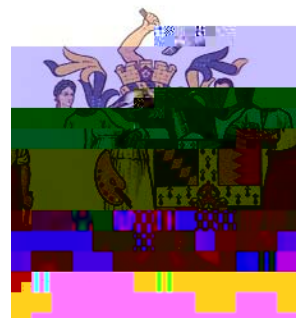


**ANNUAL REPORT**

**OF**

**THE CHAIR OF THE CO-ORDINATING**  
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## **Preface**

I am delighted to introduce my sixth Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Annual Report. The report summarises Committee Members' work over the past twelve months and maps out issues for the forthcoming year. In particular, this report demonstrates where Scrutiny has contributed to the development of policy as well as service improvements. The annual report reflects the value of the work we all do and I am grateful to all who have played a part in it.

There have been a number of new additions to our strong team of O&S Chairmen. Cllr Anne Underwood has become the Chairman of Vulnerable Children's O&S Committee and we have been pleased to welcome Cllr Karen Hamilton's return to an O&S Chair role, this time as Chair of the Children's and Education O&S Committee. Cllr Robert Alden has taken on the Chairmanship of Equalities and Human Resources O&S Committee while Cllr Roger Harmer has taken on the mantle for Housing and Urban Renewal and Cllr Philip Parkin leads for Leisure, Sport and Culture.

Within this Report you will find examples of Scrutiny bringing influence to bear on a range of important issues from the economy to the lives of our young people; from improving the Council's relationship with customers of its services to searching for ways to meet local needs more quickly and sensitively. Work

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview and Scrutiny**

Local government consistently faces changes and challenges. In order to cope with these, local authority Members and managers have to decide: what needs to be done, how do we best cope under such pressures and deliver high quality services as well as improve value

Review recommendations are tracked for progress once they are accepted by City Council to ensure that the Executive is acting on the guidance given. Of the recommendations tracked this year, 57 were signed off as having been achieved, and 22 were achieved by the deadline given.

Occasionally Members have considered that there may be a case for asking the Executive to reconsider a specific decision via Call-In Requests. There have been 5 occasions this calendar year when an O&S Committee has considered whether a decision should be referred back. In only 1 of these 5 instances did the Committee decide to ask Cabinet Members to reassess their position.

While figures help to illustrate, in part, the quantity of scrutiny work undertaken by Members, they cannot convey the breadth of subjects considered or the depth of enquiries undertaken in scrutiny working. This report gives some specific examples of key investigations and approaches O&S Members have undertaken this year and the difference they have made.

## **RESPONDING TO PEOPLE'S CONCERNS**

A wide range of scrutiny work has sought to respond to Members' and residents' concerns that, this year more than ever, Birmingham fulfils its responsibilities to provide the best quality services it can for those who need them most. At the same time scrutiny enquiries

- How will young people be engaged and involved in the development and evolution of the service going forward?

As part of this project Members have carried out a series of visits to youth facilities across Birmingham where they have met both youth workers and young people. We have gained a valuable insight into the huge amount of work the service undertakes. Alongside this, a number of focus groups with young people are being conducted to explore what young people wish to see from the service. In addition, several evidence gathering sessions have been held to discuss the value of youth work with national academics, the local voluntary sector and other statutory organisations such as the police and schools. Our final report will be presented to City Council in spring 2012.

### ***Health***

A substantial concern, most associated with older adults but which also affects children and young people, is the problem of delayed transfers of care from hospital. It is not a new issue or unique to Birmingham, but it has been raised consistently by external agencies, including the Audit Commission and the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) as an area needing improvement in the city. The delays affect the quality of care and quality of life of a wide range of patients, including some of Birmingham's most vulnerable residents, and their carers. Setbacks in transfers also carry significant costs to the City Council and to the NHS. Ultimately minimising delayed transfers of care is fundamental to a person-centred approach to health and social care that treats individuals with dignity and respect as well as meeting their needs to secure the best outcomes possible.

Given the intractable nature of the problem, Members needed to make clear recommendations for improvement in planning and sharing learning and good practice. Health and Adults O&S Committee presented their report on Delayed Transfers of Care to Council in January 2011. This highlighted policy gaps where collective efforts can be better focused.

There has been much worry expressed by the public and by Birmingham Councillors about the most effective course of action to prevent the spread of tuberculosis. This was demonstrated by the motion to City Council in October 2010 and two petitions to Council (December 2010 and March 2011). Responding to these concerns, Members of the Health and Adults O&S Committee are currently undertaking a scrutiny review on TB in Birmingham which will be presented to City Council at its meeting in January 2012.

Committee Members have considered and influenced several city strategic consultations. A specific example of this work is the committee's engagement at various stages in the consultation on the move towards Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust gaining

Foundation Trust status. A response to the latest stage, making comments and suggestions on how the proposed governance arrangements might

operating model of the Community Safety Partnership. Committee Members have been tracking the recommendations from their review of *Project Champion*, the West Midlands



what type) of “avoidable” calls are made. Speaking to both senior officers from relevant services areas and those within Customer Services, we are seeking to identify where the blockages are and how they can be resolved.

Most recently we have considered a summary of an external report, commissioned by the Deputy Leader from the consultants Grant Thornton. Their conclusions bear a strong similarity to our own findings. We eagerly anticipate the Deputy Leader’s promised action



## ***Planning Strategy***

An example of where we have looked at specific strategy in more detail and reflected a range of concerns is through the oversight Members of the Transport, Environment and Regeneration O&S Committee have of planning strategy (though not of individual planning decisions). Input into the Core Strategy is fundamental to this role as the Core Strategy will set out a clear spatial framework for the growth of Birmingham up to 2028. The strategy will set out how much new housing should be provided in the city and identify the general locations for this. It will also identify the key sites for employment provision, and for other activities, such as shopping, waste management, leisure and sport, education and health in order to support the city's growing population.

We helped to shape the draft Core Strategy both before and after it went out to public consultation. As a result, provisions to strengthen the protection of employment land (within Government guidelines) and to ensure the right mix of housing in the city will be included.

## ***Supporting the Recovery***

Access to employment continues to be a central concern for Birmingham's citizens. The Transport, Environment and Regeneration O&S Committee commenced the in-depth Scrutiny Review of Supporting the Recovery in 2010. This Review has assisted the Council in responding to businesses and people's concerns as it explored how the City Council could encourage private investment in Birmingham to increase employment.

Review evidence showed that Birmingham has adapted better to the industrial changes of the last 30 years than most of our West Midland counterparts with Birmingham having a strong total Gross Value Added (GVA) of £30,182 million in 2008 and a GVA per head of £19,802 which is close to the national average. However our main findings were that the city has a major weakness in its relatively low skills levels, particularly amongst the long term unemployed. There was also a need to engender a collaborative and supportive environment that enables business to grow, including access to business support.

The business support landscape is rapidly changing as part of Government reforms. Therefore it was recognised that the City Council needed to set up a single point of contact to provide greater clarity to businesses on where they can go to for advice and assistance. Also by the City Council wo

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We have also addressed issues around the need for: high quality infrastructure to enable business to grow; access to good housing and cultural activities, among others, that mean a good quality of life for employees and ensure Birmingham continues to be viewed as a place to do business. While access to finance for businesses continues to be a problem, increasing publicity of the finance opportunities available from Finance Birmingham should greatly assist some businesses.

## **MAKING THE MOST OF RESOURCES**

Reflecting the challenges already outlined, difficult decisions continue to be taken with regard to council services and how necessary savings can be made. Scrutiny committees have focused on ensuring that these decisions are: sound, based on appropriate impact assessment, communicated clearly and will realise the benefits identified.

### ***Controlling the City Council's Spending***

In March this year the City Council agreed its business plan and budget. This was a controversial and difficult budget, requiring as it did savings of £212.8 million on previous plans to accommodate both reductions in resources and budget pressures.

In taking this decision, the Council recognised some key risks to keeping within budget. These are varied, ranging from the possibility that planned savings did not arise to the possible effects of unforeseen budget pressures, from equal pay liabilities to the affordability of the Council's borrowing.

The Finance O&S Committee has played a key role in ensuring that the Council's budget is being adhered to, through the regular consideration and questioning of the overall revenue

position of the Council's revenue position. We are positive about the 20.945 -1.335 T-thin both. We



We did not find any conclusive evidence from look

## ***Leisure Services***

With the current emphasis on Council efficiencies, the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee is looking at key service areas within the portfolio in more detail. Each session is an opportunity for Members to consider the overall health of the service, the prospects for achieving saving targets and the opportunities for income maximisation.

However, the sessions also looked at alternative ways of delivering services. For example, the City Council's policy on community asset transfer has been considered, resulting in some suggestions for more effective delivery in the future. Museums, libraries, parks and

One issue which has been raised regularly by the Committee is that of the use of agency workers, with Members seeking to ensure two outcomes: that vacancies which would normally be filled by agency workers are being prioritised for those Council employees who are at risk of redundancy and that staffing budgets are not exceeded as a result of hiring agency staff. We received an overview of a newly developed process which aims to create greater control over the appointment of agency workers and monitor more closely levels of spend and types of vacancies which are being filled. Members also learnt about the Agency Workers Directive which has recently come into force and the effect this will have on the organisation. As a result of this, it is anticipated that the Committee will continue to examine the use of agency staff in the coming year.

### ***Council Sickness Absence***

In April of this year the Equalities and Human Resources O&S Committee presented the findings of its investigation into sickness absence. This review considered how much more the City Council is able to do to deliver realistic and sustained reductions in its staff sickness absence levels, given concerns that high levels of absence are likely to result in deteriorations in service delivery and quality. Work has built upon scrutiny already



Capacity to manage these successfully is dependent on the Council developing new

### ***Neighbourhood Management***

Members of Local Services O&S Committee have been concerned with the impact of the loss of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund on Neighbourhood Management and presented a report on Neighbourhood Managem



project are particularly innovative, for example the use of LED street lighting which will reduce both costs and energy consumption.

However, it is a new way of working for the City Council in respect of highways. This necessitates the building and strengthening of key relationships. Members of the Transport, Environment and Regeneration O&S Committee have explored issues around communication and consultation, both with Councillors and the public. We have also reviewed the new approach to asset management and its implications. Our conclusions and

### ***Developing Health links***

In addition to recent work with BVSC, Health and Adults O&S Committee has been undertaking work around the radical planned changes to health structures and commissioning, with the City Council gaining new responsibilities for Public Health, as detailed in the 2011 Health and Social Care Bill. All of the main recommendations Committee made during summer 2010 in their consideration of the Health White Paper appear to have been reflected in the Bill and associated guidance. Moreover Committee Members have been building a relationship with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), both formally by inviting staff to attend Committee sessions and through informal meetings.

We have also liaised with the Regional Quality Observatory and other local authorities. The workshop aim was to share learning from other local authorities and to consider how best to address quality assurance through the work programme of the committee.

### ***Community and Sport – A Cricket Case Study***

In May 2011 the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee presented a report to the Cabinet Member on the issue of sports participation in priority areas in Birmingham. Using cricket as a case study, the report highlighted the need to increase the low level of sport and recreation taken in the city to improve mental and physical health and to create safer and stronger communities. Sport England and the Birmingham Sport & Physical Activity Partnership are working with the City Council to increase participation by children, young people and communities in physical activity.

The report noted the crucial role of community organisations in sports provision including their role as partners in developing new ways of managing playing pitches owned by the Council. The creation of initiatives such as Community Sports Hubs will be particularly important here. Also, we have asked that Birmingham Sport and Physical Activity Partnership work with the Birmingham Parks Cricket League to investigate the possibility of increasing the number of clubs formed from keen, informal players. Committee Members were updated on progress made against the report's recommended actions at their November 2011 meeting.

### ***Work with Young People***

Safeguarding children and promoting their welfare is one of our key statutory responsibilities. The term is used in this context to mean both child protection services and other activities designed to make children safer at home, at school and in their communities. It will never be possible to protect every child from harm or to be certain that things will never go wrong. However councils, with their partners, have a responsibility to do their utmost to ensure that the way they work is designed to achieve the best possible outcomes for the children they serve. All Councillors carry a general responsibility for safeguarding children.

On 13 October 2011 Members of the Vulnerable Children's O&S Committee attended an event to explore safeguarding and what it means to young people which included representatives from the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board and young people from a variety of groups and schools, notably Voice is Power (Birmingham Children and Young People's Parliament) and the Children in Care Council. The exercise included a session in the Council House, a visit to a youth service project and an 'open dialogue event' at Ladywood Youth Centre. Scrutiny staff will continue to work with young people from these organisations to explore the best ways for Scrutiny to support safeguarding and to share young people's perspectives on safeguarding with City Councillors.

Committee Members were invited to attend a Children in Care Council debate which took place in the Council Chamber on 27 October 2011. This was a first for the City Council and we hope it marks the start of increased engagement with the Children in Care Council in the future. Linked to this, the Committee's October meeting focused on fostering and, for the first time, Foster Carers were in attendance to discuss their experiences of caring with Members.

- the Police and Social Responsibility Act 2011 introduces not only directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners, but also Police and Crime Panels – one Panel for each Police Force area – to hold the Commissioner to account. We will need to find ways so that the scrutiny of crime and disorder issues – conducted by Cllr Summerfield and the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee – can be related to the work of the Panel; and also consider how elected Members in future can resolve local policing problems;
- the Localism Act 2011 famously promotes the concept of elected Mayors, and foreshadows referenda on the subject in Birmingham and other large cities. The Government sees other provisions in the Act as removing current constraints on Scrutiny, allowing Members more scope to inquire and investigate matters affecting the quality of life in the city;
- the Health and Social Care Bill will substantially alter the arrangements for health care in England and create Health and Wellbeing Boards answerable to local authorities. The Bill also provides greater flexibility for local authorities to carry out scrutiny of the local health service as Members see fit.

Whether changes will affect particular service areas or democratic governance underpinning all policy, O&S Committees will be helping to shape debate around them and assess their local impact. As prescriptive requirements and direct monitoring of local authorities by central government continue to decrease along with local government grant funding, strong local accountability mechanisms, such as the work of Overview and Scrutiny Members are increasingly important. At a time when partnership working and commissioning is now the norm, the need for local government's new partnerships to be accountable is also clear. O&S Members fulfil a unique role in considering in-depth these often complex arrangements and bringing additional perspectives to the Council's considerations. While the framework for our work continues to change, we are single-minded in our efforts to reflect concerns, to challenge and to improve services for the residents we represent.

## **MOTION**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2011 be received.

# Appendices

## Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Chairmen January – May 2011





# Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Chairmen

## May – December 2011

