

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**EXTRAORDINARY CABINET
MEETING THURSDAY, 4
APRIL 2024**

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE CABINET
COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 4 APRIL 2024 AT 1530 HOURS IN
COMMITTEE ROOMS 3&4, COUNCIL HOUSE, VICTORIA SQUARE,
BIRMINGHAM, B1 1BB**

PRESENT: - Councillor John Cotton, Leader in the Chair

Councillor Liz Clements, Cabinet Member for Transport (online)
Councillor Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness
Councillor Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment
Councillor Karen McCarthy, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
Councillor Robert Pocock, Interim Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care
Councillor Saima Suleman, Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism
Councillor Sharon Thompson, Deputy Leader of the City Council

ALSO PRESENT:-

Councillor Robert Alden, Leader of the Opposition (Conservative)
Councillor Roger Harmer, Leader (Liberal Democrat)
Professor Graeme Betts, Acting Chief Executive
John Biggs, Commissioner
Richard Brooks, Director, Strategy Equalities and Partnerships
Pam Harris, Commissioner
Deborah Carter-Hughes, Assistant Director, Corporate Law
Max Caller, Lead Commissioner
Guy Chaundy, Assistant Director Housing - Strategic & Enabling
Paul Clarke, Assistant Director (Programmes, Performance, and Improvement)
Craig Cooper, Strategic Director of City Operations
Louise Collett, Director, Adult Social Care
Robert Connelly, Assistant Director and Deputy Monitoring Officer
John Coughlan, Commissioner
Katy Fox, Director of People Services
Martin Goudie, Assistant Director People Services
Sue Harrison, Strategic Director of Children & Families (DCS)
Philip Nell, Strategic Director of Place, Prosperity and Sustainability
John Quinn, Interim Chief Operating Officer
Mohammed Sajid, Assistant Director Financial Strategy
Justin Varney, Director of Public Health
Errol Wilson, Committee Team Leader

NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

343. The Chair welcomed attendees and advised, and the Committee noted, that this meeting will be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Public-I microsite ([please click this link](#)) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.
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APOLOGIES

344. An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Nicky Brennan, Cabinet Member for Social Justice, Community Safety and Equalities.
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DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

345. The Chair reminded Members that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and other registerable interests arising from any business to be discussed at the meeting.

If a disclosable pecuniary interest is declared a Member must not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless they have been granted a dispensation.

If other registerable interests are declared a Member may speak on the matter only if members of the public are allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless they have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', Members do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that they have an interest.

Any declarations will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

EXEMPT INFORMATION – POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As there were no reports with an exempt or private appendix the Chair advised that the public meeting would carry on to consider the recommendations.

346. **RESOLVED:–**

That, in accordance with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of those parts of the agenda designated as exempt on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

DRAFT IMPROVEMENT AND RECOVERY PLAN

The Chair introduced the item and drew the attention of Cabinet to the information contained in the report. He highlighted that the report seeks the Cabinet's consideration of the draft Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP). The IRP provides the basis for improvement and change required, and will help provide assurance to citizens, councillors, officers, partners, commissioners, and other stakeholders that the Council was taking steps to improve its financial sustainability and the way it operates to deliver the services and outcomes the city and its citizens needed.

The Chair advised that the IRP summarises the activities we will be focussing on initially to achieve three overall aims.

Firstly, **the financially stable Council** – we have got to build on the initial financial recovery response including that on-going work to address the external auditors statutory recommendations to ensure long-term financial stability and sustainability. The delivery of the budget savings and the solution to the equal pay issues remained the most immediate issues to be addressed as well as resetting the foundations for the medium to longer term.

Secondly - **to obtain a well-run Council**. We had a series of external reviews and judgments that highlighted some significant and governmental issues facing this Council. We have got to address these to be a better function organisation with modern practices and with improved working relations that were based on high levels of trust, respect, honesty and transparency. This would better enable the Council to deliver its citizen facing services.

Thirdly, **citizen services** – We knew that we had historic issues with several key services that would be the initial focus of the service improvement. The Council needed to secure a continuous improvement and public trust across all of our services. We needed to ensure clear service standards that was customer focused and value for money achieving the best possible outcomes for citizens in the most efficient way. An improved financial position and a better run organisation would enable this to happen.

The Chair then made the following statements:-

- ✓ As Leader, he wanted to make it clear that we were completely committed to ensuring that the Council delivered the IRP.
- ✓ Our approach had gone beyond just putting words on a page and alongside the development of this document we have developed robust governance and assurance arrangements, and we have an agreed resourcing approach to the Plan. Both of these elements were set out in the Plan documentation.
- ✓ These arrangements and that approach including the oversight and challenge from Elected Members would ensure and enable the support of the delivery of savings and the improvement programmes and will also provide assurance to citizens, Members, officers, partners and our commissioners that we were improving.

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- ✓ By delivering the programmes we will improve how the future Council looked and felt and operates for all our citizens, our staff and all our partners.
- ✓ The delivery of this was everyone's responsibility and we needed buy-in and support from all our officers and Members. We needed to be the examples that we wanted to see. We also needed to be a learning organisation and be focussed on continued improvements.
- ✓ Our citizens and partners also needed to understand our improvement priorities and the role and contribution that they could make to that as well.
- ✓ Ultimately this was about delivering whole change to the Council, a consistent positive organisational culture with clear roles and responsibilities and expectations of both Members and staff.
- ✓ This was absolutely vital to us being an organisation that was Member led, officer run, and citizen focussed.

The Cabinet Member for Environment reported that:-

- The paper and the Commissioner's comments made clear that in reaching this point we have completed the first stage of what would be an involvement journey in the coming months.
- Street Scene services within his portfolio was identified as one of the areas where we needed to improve operations and the overall citizens experience.
- We have made positive steps in this regard and neither have anyone involved with this service was under any illusion that there was much more to do.
- Since the turn of this year our new senior officer leadership team in this area have been working at pace to refine and finalised the emerging transformation plan which was referenced in this draft IRP with details given in the five broad themes that it will cover.
- That he was reassured that there was a broad understanding and appreciation of the issues facing Street Scene which was deep-rooted and multi-layered.
- Already, change for the better was happening and the same as agreed as part of the budget that did two things:
 - the inherent cost pressures resulting in Street Scene overspending in each year since 2015 and would deliver around £10m worth of savings in 2024 and 2025 focussed around the principles of income generation, service redesign and increased productivity.
 - two big ticket issues was included in the budget were the introduction of alternate weekly collections and the introduction of weekly food waste recycling in 2025.
- It could not be emphasised enough that the latter of these will of course ensured that the smelly waste which was of greatest concerns to households continued to be collected on a weekly basis.
- This was something that was lost in the noise surrounding the budget setting process and needed to be clarified at every possible opportunity.
- More broadly the transformation programme was underpinned by the aims of modernising our services, making them more reliable, increasing recycling rates and ultimately providing better value for money.

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- We were up for the challenge and have the operational leadership in place that had the experience to deliver on this.
- We were optimistic for the future for Street Scene services as we strive for a cleaner, greener Birmingham.

The Deputy Leader expressed thanks to the officers for their hard work that had gone into producing the IRP in consultation with colleagues Elected members and other officers. She expressed her optimism and stated that it was felt that this was a live document as it kept changing with people's contributions. A lot of effort have been done in pulling this together. It was having an understanding that there will be more that underpinned this from other directorates that would feed into making this deliverable across all directorates. It was also pulling together the transformation that the Council needed in line with the intervention direction we have. This was a positive thing for the Council as it helped us to rebuild relationships and looked at the continuous improvements that needed to happen.

The Deputy Leader continued that a huge part of this will be around culture change which meant that this will be at all levels as it was not just Cabinet Members, the Opposition Members or Corporate Leadership Team, but the whole organisation travelling in the same direction for the betterment of the people we were serving. This involved going back to those principles for us to be an organisation that was focussed on citizens outcomes.

Of importance was that it would give us clarity on where we were going with everybody knowing with an organisation of this size. The key thing was that this had to deliver real progress and not just promises. We needed to ensure that we were making it purposeful for the people of the city. This was only the beginning as there was a lot of work to be done and we could only achieved that in a behaviour where moving forward and everybody was rowing together in the same direction.

Councillor Robert Alden commented that the Council had a good history of producing glossy plans and well-meant words as touched on by the Deputy Leader, but so far had little delivery of those plans and words. This now had to change in the next step after this so that this did not just become another plan that was placed on the shelf and did not deliver the change that Birmingham residents needed. He added that this was the third reset that this administration has had on partner relationships in the last 10 years and remarked that he suspected that the question partners would be asking was how this one would be different and led to a different outcome to the last couple of resets that had been a partnership relationships. He requested further information in relation to direct delivery under the HRA as previously Cabinet heard how the HRA was not going to be directly building houses anymore as we would be partnering with other people to do so.

Councillor Alden referred to page 14 of the document (middle column) that references a phrase that was used to sum up the whole IRP looking at the whole document and stated that we needed to be clear that we work with partners to put residents first and that the Council's purpose was to improve the lives of residents and that we work with partners to deliver that. He added that

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it was hoped that in the later versions of the plan that became clearer as this was the moral guiding principle of the Council.

In terms of culture, fundamentally this Plan was about change but should be about changing the culture of the organisation. It was not about individual policies. This Plan failed if when individual policies change everything fell apart as policies of the Council will always change over time. What needed to be the constant was that the culture of the organisation as a place people wanted to work that puts residents first and was an organisation that delivered what it stated it would deliver. That needed to outlast any one individual policy that the administration may have. It was hoped that all Cabinet Members had that guiding principle that it was the culture of the organisation that needed to change first and foremost.

Councillor Roger Harmer stated that one of the indications of how we were doing as an organisation was whether we have the stability and the leadership. We have in recent weeks seen the Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources leave the organisation. We were still some way from having that stability behind these improvements that we needed to get, and it was hoped that we will get to that stability. Whilst it was difficult to deliver such challenging culture change which has to be driven from the leadership that needed a consistent messaging. Whilst the IRP may say many of the right words about putting citizens, communities and partners first was a meaningless phrase as we cannot have everybody first. Our primary job was to serve our citizens.

Councillor Harmer argued that it was important to discuss the structure of the organisation to see whether it was appropriate. We needed to look at creating a structure for the Council that worked in the future. There was a number of different things that could be done some being radical and some not radical and it was important that we have that debate some of which would require primary legislation. If we were going to do that we needed to get on with looking at some of those things by examining them early.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families made the following statements:-

- ✚ That within her portfolio there was a SEND Improvement Board chaired by a commissioner and has rigorous processes within its planning.
- ✚ We now had a portfolio wide Improvement Board which has been independently chaired.
- ✚ Meetings with partners who have signed up to what we were trying to achieve in improving our services for children and young people across the city were important.
- ✚ We did not forget that even when the data looked good that there were people behind that data.
- ✚ There were people who needed to have their trust in us rebuilt. This goes across our services, and it was particularly upsetting if you were expecting something for your child and it did not happen when you were expecting it.

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- ✚ People's lives were disrupted by all our services when they go wrong, and we needed to give clear reasons when something goes wrong. We needed to win back the trust of the residents of the city.
- ✚ The energy and diligence that had been shown through this process we will apply to working within the IRP.
- ✚ The rigour of tracking both the improvements and the savings was key, and this was something we modelled in Children, Young People and Families.
- ✚ We needed to ensure we were all working together to deliver this cross-party, cross directorate and involving our partners and the people of Birmingham.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness gave assurance to the Cabinet and the residents of Birmingham that since both the Ombudsman Paragraph 49 report in January 2023 and the notice by the Regulator for Social Housing in May 2023, officers had been working hard to drive and secure some significant improvements across the Housing Directorate. As outlined in the report there were three areas of focus for Housing:-

- Firstly, to increase the supply of affordable housing through direct delivery and third-party providers.
- Secondly, to improve the overall quality of Council housing and ensured that the Council achieved compliance against the consumer standards.
- Thirdly, to ensure that homelessness was prevented wherever possible and where it occurred it was rare, brief and non-recurring.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness then highlighted the following:-

- a) Some progress had been made and that we have successfully disposed of the first tranche of eight sites to registered providers for 100% affordable homes.
- b) Tranches 2 and 3 were approved by Cabinet to create a pipeline of activity and development.
- c) We were mobilising the Affordable and Delivery Group which brought together developers, registered providers and Council officers who undertook direct delivery activity to try and bolster affordable housing in the city.
- d) We have mobilised an affordable housing delivery team who worked closely with Planning to push through the highest level of affordable housing through the Section 106 process aiming for the compliance sites at all times.
- e) We have launched our HRA Business Plan Management Strategy 2024-29 which will enable the city to secure £1.4b worth of investments over the next eight years to bring homes up to decent standards.
- f) We have responded to the breach notice issued in May 2023 by the Regulator of Social Housing accelerating all areas of landlords health and safety compliance, asbestos surveys had gone from 20% to 50%, low rise FRA's had gone from 30% to 70% and electrical safety tests from 65% to 90%.
- g) We have ceased formal engagement with the Housing Ombudsman who was satisfied with the work undertaken to improve complaints handling,

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financial redress through compensation and the way repairs were managed.

- h) We have undertaken self-assessment against these new consumer standards working with strategic partners Campbell Tickle to ensure we were ready for future inspections.
- i) We have continued to reduce the number of households with children in B&B for over six weeks over the last six months for the first time in many years and against national trends.
- j) We will not be complacent here as we knew things will continue and there will be continued demand on our services.
- k) At the end of Quarter 3 the Council achieved 55.2% successful prevention outcomes for those who approached us threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- l) The Commissioner Housing Led Sub Board that met on a monthly basis had a range of other projects which will provide assurance that the directorate were delivering on agreed service improvements. It was important to note that the Sub Board included representation from opposition parties.

The Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism stated that alongside the former Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources we have been working with officers to ensure that the Oracle stabilisation and reimplementation continued on track. Supporting the establishment of strength and programme governance for the Oracle programme and ensuring that outstanding issues continued to be resolved. The programme was currently going through a period of reset and would continue to develop and form a key part of the Council's overall improvement. This had not been an easy journey and we were under no illusion of the challenge ahead. It was critical that we remained focussed and on track.

The plan going forward with the programme was we will get to a place where we would see the introduction of new ways of working for staff, enabling greater accountability and ownership across the organisation. This includes consolidation and digital efficiencies which will identify opportunities to reduce duplications across the Council and deliver services in a more consistent standardised efficient and cost-effective way to improve performance and enhance the customer experience.

As Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism I will continue to challenge officers and keep a close eye on the programme to ensure that improvements continued and that benefits for the organisation and the residents of Birmingham could be realised. The Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism expressed thanks to all staff for their hard work on the programme.

The Interim Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care commented that we have an improvement plan that was bold, honest and candid in recognising the case for change. We recognised that we have come to an inf defining moment where we set Birmingham on a new course. A smaller, leaner, more efficient and more productive Council focussed on getting the basics right and delivering better basic services. Creating a new partnership with citizens and partners in a collaboration of power sharing agreement that brought together the Council its

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statutory and voluntary partners and those in the community and individuals as citizens. The IRP marked the launching point to a more wholesale and fundamental transformation in the way we ran the city. It was a transition point which would be of historic significance if we delivered this right. There were examples where this was done well such as Adult Social Care Services where a new vision was set out in 2017 that have over the following years fundamentally transformed that service. The IRP was an ambitious, honest and determined Plan.

The Deputy Leader noted Councillor Alden's comments concerning the previous plans and advised that we were ensuring that there were clear focus around governance which was fundamental to the running of the organisation a key element. Whilst we have a Plan we will also have a robust governance and assurance arrangements that sat around that which includes Member oversight challenge as well as officers of different levels. It was about ensuring responsibility in terms of named officers and Members alongside that to ensure we got the full delivery against budget and the improvements we were looking for. In terms of culture she expressed agreement with Councillor Alden's statement. This was something that makes the organisation functioned better but also for the residents of the city i.e. Member led officer run which was at the heart of that.

At this juncture the Chair underscored the importance of cultural change as without that we would not deliver against the objectives we had set ourselves. The Chair noted Councillor Alden's comments concerning the Foreword of the IRP and advised that we will ensure that we have the correct names against the Foreword when this goes to Full City Council. The Chair further noted the comments around partners i.e. what would be different and what had changed and advised that we were engaging with the Council's top 50 strategic partners, meeting different sets of partners based on sectors of interest every couple of months. This gave us a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data so that we had some real time understanding and what part were their thinking and feeling in relation to how the Council could improve and informing directly that journey. This will also form part of our corporate reporting and would be monitored as part of the stabilisation plan set out to be mainstreamed into the IRP.

The Chair continued that a general point about partners was, when we spoke of partners we were not just talking about businesses or big statutory agencies. Important though they were to this city – they were enablers that helped to improve people's lives whether by creating jobs or delivering some important public services), but he was also thinking of the voluntary organisations, the faith organisations many of whom have been at the front line in leading our response to the cost of living challenges, the Covid 19 Pandemic, the residents organisations which were an integral part of the city's community and we needed to think in the broader sense of all of those different stakeholders being part of what makes Birmingham. Many of those representatives of partner organisations were also citizens who were living in this city and contributing in that way. It was important that we viewed partners as a key ally in the work that we do, but the ultimate focus was delivering for our citizens.

347. RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: -

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That Cabinet:-

1. Considered the draft Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) (attached at Appendix 1, to the report) as the overarching document that summarises the key programmes, projects, and activity the Council needs to deliver improvement;
 2. Agreed the Aims, Outcomes, and Priorities of the Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP);
 3. Noted the Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) will be reviewed and refreshed to reflect new priorities and the further development of delivery plans for new programmes; and
 4. Recommended that the City Council approve the Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP).
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HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

The Deputy Leader introduced the item and drew the attention of Cabinet to the information contained in the report.

Members then made the following comments:-

- ❖ That £950k of this fund would be spent on current pressures in temporary accommodations which was important for families.
- ❖ This level of funding at such short notice was *no way to run a railway*. It forces the Council to use the existing programme and mechanisms to spend the money. One would want more time to plan and to allow the programme to evolve and developed, but this was not possible when you got such a short notice.
- ❖ It was hoped that the Council would focussed on the delivery of that funding over the summer to ensured that it maximised in terms of the impact we could get for residents in the city. It was also hoped that the hardship fund in the appendix to the report would include things like the funding of white goods when they were broken.
- ❖ The statement in paragraph 3.14 of the report was a welcomed focus as it would help people in situations where they did not need short-term funding from the public sector longer term. Anything that could be done to help families economic position was welcomed.
- ❖ The £950k that was set aside for temporary accommodation homelessness support it was hoped that we would be tight on this to ensure that it delivered for those residents that needed it.
- ❖ Whilst this funding was welcomed the fact that it was only until September gave us concerns of how residents would get through the winter. It needed to be funding for a year at a time and the voluntary

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sector in particular found it difficult if projects were not just for a year as they needed to be able to plan ahead and the Council needed to be able to support them in doing so.

- ❖ That a *sticking plaster was better than an open wound*. The public health benefits needed to be emphasised that arises from this as hardship, poverty was a major driver of the wider determinants of ill-health.
- ❖ There was a useful piece of evaluation work that would be done in the Public Health Division looking at the recent food voucher scheme. We will also be looking at the holistic benefits that came from that and it was hoped that a further announcement would come from the Government later in the year to deal with the winter.
- ❖ It was hoped that we have a longer-term solution where this pepper potting of bits of money out of the blue was not needed as there was a fundamental solution and we look forward to the day when that was coming forward.

A brief discussion then ensued concerning the distribution of the food vouchers.

The Deputy Leader gave assurance that Members would be updated in terms of what was happening.

348. RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: -

That Cabinet:-

- a. Accepted the 2024 allocation of Household Support Funding which is £12,791,135.04 (for the sake of brevity, the sum reported in the rest of this paper will be rounded to £12.791m);
- b. Approved that the fund be delivered by the Cost-of-Living programme through the established Strategic Response Group. This would be in consultation with the Deputy Leader, who is the Cabinet Member responsible for the Cost-of-Living programme;
- c. Reconfirmed that the Chair of the Strategic Response Group for the next six months, as well as being the Senior Responsible Officer, will be Richard Brooks, the Director of Strategy, Equality and Partnerships;
- d. Approved the indicative spend on disbursements set out in Appendix 1, to the report;
- e. Delegated relevant decisions, including detailed decisions on spending, to the Strategic Response Group in consultation with the Deputy Leader including any decisions required if the fund is subsequently extended from six months to the full 2024/25 financial year;
- f. Noted these decisions will continue to be formally recorded and shared on CMIS through an established Officer Delegated Decision form. This

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form is signed off by the SRO in consultation with the Council's business partners including the S151 officer; and

- g. Delegated procurement decisions to the Director of Strategy, Equality and Partnerships and the Section 151 officer, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Corporate Procurement and the appropriate Cabinet Members.

OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

- 349.** No item of urgent business was raised.

The meeting ended at 1625 hours.

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CHAIRPERSON