

Birmingham City Council

Economy and Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18 April 2024



Subject: Economy and Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets out the work programme for the Economy and Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2023-24. Following the findings and recommendations from the independent Governance Review of the Council, and specifically recommendation 5, the Committee reframed its work programme to be aligned to the Council's improvement and recovery priorities.

2 Recommendations

That the Committee:

2.1 Notes the report.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Committee's Terms of Reference is to fulfil the functions of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee as they relate to any policies, services and activities concerning:
- 3.1.1 major physical regeneration and infrastructure projects in the city (with Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness)
 - 3.1.2 promotion of the city and inward investment (with the Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism)
 - 3.1.3 land use and property assets
 - 3.1.4 economic growth and jobs
 - 3.1.5 skills expansion for key growth sectors along with lifelong learning for post-14 skills and lifelong learning

- 3.1.6 access to employment and delivery of local employment plans
- 3.1.7 economic impact of arts, culture, tourism and sport
- 3.2 The Committee is chaired by Councillor Katherine Iroh. Its cross party membership comprises Councillors Akhlaq Ahmed, Bushra Bi, Jon Hunt, Katherine Iroh, Simon Morrall, Richard Parkin, Jamie Tennant and Lisa Trickett.
- 3.3 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. 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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.

3.7 Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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. Committees have been advised to consider where they can best add value 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.

3.8 There are a range of ways to undertake scrutiny. In line with statutory guidance from 2019, the approach for 2023-24 has enabled a more flexible scrutiny and outlined a shift from monthly formal meetings to a combination of approaches. The Committee has chosen the most effective scrutiny method to achieve the desired aims and objectives for each topic.

4 Outcomes from 2023-24

4.1 During June – December 2023, the Committee considered the following topics:

4.1.1 Regeneration across the City (July) – the Committee reviewed the Our Future City: Draft Central Birmingham Framework and provided feedback as part of its consultation. In summary, the Committee supported its vision. However it raised concerns that the title of the framework indicated that it was only concerned with Central Birmingham. In addition, the role of communities in developing these proposals and governance arrangements as well as how it will reduce inequalities needed to be better articulated.

4.1.2 Tracking of the Scrutiny Inquiry: Increasing the opportunities for employment and skills for young people (July, October and December) – this included a presentation on the Local Skills Improvement Plan by Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce.

4.1.3 Financial Challenges and Budget Savings and Recovery Plan (September and October) – the Committee received reports on the s114 notice, the Medium Term Financial Plan and the context for services falling under the remit of this Committee including performance on current savings.

4.2 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.

4.3 On 10 January 2024, the Economy and Skills 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 January - April and reframed it to ensure it aligns with the issues set out above.

4.4 In light of this, the Committee considered the following topics in January, February and March:

4.4.1 The proposed budget for 23-24 and specifically how the Place, Prosperity and Sustainability Directorate is mobilising to deliver these savings (January, February and March).

4.4.2 A briefing on the proposed Improvement and Recovery Plan (February).

4.4.3 A workshop to inform a new corporate performance management framework (February).

4.4.4 Asset Disposals – a briefing on the asset disposal programme and methodology (January).

4.4.5 Sale of Bordesley Park (March) – the Committee undertook pre -decision scrutiny of this asset disposal and made seven recommendations to the Cabinet Committee – Property to consider when making its decision.

4.4.6 Our Future City Plan – the Committee suggested that there should be a Statement of Involvement setting out how communities will be involved in the implementation of the framework; confirmation that issues raised by the Jewellery Quarter Neighbourhood Plan have been taken on board; further information on the economic, environmental and sustainability impact of the framework, and how risks around the Council's current financial position have been mitigated (March).

5 Looking Ahead

5.1 In April and May, the Committee will be undertaking further pre decision scrutiny around asset disposals. The Committee will also be holding an informal Budget Task and Finish Group to consider the delivery plans for relevant savings for 2023-24.

5.2 Other areas the Committee identified include (any future work will need to consider how it contributes towards the delivery of the Improvement Recovery Plan and Governance Stabilisation Plan:

5.2.1 Local Enterprise Zones and Business Rates Maximisation

5.2.2 Scrutiny Inquiry: Increasing the opportunities for employment and skills for young people – further tracking of recommendations

5.2.3 Night-time Economy

5.2.4 East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy

5.2.5 Integration of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions

5.3 The Council's latest [Forward Plan April 2024](#) may assist Members in identifying further areas for the Committee to explore.

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 There are no appendices.

10 Background Papers

10.1 [Birmingham City Council Constitution](#)

10.2 Birmingham City Council Overview and Scrutiny Framework April 2021