

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 9 FEBRUARY 2016
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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2016 AT
1400 HOURS IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 3 AND 4, COUNCIL HOUSE,
BIRMINGHAM**

PRESENT:-

Councillor Zaffar in the Chair;

Councillors Bridle, Chatfield, Finnegan, Hunt, Kooner, Lal, Mosquito, Sambrook and Wood.

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors J Alden, Anderson, Griffiths, Kennedy, Pocock and Spencer

Mr I Jones – Service Director – Homes and Neighbourhood

Ms J Power – Scrutiny Officer

Miss V Williams – Committee Manager

Miss E Williamson – Head of Scrutiny Services

NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

- 61 The Chairman advised, and the Committee noted, that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.birminghamnewsroom.com) and members of the press/public could record and take photographs. The whole of the meeting would be filmed except where there were confidential or exempt items.

APOLOGIES

- 62 Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brew and C Khan, who served on the Committee, and Councillors McCarthy and Underwood, who had been invited to attend to give evidence for agenda item 4 regarding the District and Ward arrangements.
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MINUTES

- 63 The Minutes of the last meeting, having been previously circulated, were confirmed and signed.

The Chairman in referring to the report concerning the performance of the property portfolio (minute no 53 refers) advised that he wished to set up an inquiry to be undertaken by a 3 Member working group comprising the Chairman, 1 other Labour Member and 1 Opposition Member to look at “marriage value” and how it was used.

Following a motion considered at the last meeting of City Council, the Chairman also wished to set up an inquiry regarding the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). This inquiry would also be undertaken by a 3 Member working group.

DISTRICT AND WARD ARRANGEMENTS

The following document was submitted:-

(See document No 1)

Miss E Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services, briefly explained the purpose of the inquiry session.

Ifor Jones, Service Director, Homes and Neighbourhood, outlined the recommendations of the Kerslake Report and changes to the constitution referred to in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the document now submitted.

He outlined the steps taken to try to achieve the recommendations and progress made to date. He explained the different facets of the work covered and how it would be taken forward in the future.

The following documents were tabled at the meeting:-

1. Response to O & S Scrutiny Committee Re Devolution Arrangements – Perry Barr District.
2. Pilot Project ‘Forward Together’ – Unlocking Community Assets and Talents in the South of the City.

(See documents Nos 2 and 3)

Councillors J Alden, Anderson, Griffiths, Kennedy, Pocock and Spencer explained what changes were being made to establish a new model for

devolution in their respective Wards and Districts together with the issues that had been identified. This included:-

1. holding District conventions;
2. developing a community plan;
3. the need to develop better corporate support;
4. the fact that one size did not fit all and the importance of dealing with issues that were specific to a particular area;
5. the establishment of strategic partnerships;
6. the suggestion that District Committees should take place in the District and not be held in the city centre;
7. the nature/topics of the Neighbourhood Challenges that had been set up;
8. the different styles and types of local meetings that were being held in preference to the more traditional Ward Committees which were not considered to be 'up to speed' and had become static;
9. the importance of engaging with local people, encouraging them to become 'active citizens' and 'stand up' for Birmingham;
10. encouraging a partnership approach;
11. concern that the changes to the Ward boundaries could create problems if they did not reflect natural/local borders;
12. the importance of learning from established organisations such as the New Frankley in Birmingham Parish Council;
13. concern regarding constitutional restrictions relating to strategic roles.

Ifor Jones pointed out how the role and infrastructure of Ward and District Committees had changed with an emphasis on local citizens.

Hereon, Members of the Committee expanded on what changes had been taking place in their respective Wards and the issues that had been identified. This included:-

1. partnership working;
2. engaging with the local community;
3. the need for more 'back room' support and the fact that there were insufficient resources to cover administrative costs such as advertising meetings. Improved funding and resources were crucial;

4. the geography of some areas that made it difficult to identify a definitive area and the fact that not all residents shared a common interest;
5. holding themed meetings;
6. rather than focusing on a large area, acknowledging that neighbourhood forums and other local tasking groups worked well in some Wards;
7. the need to 'bend' existing resources and acquire more clarity concerning some officer roles, such as the place managers;
8. sharing information and learning from each other;
9. setting up District Champions and Boards to look at specific issues such as jobs and skills. Jobs fairs had been held in some areas;
10. considering running Neighbourhood Challenges for longer than a year in order to afford time to deal with bigger issues such as employment and education;
11. the fact that the role of the Councillor was changing;
12. being more open, co-ordinated and encouraging cross party working;
13. providing the best service possible;
14. ensuring that changes were meaningful;
15. the suggestion of introducing a 'basket' where Members could share ideas;
16. recognising the principle of subsidiarity, whereby decisions were made at spatial level closest to the people on the ground;

Ifor Jones undertook to:-

1. provide details of the Neighbourhood Challenges on a Ward by Ward basis;
2. provide information regarding boundary changes and how they might impact on the community plans;
3. circulate his 'speech notes' to Members and respond via e-mail to any other outstanding issues raised.

The Chairman advised that it was intended to carry out a survey to test some of the suggestions and ideas put forward at today's meeting.

He added that it was the intention to send a letter to the Leader of the Council outlining the findings of the inquiry session. A discussion paper on the devolution options, to be compiled jointly with the Neighbourhood and

Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was due to be submitted to a future meeting of the City Council.

The Chairman thanked Councillors J Alden, Anderson, Griffiths, Kennedy, Pocock and Spencer for attending the meeting.

The Chairman pointed out that Lfor Jones' would be leaving the Council in the near future and that this was his last meeting. He thanked Lfor for his contribution and assistance over the years.

64

RESOLVED:-

That the documents be noted.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING

The following terms of reference regarding the inquiry into the arrangements for meetings of the City Council was submitted together with additional information tabled at the meeting:-

(See documents Nos 4 and 5)

Miss E Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services, introduced the documents.

Members commented on the information submitted and the following were amongst the points made:-

1. The inquiry should include investigating how other Councils operated and whether those methods might work in Birmingham.
2. Whether backbench Members should become more involved at meetings of the City Council.
3. Some Members had full time jobs and suggested that consideration should be given to meetings commencing at a later time. However, there was concern that if meetings finished much later it could make travelling home more difficult and that parents with young children might be precluded from attending.

It was pointed out that when someone put themselves forward to serve as a local Councillor they knew what the job would entail. However, Members also considered that employers should be more tolerant, recognising the fact that Councillors were undertaking a public service and, in order to carry out their duties, would require some time off work.

The Chairman requested information regarding the times that other Councils held meetings.

4. Public questions were pointless because the answers were pre-determined and could just as easily be e-mailed to the member of

the public rather than being read out by the Cabinet Member, thus freeing up time for more important debates.

5. The role of the City Council and Councillors needed to be enhanced.
6. It was suggested that Cabinet Members should submit regular reports to Council.
7. Any important issues due to be considered by Cabinet should also be debated at City Council.
8. Insufficient time was given to debate the Notice of Motions which usually comprised a series of speeches. It was suggested that the time could be used more wisely.
9. Outside organisations, such as the police and fire service, could be invited to attend meetings.
10. Policy plans or reports from Council Business Management Committee were rarely considered.
11. Scrutiny discussions could be increased. The current format leaned too much towards the Executive.
12. One meeting should be held every month.
13. Consideration should be given to reinstating refreshments at City Council meetings.

The Chairman advised that it was hoped to submit a report outlining the findings of the inquiry to the City Council meeting in April 2016.

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RESOLVED:-

That the report be noted.

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WORK PROGRAMME 2015-16**

The following work programme was submitted:-

(See document No 6)

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RESOLVED:-

That the work programme be noted.

REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

- 67 The Chairman advised that there had been no requests for call in/councillor call for action/petitions received.
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OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

- 68 No other urgent business was raised.
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AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

- 69 **RESOLVED:-**

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 1615 hours.

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CHAIRMAN