

Birmingham City Council

Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee

22 February 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 On September 21, the Committee agreed its Terms of Reference for an inquiry on 'Improving Standards of Council Housing'. In light of the budget challenges and financial recovery as well as the regulatory compliance work being undertaken by City Housing, the inquiry has reviewed this Terms of Reference. A focus on improving standards around void properties was agreed on 23 November 2023. Appendix 2 sets out the revised Terms of Reference.

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 during March – May 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.
- Note the revised Terms of Reference for the inquiry on improving standards on void properties.

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.

Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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 will meet informally to consider the developing Improvement and Recovery Plan and the findings and recommendations of the Governance Review. The Committee will reconsider its work programme for March – May and will reframe 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
012489/2024	Response to Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Report	N/A	27 Feb 24
012445/2024	Disposal of 8 no. sites to Registered Providers	Housing and Homelessness	29 Feb 24
012520/2024	Improvement and Recovery Plan	Deputy Leader	19 Mar 24
012205/2024	Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2024-2029	Housing and Homelessness	19 Mar 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 21 September 2023, the Committee agreed a terms of reference for an inquiry to improve the standards of council housing. In light of the financial challenges facing the Council and City Housing’s programme to meet regulatory compliance, the inquiry Task and Finish Group have reconsidered the terms of reference to ensure the inquiry can continue to add value. This has been informed by further discussions with City Housing.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 Evidence gathering for this inquiry has commenced and will continue until April 2024 at the earliest. 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 - February

9.2 Appendix 2: Terms of Reference – Improving Standards of Re-let Properties

10 Background Papers

10.1 [Birmingham City Council Constitution](#)

10.2 Birmingham City Council Overview and Scrutiny Framework April 2021

Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023/24

Month	Item/Topic	Aims and Objectives	Scrutiny Method	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer	Other Witnesses	Additional Information and Outcome*
July	Voids – Improving Standards Corporate Priority: 11	To be confirmed by Task and Finish Group	Task and Finish Group meetings	Director, Housing Management – Stephen Gabriel		<p>The Housing and Neighbourhoods O&S Committee in 2022-23 agreed to review Voids – Improving Standards. A Terms of Reference was approved in February 2023, and the Council’s City Housing service presented in March 2023. Committee members also took part in visits to City Housing void properties. The intention had been to continue into 2023-24.</p> <p>As there is now a dedicated Homes O&S Committee for 2023-24, the scope of these Terms of Reference will be reviewed at the first Task and Finish Group meeting.</p>
September	Social Housing Regulation Bill Corporate Priority: 11	<p>Provide information on what the Social Housing Regulation Bill means for the Council’s City Housing service.</p> <p>Understand how City Housing will achieve compliance with the Social Housing Regulation Bill, and preparation for inspection from the Regulator for Social Housing in April 2024</p>	<p>Committee meeting - single item: 21 September 2023, 2pm.</p> <p>Venue: Room 6, Council House</p>	Head of Service, Strategic Enabling – Naomi Morris		<p>This Bill intends to deliver the reforms outlined in the Social Housing White Paper and address the concerns following the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017. It will introduce a stronger and more proactive regulatory regime to improve standards and accountability for landlords for the services they provide.</p>

Month	Item/Topic	Aims and Objectives	Scrutiny Method	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer	Other Witnesses	Additional Information and Outcome*
		Consider how Member insight can inform and drive improved services	Deadline for Papers: 12 September 2023			The agenda item will also outline progress toward inspections following the Regulatory Notice in May 2023. Outcome: Approved quarterly compliance meetings
September	Housing Ombudsman – Paragraph 49 Corporate Priority: 11	Outline the background to, and the key recommendations from, the Housing Ombudsman special report on Birmingham City Council Provide information on the progress made towards delivering on the recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman, Paragraph 49 report. Consider how Member insight can inform and drive improved services	Committee meeting - single item: 21 September 2023, 2pm. Venue: Room 6, Council House Deadline for Papers: 12 September 2023	Head of Service, Strategic Enabling – Naomi Morris		In January, the Housing Ombudsman published a special report on Birmingham City Council. The report made recommendations relating to repair handling; complaint handling; record keeping and compensation policy. Outcome: Approved quarterly compliance meetings
September	Scrutiny Contribution to Budget Savings and Recovery Plan	For the Committee to consider a report on current and future Budget Savings and Recovery Plans and implications for Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Committee meeting - single item: 21 September 2023, 2pm. Venue: Room 6, Council House	Cllr Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness	Paul Langford, Strategic Director, City Housing	It was agreed at Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July that all Scrutiny Committees will consider the implications of the Medium-Term Financial Plan at the September Committee meetings.

Month	Item/Topic	Aims and Objectives	Scrutiny Method	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer	Other Witnesses	Additional Information and Outcome*
			Deadline for Papers: 12 September 2023			
October	Exempt Accommodation Corporate Priority: 9, 10 and 11	Provide update on progress of outstanding recommendations from Exempt Accommodation inquiry. Consider the impact of the recommendations from the Inquiry	Committee meeting - single item: 19 October 2023, 2pm. Venue: Room 6, Council House Deadline for Papers: 10 October 2023	Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Jayne Francis Assistant Director, Housing Strategy and Enabling – Guy Chaundy		Exempt Accommodation Inquiry 2021 Latest update to Co-ordinating O&S Committee (March 2023) Outcome: The Committee reviewed the update on progress and agreed the Cabinet Member assessments for each of the outstanding recommendations.
October	Scrutiny of Delivery of 2023/24 Budget Savings and Update on Council's Response to Section 114 Notice and Financial Recovery Plan	Continue to scrutinise the existing 2023/24 savings. Consider the implications of recent events on the Committee's work programme.	Committee meeting – standing item: 19 October 2023, 2pm Venue: Room 6, Council House Deadline for Papers: 10 October 2023	Interim Strategic Director, City Housing - Paul Langford	TBC	Co-ordinating O&S Committee on 15.09.23 agreed that all committees should have a standing item on the delivery of existing savings for 2023/24 particular to the remit of the Committee.
November	Scrutiny of Delivery of 2023/24 Budget Savings and	Continue to scrutinise the existing 2023/24 savings.	Committee meeting – standing item: 23 November 2023, 2pm	Strategic Director, City Housing - Paul Langford		

Month	Item/Topic	Aims and Objectives	Scrutiny Method	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer	Other Witnesses	Additional Information and Outcome*
	Update on Council's Response to Section 114 Notice and Financial Recovery Plan	Consider the implications of recent events on the Committee's work programme.	Venue: Room 6, Council House Deadline for Papers: 9 November 2023			
November	Regulatory Compliance Corporate Priority: 11 and 12	Provide Committee members with skills and knowledge to prepare for, and engage with, the first Regulatory Compliance session in January.	Other – Training session	Head of Strategic Enabling – Naomi Morris		This is a training session to be delivered by Campbell Tickell as part of their existing work with Birmingham City Council. This session will not be livestreamed.
December	Improving Standards of Re-let properties Inquiry	Evidence gathering session – City Housing properties	Site Visit	Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager		Terms of Reference for this Inquiry have been revised (see November Committee). The Inquiry directly responds to challenges outlined in the Regulatory Notice. Evidence gathering programme agreed by the Task and Finish Group.
January	Regulatory Compliance Corporate Priority: 11 and 12	Provide oversight, scrutiny and productive challenge to City Housing while moving towards compliance with the requirements under the Social Housing Regulation Bill and the recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman special report.	Committee meeting – single theme: 25 January 2024, 2pm Venue: Room 6, Council House	Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Jayne Francis Strategic Director, City Housing – Paul Langford		Following agreement in September 2023 to hold quarterly landlord compliance meetings, the cycle of meetings will commence in January 2023. This will enable Members of the Committee to receive bespoke training in advance of this first session.

Month	Item/Topic	Aims and Objectives	Scrutiny Method	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer	Other Witnesses	Additional Information and Outcome*
			Deadline for Papers: 10 January 2024			Outcome: Agreed that the Committee would continue to take a proactive role in providing oversight, scrutiny and productive challenge to the directorate whilst moving towards a position of regulatory compliance.
January	Request for Call-In: Contract Award for the Provision of Repairs and Maintenance 2024-2026	To consider whether the decision should be called in and referred back to Cabinet.	Committee meeting – single item: 25 January 2024, 2pm Venue: Room 6, Council House	Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness – Cllr Jayne Francis Strategic Director, City Housing – Paul Langford	Director, Asset Management – Wayne Davies	Outcome: The decision was not called in.
February	Review work programme in response to Governance Stabilisation Plan	To review the Committee’s work programme to respond to Recommendation 5 of the Governance Review Stabilisation Action Plan	Informal Meeting: 15 February 2024 Venue: Ellen Pinsent Room, Council House	Paul Clarke, Director Programmes, Performance and Improvement		Governance Review Report available from: Document.ashx (cmis.uk.com)
February	Affordable Housing Item Deferred* Corporate Priority: 11 and 12	To provide the Committee with a more detailed understanding of the strategy for Affordable Housing. Consider future areas Overview and Scrutiny to explore.	Committee meeting – single item: 22 February 2024, 2pm Venue: Room 6, Council House	Assistant Director, Housing Development – Claire Flowers	Assistant Director, Housing Strategy & Enabling - Guy Chaundy	Affordable Housing is a workstream under the proposed Improvement Recovery Plan. *This item has been deferred – new date to be agreed at the informal session on 15 February 2024.

Month	Item/Topic	Aims and Objectives	Scrutiny Method	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer	Other Witnesses	Additional Information and Outcome*
			Deadline for papers: 7 February 2024		Head of Strategic Enabling – Naomi Morris	
February	Exempt Accommodation Corporate Priority: 9, 10 and 11	Provide update on progress of outstanding recommendations from Exempt Accommodation inquiry. Consider the impact of the recommendations from the Inquiry	Committee meeting – single item: 22 February 2024, 2pm Venue: Room 6, Council House Deadline for papers: 7 February 2024	Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Jayne Francis Assistant Director, Housing Strategy and Enabling – Guy Chaundy		Exempt Accommodation Inquiry 2021 Previous tracking report October 2023
February	Improving Standards of Re-let properties Inquiry	Evidence gathering session	Informal meeting	Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager		Terms of Reference for this Inquiry have been revised (see November Committee). The Inquiry directly responds to challenges outlined in the Regulatory Notice. Evidence gathering programme agreed by the Task and Finish Group.
March	Items to be agreed on February 22 Committee					This will be identified at the informal session on 15 February 2024.
March	Improving Standards of Re-let properties Inquiry	Evidence gathering session – Other Social Housing providers	Informal meeting	Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager		Terms of Reference for this Inquiry have been revised (see November Committee). The Inquiry directly

Month	Item/Topic	Aims and Objectives	Scrutiny Method	Cabinet Member/ Lead Officer	Other Witnesses	Additional Information and Outcome*
						<p>responds to challenges outlined in the Regulatory Notice.</p> <p>Evidence gathering programme agreed by the Task and Finish Group.</p>
April	<p>Regulatory Compliance</p> <p>Corporate Priority: 11 and 12</p>	<p>Provide oversight, scrutiny and productive challenge to City Housing while moving towards compliance with the requirements under the Social Housing Regulation Bill and the recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman special report.</p>	<p>Committee meeting – single theme: 18 April 2024, 2pm</p> <p>Venue: Room 6, Council House</p> <p>Deadline for Papers: 3 April 2024</p>	<p>Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Jayne Francis</p> <p>Interim Strategic Director, City Housing – Paul Langford</p>		<p>Following agreement in September 2023 to hold quarterly landlord compliance meetings, the cycle of meetings will commence in January 2023. This will be the second time that this item will take place.</p>
April	<p>Improving Standards of Re-let properties Inquiry</p>	<p>Evidence gathering session – Other Social Housing providers</p>	<p>Informal meeting</p>	<p>Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager</p>		<p>Terms of Reference for this Inquiry have been revised (see November Committee). The Inquiry directly responds to challenges outlined in the Regulatory Notice.</p> <p>Evidence gathering programme agreed by the Task and Finish Group.</p>

*Outcome: This will be populated once the item/topic has been completed. It will highlight the added value and impact.

Menu of Options for Future Consideration

The following items had been identified as potential topics for future consideration. This approach enables the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to remain flexible and respond in a timely manner to emerging issues.

This is a live work programme. New items may be added, or items removed during the course of the year. Proposed aims and objectives as well as scrutiny methodology may also be subject to change.

Item/ Topic	Proposed Aims and Objectives	Proposed Scrutiny Method	Additional Information
Budget Savings	To update and monitor 2023/24 Budget Savings; to provide information on the mobilisation / implementation of the 2024/25 Budget Savings; and update on any recommendations from the Budget Scrutiny T&F Group relevant to the Committee's remit.	To be confirmed	
Customer Services – Housing Repairs	To be confirmed following July's Co-ordinating O&S Committee. Currently: Monitor the progress and impact of the recommendations from the Customers Services O&S programme	To be confirmed	<p>Co-ordinating O&S Committee convened Task and Finish groups to identify, and monitor progress of, recommendations to improve customer services in 4 areas including Housing Repairs.</p> <p>A final Task and Finish group took place on 14 June 2023, and a report presented to Co-ordinating O&S in July. It was agreed that Homes O&S Committee takes forward this work for Housing Repairs in the future.</p>
Tenant Engagement	This will be confirmed following further discussions by the O&S Committee.	This will be confirmed following further discussions by the O&S Committee	This will be confirmed following further discussions by the O&S Committee.

Scrutiny Method Options:

Committee meeting - single item

Committee meeting - single theme

Task and Finish Group (outline number of meetings)

On location

Other - (describe)

Corporate Priorities, Performance and Outcomes

Corporate Priorities 2022 – 26:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Support inclusive economic growth | 11 Increase affordable, safe, green housing |
| 2 Tackle unemployment | 12 Tackle homelessness |
| 3 Attract inward investment and infrastructure | 13 Tackle health inequalities |
| 4 Maximise the benefits of the Commonwealth Games | 14 Encourage and enable physical activity and healthy living |
| 5 Tackle poverty and inequalities | 15 Champion mental health |
| 6 Empower citizens and enable citizen voice | 16 Improve outcomes for adults with disabilities and older people |
| 7 Promote and champion diversity, civic pride and culture | 17 Improve street cleanliness |
| 8 Support and enable all children and young people to thrive | 18 Improve air quality |
| 9 Make the city safer | 19 Continue on the Route to Zero |
| 10 Protect and safeguard vulnerable citizens | 20 Be a City of Nature |
| | 21 Delivering a Bold Best in Class Council |

Information on the Corporate Priorities, Performance and City Outcomes was reported to the Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee OSC in June 2023:
[Decision Details: Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023/24 \(15.00 - 15.45\) \(cmis.uk.com\)](#)



Work Outline / Terms of Reference

Improving Standards of Re-let Properties Inquiry

Reporting to Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<p>Our key question:</p>	<p>How can the Council improve the quality of its housing for Council tenants?</p>
<p>1. How is O&S adding value through this work?</p>	<p>Context</p> <p><i>In January 2023, the Council declared a ‘housing emergency’ in Birmingham. Shortly afterwards, the Housing Ombudsman published a special report into Birmingham which made recommendations into four key themes: repairs; record keeping; complaints handling, and compensation. A Regulatory Notice was also issued against the Council in May 2023. All Members receive daily complaints from tenants highlighting significant concerns about the quality of their council housing. Local media such as the Birmingham Evening Mail are also regularly featuring stories which also draw attention to real life cases. During the January 2023 debate in Council, it was reported that 29% of the proportion of Council homes in Birmingham do not meet the Decent Homes standard (compared with 7.8% nationally). This year, the Social Housing Regulation Bill has been introduced, which places new responsibilities on landlords such as Birmingham City Council.</i></p> <p><i>To respond to this urgent challenge in service delivery and to provide the standards that social housing providers should meet, the Council’s City Housing service is undertaking a broad transformation programme. This wide ranging programme is being delivered in the specific context of the significant Council’s budget gap and financial recovery programme. It will remain a priority, and the O&S Committee will play an important role in providing oversight and driving improvements in the service.</i></p> <p>Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Framework, 2021</p> <p><i>This framework outlines suggested criteria to ensure inquiries add value. This inquiry meets the criteria listed below:</i></p> <p><i>A high degree of public interest, political importance or sensitivity.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Issue identified by members as a key issue for public.</i> • <i>Public interest issue covered in local media.</i> <p><i>Implications for the City Council’s wider governance role</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>New Government guidance or legislation.</i> <p><i>Service delivery and efficient management processes, where there is:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Concern about service performance.</i> • <i>A high level of service user dissatisfaction with the service.</i> • <i>A high priority afforded to the service by customers/users.</i> • <i>High level of budgetary commitment to the service/ policy area.</i> • <i>Issues raised by external audit reports.</i>



	<p>Improvement Plan and Governance Review</p> <p><i>It is important that all future work carried out by Overview and Scrutiny Committees contributes towards the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan. This will incorporate the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Governance (CfGS) Review, November 2023, which highlighted 13 recommendations for the Council to urgently undertake to improve the quality of its decision making.</i></p> <p><i>Recommendation 5 from this CfGS review is: 'Reframe the scrutiny work programme to focus on the Council's improvement and recovery priorities' and outlines 4 specific areas O&S activity should focus on. This inquiry links in with: 'Critical Performance Issues emerging by "exception"'. </i></p> <p>Focus</p> <p><i>Given the transformation programme in place and the new financial context the Council is operating on, the O&S Committee has considered with City Housing where its work could best add value for improving the conditions of housing stock. As a result, it has been agreed that the O&S Committee will focus how it can recommend service improvements in the Council's standards for re-letting void properties. This will contribute towards addressing some of the concerns highlighted by the Regulator and Ombudsman, but also importantly also inform the new Housing Repairs and Maintenance contract.</i></p> <p>Adding Value</p> <p><i>Specifically, this inquiry will provide an opportunity to inform the development of a new standards for the reletting of properties and in turn, the future Housing Repairs and Maintenance contract. While City Housing would still have completed this work as part of 'business as usual', the work undertaken as part of this inquiry will ensure this is better informed and effective.</i></p> <p><i>Note the intention of this Inquiry is not to duplicate any existing work, but to complement and enhance it. The inquiry presents an opportunity for Members to use their unique insight to consider these challenges in a different way, and as a result make recommendations which can make a tangible difference to the housing for tenants in this city.</i></p>
<p>2. What needs to be done?</p>	<p><i>The Inquiry will receive evidence from a range of stakeholders to consider the following key issues:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• What do we know about the condition of Council properties becoming void? What are our current standards for re-letting? How are we currently performing against these standards? What are tenants telling us about our service and the standard of the property (when they are letting a previously void property)? How are we responding to any complaints and what are the outcomes?</i> <i>• What should our standards for re-let properties be? What are the standards for other Registered Providers and Local Authorities in the region? How do we currently compare to this? How could we meet these standards, in particular given the financial context of the Council?</i> <i>• What are the specific concerns raised by the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator for Social Housing? How are City Housing</i>



	<p><i>responding to these concerns? What progress have they made, and what still needs to be done?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>How does this feature in City Housing's transformation programme? What is the progress and impact of this programme to date? What are the challenges to overcome in the future? What other areas of the service does this link to? What is our proactive approach towards housing management and residents' looking after their properties?</i>
<p>3. What timescale do we propose to do this in?</p>	<p><i>As the original agreed scope of this inquiry has been reconsidered, the timescales have been reviewed and revised. The title has also changed to, more accurately, capture its focus.</i></p> <p><i>For clarity, the original Terms of Reference had been agreed by the Committee on 21 September 2023 with evidence gathering to commence in November 2023. On 23 November, the Committee verbally agreed to revise the Terms of Reference to better reflect where it could add value; its revised focus will be specifically on void properties. A revised Terms of Reference will be agreed at a later Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</i></p> <p>Scoping: <i>Revised outline Terms of Reference and delivery plan: to be agreed at O&S Committee on 22 February 2024.</i></p> <p><i>Evidence gathering to commence in December 2023 and conclude in April 2024.</i></p> <p><i>The Homes O&S Committee intends to report and make recommendations to Council. A date will be confirmed.</i></p>
<p>4. What outcomes are we looking to achieve?</p>	<p><i>This inquiry will make recommendations which will contribute towards:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Make Council homes safer for tenants and improve standards (Outcome 1)</i> <i>Improve tenant satisfaction with their Council Homes and the services they receive (Outcome 2)</i> <i>Inform the new Repairs and Maintenance contract for City Housing (Outcome 3)</i> <p>Birmingham City Council's Corporate Plan 2022-2026 <i>Priority 11: Increase affordable, safe, green housing.</i> <i>Priority 12: Tackle homelessness</i> <i>Priority 13: Tackle health inequalities</i></p>
<p>5. What is the best way to achieve these outcomes and what routes will we use?</p>	<p><i>A Task and Finish Group is the recommended approach by the Committee to gather and review evidence for this inquiry. This Task and Finish group will comprise Committee Members and will be cross party.</i></p> <p>Stakeholders <i>The following stakeholders will be requested to provide information to this inquiry:</i></p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Birmingham City Council’s City Housing Directorate</i> • <i>Council’s Housing contractors</i> • <i>Local Government Association (LGA)</i> • <i>Social Housing Providers in Birmingham and West Midlands</i> • <i>Tenants</i> <p><i>Other stakeholders may be identified by the Task and Finish Group during the inquiry.</i></p> <p><i>The inquiry also welcomes suggestions for additional stakeholders to seek evidence from all stakeholders listed above and Members of the Council. All suggestions should be highlighted to the lead officer listed below.</i></p> <p><i>Stakeholders will be invited to provide evidence in a variety of formats. This will be finalised as part of the scoping stage. In general terms:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>For organisations, this may be information in writing and/or a face-to-face presentation. Organisations will be advised of the relevant format for their evidence individually when invited to provide information to the inquiry.</i> • <i>For tenants, the inquiry group is currently determining the best approach. This will be informed by the current type and nature of the information collected by City Housing.</i> <p><i>The inquiry group also intends to undertake site visits to empty (void) Council properties to support their inquiry.</i></p> <p>Members <i>All Members of the Council will also be invited to provide evidence. In addition to this, all members of the Council may request to attend evidence gathering sessions. If a Member is interested in this, they are invited to contact the lead officer for further information.</i></p>
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Member / Officer Leads

Lead Member:	<i>Chair: Cllr. Ken Wood</i>
Members of the Task and Finish Group:	<i>Councillors Saqib Khan; Mohammed Idrees; Lauren Rainbow; Penny Wagg</i>
Lead Officer and support:	<p><i>Lead Officer: Amelia Wiltshire</i> <i>Support Officer: Jayne Bowles</i></p> <p><i>City Housing are also providing expertise through their Asset Management, Housing Management and Strategic Enabling teams.</i></p>