

Birmingham City Council

Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14 March 2024



Subject: Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed work programme for the Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2023-24. Following the findings and recommendations from the independent Governance Review of the Council, and specifically recommendation 5, the Committee has reframed its work programme to be aligned to the Council's improvement and recovery priorities. Appendix 1 outlines the topics identified, aims and objectives as well as the preferred method of scrutiny to achieve these objectives.
- 1.2 Appendix 1 also provides information on other topics, which had previously been identified by the Committee for future consideration.
- 1.3 The report also provides a progress update on its inquiries: Improving Standards of Re-let Council Properties.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee:
 - Notes the information set out in Appendix 1 and identifies if any further topics need to be added aligned to the Council's improvement and recovery priorities.
 - Agrees, subject to further input from the Chair and Deputy Chair, the issues that the Committee will consider in April 2024, the proposed aims and objectives and the preferred method of scrutiny.

- Notes, subject to further input from the Chair and Deputy Chair outside of the meeting, its proposed work programme will be submitted to Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable work to be planned and co-ordinated throughout the year.

3 Background

- 3.1 The [statutory guidance for local government overview and scrutiny](#) sets out the role it can play in holding an authority's decision makers to account. This makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy.
- 3.2 Effective Overview and Scrutiny should:
- Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge.
 - Amplify the voices and concerns of the public.
 - Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role.
 - Drive improvements in public services.
- 3.3 The role and functions of Overview and Scrutiny Committees are outlined in [The City Council's Constitution | Birmingham City Council](#) They will:
- Make reports and/or recommendations to the full Council, the Executive and/or other organisations in connection with the discharge of the functions specified in their terms of reference.
 - Consider any matter covered in their terms of reference that may affect or be likely to have an effect on the citizens of Birmingham; relevant to the Council's strategic objectives; relevant to major issues faced by officers in managing a function of the Council; and likely to make contribution to moving the Council forward and achieving key performance targets.
- 3.4 Effective scrutiny needs to add value. A well planned and timely work programme enables Overview and Scrutiny Committees to be involved at the right time and in the right way, and ensure their involvement is meaningful and can influence the outcome.
- 3.5 Members often have a number of topics suggested to them and are therefore required to **prioritise** matters for consideration. The Scrutiny Framework sets out the following factors to be considered:
- Public interest: concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen.
 - Ability to change: priority should be given to issues that the Committee can realistically influence.
 - Performance: priority should be given to areas in which the Council and Partners are not performing well.
 - Extent: priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or a large part of the city.

- Replication: work programme must take account of what else is happening to avoid duplication.

Looking Ahead

- 3.6 Since June 2023, Overview and Scrutiny Committees have identified a 'menu' of issues (including policy development, policy review, issues of accountability and statutory functions). Each Committee has then regularly reviewed their 'menu' and decided which issues needed to be examined further, and how that work would be undertaken.

Scrutiny Methods

- 3.7 There are a range of ways to undertake scrutiny. The approach for 2023-24 enables flexible scrutiny and outlines a shift from monthly formal meetings to a combination of approaches. The Committee will choose the most effective scrutiny method to achieve the desired aims and objectives for each topic.
- 3.8 Scrutiny activities should be thorough and undertaken in a timely manner.
- 3.9 Based on Statutory Guidance published in 2019, different scrutiny methods include (but are not limited to):
- A single item, or items, on a committee agenda – this method fits more closely with the “overview” aspect of the Scrutiny function and provides limited opportunity for effective scrutiny. It is most appropriate for specific issues where the committee wants to maintain a watching brief.
 - A single item meeting, either as the committee or a more limited number of Members. It has the capacity to enhance the previous option by taking evidence from a number of witnesses.
 - A task and finish day - provided that these are properly focused, they ensure Councillors can swiftly reach conclusions and make recommendations and are effective even for complex topics.
 - A task and finish review – this is an enhancement of the previous option being held over four or six meetings spread over a limited number of months.

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- 3.10 The Committee's Terms of Reference is to fulfil its functions as they relate to any policies, services and activities concerning:
- Council Housing management services, repairs and maintenance programmes.
 - Best use of housing stock across all housing providers.
 - Neighbourhood management initiatives and the housing growth agenda (Birmingham Social Housing Partnership).
 - Private rented sector, licensing and regulation.

- Tenancy engagement in the management and development of social housing and Housing Liaison Boards.
- Exempt accommodation.
- Housing Options for vulnerable adults, children, young people and offenders.
- Temporary accommodation provision.
- Homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Supply of homes to meet housing need.

3.11 The Committee is chaired by Cllr Mohammed Idrees, and its membership comprises Cllrs Ziaul Islam, Saqib Khan, Lauren Rainbow, Rinkal Shergill, Ron Storer, Penny Wagg and Ken Wood.

4 The Governance Review – Reframing the Work Programme 2023-24

4.1 The Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 December 2023 acknowledged the recommendations in the Governance Review of Birmingham City Council agreed by Cabinet on 12 December 2023. Recommendation 5 stated the need to reframe scrutiny work programmes on the Council's improvement and recovery priorities, and that alignment of work programmes should focus on:

- a) Having an active part in the 2024/25 budget development process.
- b) The safe and effective delivery of key services supporting vulnerable people.
- c) Critical performance issues emerging "by exception".
- d) Equality and equity issues arising from the development of the 24/25 Budget, the Emergency Budget (to be identified by exception), and other priority scrutiny activity relating to the Budget.
- e) Culture, behaviour change and organisational development.

4.2 On 15 February 2024, the Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee met informally to consider the developing Improvement and Recovery Plan and the findings and recommendations of the Governance Review. The Committee reconsidered its work programme for March – May and reframed it to ensure it aligns with the issues set out above.

4.3 Appendix 1 sets out the current agreed work programme.

4.4 The Committee may decide to add further items to the work programme during the remainder of the year. When considering this, the Committee is advised to consider where it can best add value through scrutiny aligning to the Council's priorities and improvement journey, and how it can prioritise topics for consideration based on the Scrutiny Framework referred to in paragraph 3.5 above.

- 4.5 The Council's latest [Forward Plan February 2024](#) may assist Members in identifying future topics. The following reports are of particular relevance to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Reference	Title	Portfolio	Proposed Date of Decision
012520/2024	Improvement and Recovery Plan	Deputy Leader	19 Mar 24
012549/2024	Shelforce Machinery Replacement	Housing and Homelessness	19 Mar 24
012445/2024	Disposal of 8 no. sites to Registered Providers	Housing and Homelessness	28 Mar 24
012121/2024	Perry Barr Residential Scheme – Disposal of Plots 2, 3, 4 & 5	Leader	28 Mar 24
012562/2024	Local Authority Housing Fund Additional Grant	Housing and Homelessness	23 Apr 24
012205/2024	Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2024-2029	Housing and Homelessness	14 May 24
012620/2024	Implementation of Updated Conditions of Tenancy	Housing and Homelessness	25 Jun 24

- 4.6 Overview and Scrutiny Chairs are advised to maintain regular engagement with Cabinet Members to enable flexibility to be built into the Overview and Scrutiny work programme, so as to respond to the Council's policy priorities in a timely way.

5 Improving Standards of Re-let Properties Inquiry

- 5.1 On 23 November, the Committee agreed the inquiry refocused on improving standards for void properties only. This follows reassurance to the inquiry Task and Finish Group on the wider City Housing programme to address the concerns raised by the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator for Social Housing. On 22 February, the updated Terms of Reference was formally agreed.
- 5.2 Evidence gathering for this inquiry has commenced and will continue until April 2024 at the earliest. The Committee has carried out site visits to Birmingham City Council and Pioneer properties. An evidence session with Pioneer is scheduled for 14 March. An evidence gathering session with Birmingham City Council City Housing is scheduled for 18 April.
- 5.3 The inquiry will confirm a date to report to Council on its key findings and recommendations in the new municipal year.

6 Any Finance Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

7 Any Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

8 Any Equalities Implications

- 8.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2 The protected characteristics and groups outlined in the Equality Act are Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Marriage and Civil Partnership; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion and Belief; Sex, and Sexual Orientation.
- 8.3 The Committee should ensure that it addresses these duties by considering them during work programme development, the scoping of work, evidence gathering and making recommendations. This should include considering how policy issues impact on different groups within the community, particularly those that share a relevant protected characteristic; whether the impact on particular groups is fair and proportionate; whether there is equality of access to services and fair representation of all groups within Birmingham; and whether any positive opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and/or good relations between people are being realised.
- 8.4 The Committee should ensure that equalities comments, and any recommendations, are based on evidence. This should include demographic and service level data and evidence of residents/service-users views gathered through consultation.

9 Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1: Work Programme 2023-24 - March

10 Background Papers

- 10.1 [Birmingham City Council Constitution](#)

- 10.2 Birmingham City Council Overview and Scrutiny Framework April 2021