in October which included Perry Hall Playing Fields, Handsworth Park and Holford Drive.

The demand for allotments

In the autumn of 2009, Members of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee became aware of articles in the media highlighting the surge in demand for allotments from residents. Local press articles suggested that there were areas of Birmingham that were suffering from a shortage of plots and lengthening waiting lists. At the same time, the Government were expressing concern about the challenges facing the global food supply and the dangers of escalating obesity.

As a result Members agreed to undertake a Scrutiny Review of Allotments, which was led by Cllr Roger Harmer. Written representations were received and plot holders from several sites were invited to a meeting of the Committee. The report was presented to Council in October 2010.

The Review found that the Council's planning for allotments was based on an assumption of decline in demand for allotments and that this is out of date. It also found that public concern about sustainable food production has been growing for many years. Members of the public suggested in the consultation on the Coalition's programme for Government increasing UK food production, ensuring food security and sourcing food locally. However, allotments are not just about food production. They bring together people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and they are of particular significance to the elderly.

The review concluded that the Council needs to plan positively to increase plots where communities need them. However to make this growth sustainable we need to ask more of our plot holders. In line with the Government's Big Society ideas, the report hopes to encourage plot holders to take greater responsibility for the management of their sites and support for this to be provided by an annual Birmingham Allotment Conference.



Making communities safe

To support the City Council's key priority to help residents "stay safe" the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee investigated the impact of drug and alcohol misuse on Birmingham's residents. The focus of the report was on the community safety impact and the interventions being put in place to mitigate this. Evidence gathering for the review started in April 2009 with the final report being presented to City Council in January 2010.

A progress report giving details on the implementation of the recommendations agreed by City Council was presented to the Committee in November 2010. As a result of the review the Birmingham Drug and Alcohol Action Team (BDAAT) and Accident and Emergency Departments have worked together to attach a marker to individuals who are admitted to hospital frequently for an alcohol related incident. Furthermore, Birmingham Anti-Social Behaviour Unit has also developed a special marker for individuals where their anti-social behaviour is linked to substance misuse. This will be implemented on to the Council's Customer First IT system.

BDAAT has also undertaken consultation with community safety local delivery groups in constituencies to raise awareness of its work through dissemination of its work relating to drug and alcohol misuse issues. A new service for young people giving information and support on substance misuse delivered by "Birmingham Lifeline" was commissioned on 1st July 2010.

In addition to the impact of drugs and alcohol, gang violence is a concern in many communities. Birmingham is one of the main cities, along with places like London and Glasgow, which has a significant gang problem. Members of the Equalities and Human Resources O&S Committee led by Cllr Keith Barton have been working to ensure that there is a strong partnership in place to tackle gang violence across the city. After a lengthy review, which involved speaking to members of local communities about their experiences of gang violence, recommendations to Council were presented in April.

The report highlighted that gang violence is a major concern for residents in neighbourhoods where it is prevalent and has an effect on quality of life for families and their children. Recommendations focused strongly on ensuring that the partnership was set up well, with a strong link to communities in order to include them in the decision making processes and address their concerns. Improving communications and relationships between the Police and the community was also highlighted as important. Additionally it also provided recommendations intended to encourage young people to leave gangs, as well as prevent children joining gangs at a young age.



Progress against implementation of these recommendations has now been examined for the first time and the Committee was pleased to hear of the measures which have been put in place to strengthen partnership ties and reinvigorate the relationship between the Police, Council and communities. The Scrutiny Review has led to a wider examination of the partnership structure, revealing the need for the community to become more integrated into its work. The Committee will continue to monitor the partnership until it passes responsibility over to the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee as the review recommended that the Cabinet Member takes responsibility for the operational aspects of the partnership.

Community consultation and partnership working

Involving communities in partnership work is vital in many areas. This year O&S has investigated other areas in which partnership working, especially with communities, needed improvement.

Project Champion is a counter terrorism initiative in Birmingham managed by West Midlands Police. The Project consists of 216 close circuit television (CCTV) and automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) surveillance cameras within two Constituencies. From April 2010, following installation work, this has been subject to much criticism from many local residents and Members. It has also received some national attention. Led by Cllr James Hutchings, Members of the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee took the decision to carry out a very quick review, with evidence gathering in August and results presented to City Council in November. This was intended to provide a quick and effective response to the concerns being raised, especially by local residents.

The keys lines of enquiry were two fold. The first key question was an examination of whether the installation of large numbers of CCTV and ANPR cameras concentrated in specific areas was beneficial and justifiable. We received no positive evidence from the police or anybody else that this was the case. There is a balance to be achieved between acceptable surveillance and excessive intrusion into personal freedom and privacy. Members were clear that Project Champion overstepped this boundary and that the Project was unacceptable in the way it was constructed to target the Muslim community. However, they also acknowledged that appropriate, local CCTV schemes in Birmingham do have widespread support.

The second line of enquiry related to learning lessons from Project Champion in order to make recommendations for improving communication, Councillor and community



consultation and partnership working. Consultation for the project was woefully inadequate and a number of the recommendations relate to improving communication and consultation. Birmingham does have an Open Space CCTV Strategy, but this had not been followed. O&S asked that this be updated, strengthened and embedded into the working practices of the partners. Finally some recommendations were made regarding reviewing and strengthening reporting procedures.

In addition to the recommendations to the City Council and the Safer Birmingham Partnership, a number of suggested actions were made to the Police and to the Police Authority which we shall ask for feedback on.

This was a difficult review to conduct – it gave us no pleasure to criticise colleagues in the public service, but things did go wrong and O&S was forthcoming in highlighting these issues. There is still a lot of excellent policing undertaken at a neighbourhood level and we hope to see this built upon in the future.

An additional piece of consultation work has been held with disabled and other vulnerable people, regarding road safety. The Transportation and Street Services O&S committee, in following up on the previous years Scrutiny Review of Road Safety, held sessions with some representatives of relevant organisations. We discussed how and when those groups representing disabled and other vulnerable people were consulted on highway works and public transport changes. Council Highways officers and Centro were also involved in these discussions. The resulting report recommended closer working with these groups by both the City Council and Centro to improve access to public transport, improve signage and improve consultation regarding changes to the highway.

Closer working is already happening, with Highways officers involving relevant groups in developing the Manual for Streets, and in the Pedestrian Task Force. At a recent meeting, a representative said she was pleased with what had been included in the manual and with subsequent contact with the Highways department.

Relationships and sexual health in young people

Last year a cross party working group made up of Councillors and young people looked at the effectiveness of sex and relationship education in schools. The review made a number of recommendations and gained national recognition for involving young people, other groups including the faith communities, young parents and the voluntary sector in its work.



The review was very much a joint project between the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) and O&S Members. It has resulted in the young people involved taking the review a stage further and producing a summary of findings “in their own words”. This has been used to publicise the findings of the review to other young people in the city. This “youth proofed” leaflet has now been produced and has been circulated to all schools.

MOVING THE COUNCIL FORWARD

To ensure that we are able to tackle the concerns of residents and move the city forward, it is important that the City Council itself is in a strong position, both in terms of resources, policies and future plans. As such some of the work undertaken this year has focused on internal organisational issues.

Managing organisational change

Difficult decisions are being taken with regard to Council services and how the necessary savings can be made. Scrutiny Committees are playing their part in ensuring that decisions are sound and will yield the benefits set out.

The Comprehensive Spending Review outlined some significant changes and challenges for local Government namely an annual cut of around 7% in budgets over the next four years. Individual councils will know more about the detail in the grant settlement, but it is inevitable that some services will be cut, resulting in many job losses and radical changes to how councils structure themselves to meet the needs and demands of residents.

Members of the Equalities and Human Resources O&S Committee have been receiving a number of briefings on the City Council’s workforce profile. This includes data on gender, ethnicity, disability and age profiles of the 52,000 staff currently employed. With expectations that cuts will make improving diversity harder to achieve, such significant changes will need to be managed effectively to ensure that the workforce reflects the make up of the area it serves.

The Committee has been focusing on this workforce profile and is at the early stages of examining different workforce groups. One of the areas being considered is how the organisation encourages and retains new talent especially graduates and young people



and those with specialist skills sets. This is because there are figures which show that only around 8% of the Council workforce are under 30 years old.

In the forthcoming year the Committee will be focusing strongly on Human Resources issues, particularly issues around the Birmingham Contract, redundancy and employee policies and procedures.

Managing staff absence

One of the issues the Equalities and HR O&S Committee has chosen to begin evidence gathering on is how much more the City Council can do to deliver realistic and sustained reductions in staff sickness absence levels. The aim of this piece of work is to add value and build on the work already undertaken as part of the Executive's Joint Priority Review on sickness absence.

The Committee intend to learn about how well managers are supported to deal with staff sickness, sickness target level setting and the impact of the planned financial cuts that the Council will be facing on issues of presenteeism and job quality. Managers, particularly in those directorates with significant sickness levels, will be invited to discuss the challenges in their areas and how these might be addressed. In addition the Committee will hear about how realistic targets can be set for service areas, with Members choosing a directorate as a case study and examining how specific occupational targets can be generated.

A report of the Committee's findings is intended to be presented to City Council in April 2011.

Assessing local decision making

In July, the Executive set out proposals to remove delegations from Constituency Committees and allocate back to Cabinet portfolios and, possibly, replacing Constituency Committees with Area Committees which would be based on larger geographical areas. As such the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee undertook a short piece of work to respond to the proposed changes to the Future Shape of Localisation.

The O&S Committee had time to do little more than test some of the basic assumptions within the consultation document and to take the temperature of relevant parties. However, in doing so, Members found that any reduction in local accountability was a



concern for Councillors, partners and community volunteers alike. The local structures and local decision-making have, over the past few years, yielded a number of benefits relating to service improvement, efficiencies, partnership working and better community engagement.

The fundamental question addressed by the review was to identify these key elements of localisation that contribute to an improved quality of life for Birmingham residents. Our aim was to maintain these, and their outcomes, in any changes that are to come.

The key elements of success were found to be Councillors with clear resources to direct, a transparent and accessible officer structure and locally based officers with good local knowledge and a culture of working across service boundaries.

Financial constraints are real and the localised elements should make a contribution through more efficient and effective working, just like everybody else. But equally this could be an opportunity to look at the advantages of shaping more outcomes locally and whether this could be done in combination with a reduction in bureaucracy and officer time. In particular, all public services would be better able to make savings and retain service delivery if modelled on Place-Based Budgeting focussed on improving operations at the very local level.

We expect the proposals and consultation responses to be considered at the Cabinet Committee for Achieving Excellence with Communities. The Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee will continue to monitor this issue.

Providing decent Council property

In addition to being able to have affordable homes across the city, the Council must have a decent housing stock. Good housing is a fundamental aspect of the Council's priority for residents to enjoy a high quality of life. This year the Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee has continued to monitor closely the modernisation of the Council's housing stock through the Decent Homes Programme and the performance of housing repairs contractors. This was carried out both through receipt and detailed discussion of regular progress and performance reports to the Committee as well as inviting the contractors to meetings for direct questioning. The Committee also continues to play an active role in monitoring the disrepair litigation function. As a result of this and the improvements made in carrying out repairs more quickly, the number of legal actions being taken against the City Council has significantly reduced. This has



had an additional benefit - the Council is now much better equipped to defend itself against unfounded claims.

Another key focus of the Committee's work is to scrutinise efforts being made to maximise the existing housing stock, particularly as demand for social housing continues to rise. It has been examining the under-occupation and overcrowding of properties, together with the Council's lettings and allocation arrangements and action taken to reduce the number of privately owned empty properties in the city.

Housing stock is not the only property the Council owns and through the Finance O&S Committee Members have been examining the Working for the Future Business Transformation programme, which aims to transform Council office buildings.

Ensuring processes are sound – Flood risk

Some aspects of O&S work have tied in with Government bills and proposals, with Committees looking at how the Council needs to adapt in light of these.

A draft Flood and Water Management Bill was published in April 2009 to respond to Sir Michael Pitt's independent review of the lessons to be learned from the devastating summer floods of 2007. Although Birmingham may not have seen the sort of major river flooding that has dominated the headlines in recent years, it has experienced several large scale flooding events, most recently in September 2008. As flood risk management and response at that time cut across two portfolios, Regeneration and Transportation & Street Services, both Committees (now amalgamated) agreed that a joint Scrutiny review was necessary to examine the proposed changes and how well placed Birmingham was to respond to them in light of evolving legislation.

The Review found that the City Council had taken the lead in relation to flooding issues, both in mitigation and response and actions of local residents and dedicated staff had played a major role. It was acknowledged that flooding cannot be eradicated as "flooding is a part of nature". However, our recommendations to ensure we have the expertise and capacity will assist the City Council and partners respond to the Act and ultimately improve mitigation and response to flooding.

The Scrutiny Review was reported to City Council in June 2010 and nearing the end of this review the Flood and Water Management Act received Royal Assent. This Act has extensive and far-reaching consequences for the City Council in terms of how it must



undertake flood risk management, however guidance on this has yet to be issued and funding issues have yet to be resolved.

Building Schools for the Future

Another area in which Government influence has affected the work O&S and what the Council does is the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. Over recent years the City Council has been working towards developing and implementing its vision to transform teaching and learning in Birmingham. A key element of this has been to find ways to improve the fabric of schools so that they are fit to support 21st century learning. As part of its wider programme known as Transforming Education, it had been working to secure a significant investment from the then BSF programme to build or refurbish all 79 secondary schools plus six secondary special schools in the city over the next 15 years.

This was to have been the largest urban BSF project in the country, and given the size of this investment and its potential to have a major impact on the schools estate in Birmingham, the Children and Education O&S Committee decided to undertake an overview exercise of the process in Birmingham.

As the BSF programme has now been discontinued by the new Government, the review group is currently exploring how best the City Council can now respond to this reduction in resources and how it might most effectively utilise the limited capital funding that may be available in the future to best effect.

LOOKING AHEAD

As this report has demonstrated, through Overview & Scrutiny Elected Members have examined some of the key topics over this year and have had a strong impact in many areas. In the year to come, we recognise that Birmingham and its City Council face major challenges and we need to play our part in meeting these as fully as possible.

The financial challenge facing the City Council and its public sector partners is clear. But there are other important changes on the horizon, many stemming from the new Central Government. Among the changes the Government has said it will promote are a decrease in detailed accountability to the centre, as demonstrated by the the abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Audit Commission; and a determination



to allow local authorities, their partners and communities to put into practice their own approaches to organising and delivering services.

So Value for Money and efficiency will be a theme which continues to underpin the majority of our work. This includes looking at both the present and the future, ensuring that current spend is managed in the best way possible, but also that decisions about spending being taken now will not affect us negatively in the medium to long term future.

Equally, the importance of partnership working will continue as efficiencies are sought. O&S will continue its work on community based budgets, working alongside partners from the Police, Probation Service and the voluntary sector. Committees will also continue their programme of partnership reviews, examining whether the significant partnerships the Council is involved in are providing added value.

As inspection by, and accountability to the centre decreases, strong and robust local accountability mechanisms, such as Scrutiny, will become increasingly important.

In the future, the way public services are delivered and the degree to which local communities are involved in them could also change. Through Scrutiny work, Members of the Council will be well placed to influence these decisions to gain the best outcomes for their constituents.

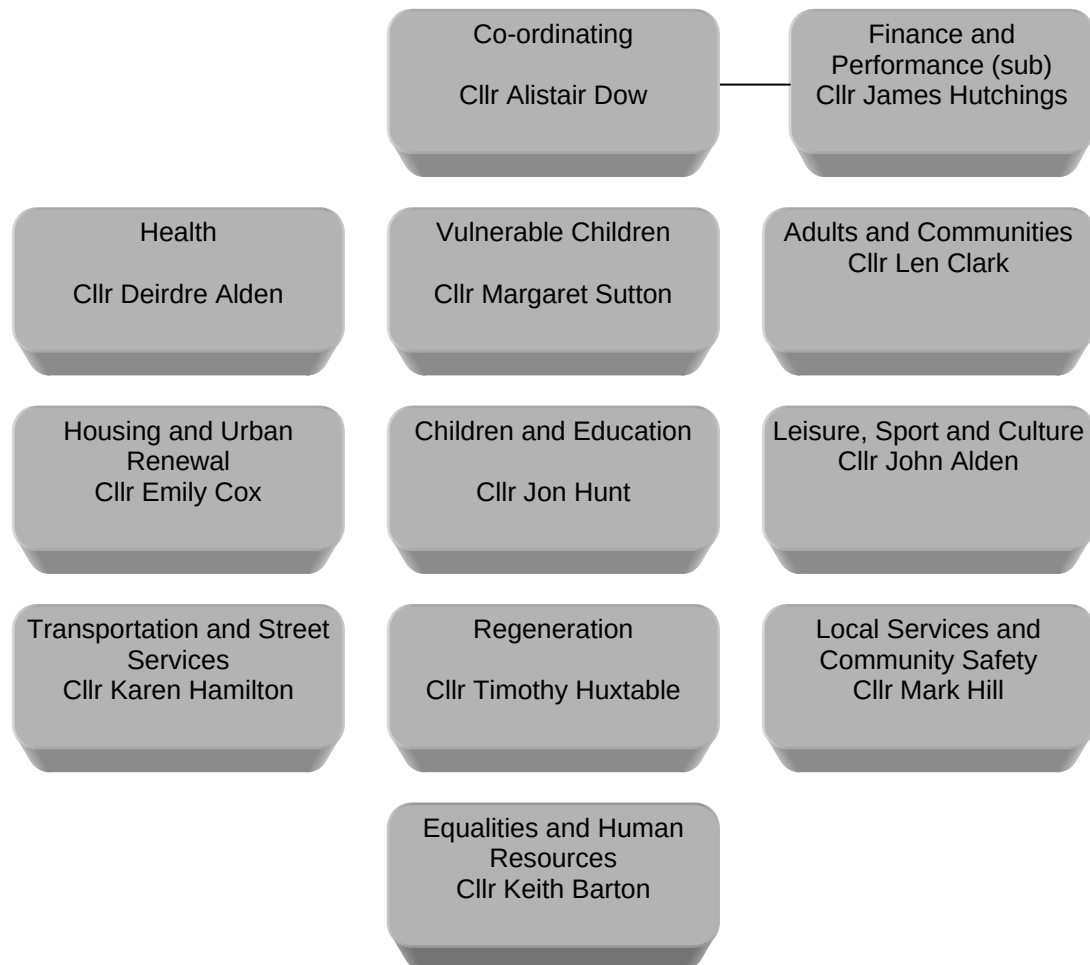
MOTION

That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010 be received.



Appendix

Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Chairmen January – May 2010





Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Chairmen May – December 2010

