

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

COORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1100 hours on Tuesday 19th March 2024, Committee Rooms 6,

Council House, Victoria Square, B1 1BB

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Sir Albert Bore (Chair)

Councillors: Deirdre Alden, Mick Brown, Shabrana Hussain, Mohammed Idrees, Katherine Iroh, Morriam Jan, Kerry Jenkins, Ewan Mackey, Lee Marsham and Alex Yip

Also Present:

Max Caller CBE, Lead Commissioner

Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

Johane Gandiwa, Scrutiny Officer

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that the meeting would be webcast for live and 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 were confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

No apologies were given.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. MINUTES – 26th January 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER

The Chair, Cllr Sir Albert Bore, outlined the proposed amendments to the work programme. The Chair reiterated the need for scrutiny to focus on improvement and

recovery. Two workshops were held with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). A Draft Blueprint from Ed Hammond of CfGS had been received and would be shared with all Coordinating Committee members as well as Commissioners. The blueprint report sets out the proposed future work programme for Scrutiny Committees. Comments would be made on the Draft. The Chair also advised members of the meetings held with the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer, and the Lead Commissioner to set out the programme on budgetary issues.

The Chair proposed that in April, each Overview and Scrutiny Committee would hold Task & Finish Group meetings to consider Delivery Plans that sat behind every budget line. The Delivery Plans contained exempt information relating staffing, legal risks, Council commercial elements. As such, Task and Finish Groups would meet in private to consider such information as it cannot be published. The Chair had received legal advice on this matter. Cabinet Members and the Corporate Leadership Team, as appropriate, would be invited to attend these informal meetings.

The Chair further proposed that the Co-ordinating O&S Committee would convene a public meeting in May 2024 prior to the Annual Meeting of Council for a report back session by Scrutiny Committees. The advantage of May meeting was that it would bring some information into the public domain as soon as was practical possible. Beyond May meetings, each O&S Committee would hold meetings, in public, to review the implementation of the savings identified for 2024-25. The successor Coordinating OSC Committee would then consider a scrutiny contribution to the 2025-26 Budget.

Following deliberations on the proposals by the Chair, and assurances on the advantages of the private sessions for Task and Finish Groups, it was unanimously agreed as follows: -

RESOLVED:

- i. That the Co-ordinating OSC revised action tracker be noted.**
- ii. That Scrutiny Committees would convene informal Task and Finish Groups in April 2024 to discuss delivery plans and budget items.**
- iii. That a public meeting of Coordinating OSC Committee would be held in May 2024 to receive reports from Scrutiny Committees.**

6. COMMISSIONER'S REVIEW AND COMMENTS ON THE AGENDA

There were no comments.

7. LEAD COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

The Lead Commissioner, Max Caller CBE, updated the Committee on the progress recorded since government intervention in October 2023. He explained that Commissioners had been in post since 05th October 2023 and had assumed some of

the powers of Council as provided by the law. The Lead Commissioner explained that Commissioners exercised oversight of Council and were accountable to the Secretary of State and ultimately to Parliament. They were not accountable to the Council.

The Lead Commissioner added that as Commissioners, they were ready to work and engage with overview and scrutiny committees to ensure that Council performed better to come out of intervention. The Lead Commissioner emphasised that, in some areas, commendable progress had been noted and some of the services were improving. He reiterated the need for a culture change so that Members and Officers could work together for the good of the Council. A new report on the Member/Officer Relationships Protocol would be submitted to the Standards Committee on 28 March.

The Lead Commissioner outlined the various reports that the Commissioners had shared with the Secretary of State. The Lead Commissioner highlighted that the work that had been done by Scrutiny Committees on the budget was impressive. The work gave confidence to the Commissioners that the budget savings were deliverable. The Commissioner urged scrutiny to ensure that there was delivery and implementation of the budget as the historic challenge for Birmingham had been failure to deliver on the approved budgets.

The Lead Commissioner emphasised the need for Council to systematically address, amongst other issues, the revenue challenges, financial controls, spiralling adult health, and social care, equal pay liabilities and Oracle implementation. A Job evaluation needed to be done in close consultation with Trade Unions ahead of the 2025 deadline. The Lead Commissioner further called for focus to be placed on regeneration, service delivery and getting the basics right.

The Lead Commissioner informed the Committee of the advice that had been given to the Secretary of State. Following receipt of expert advice, he had recommended to the Secretary of State that the Audit Committee would be chaired by an Independent Member. The recommendation was informed by the size and scale of the budget of Birmingham City Council as well as a consideration of the specialist skills, and independence required to chair the Audit Committee. The Constitution would be amended to provide for the chairing of the Audit Committee by an Independent Member.

The Lead Commissioner encouraged Members to work at pace as more was expected of them. There were numerous opportunities for Council to deliver savings and move forward. Commissioners would adopt an interventionist approach to make things right. A culture change between Members and Officers would deliver the required positive change underpinned by mutual confidence, openness, and respect.

A discussion was then held, and the following were the responses provided by the Lead Commissioner.

- Effective scrutiny should lead to improved service delivery. This entailed, amongst others, working at pace using a variety of methods, including Task and Finish Groups. The benefits of working informally were highlighted along with the need for findings to be reported to formal committee meetings where key issues could be discussed in public.
- Scrutiny should also make use of people outside council, and not just rely on reports from Officers. This would bring a new perspective on the examination of issues. It was important for scrutiny to learn from and understand how things were done in other places as this would add to new insights and sharing of lived experiences.
- Commissioners would continue to provide the necessary guidance and oversight, and they would be watching budget implementation closely.
- The Secretary of State would continue to provide the necessary guidance, including on the way forward on the recruitment of the Chief Executive Officer.
- Experts would lead the process of resolving Oracle implementation and scrutiny must keep a close eye on this matter.
- Reports by Officers would be realigned so that there would be more focus on the big issues that members needed to know. There was a lot of material in the reports that was not crucial in supporting effective decision making.
- The Commissioners would actively engage with Scrutiny Committees so that the role of scrutiny would be amplified. The Lead Commissioner would continue sharing information, reports, and responses from the Secretary of State as and when they became publicly available so that scrutiny committees would be able to play their roles effectively.

The Chair of Coordinating O & S Committee stated that a meeting had been diarised with the Chair of the Audit Committee to discuss the working modalities between Audit and Scrutiny.

RESOLVED: -

- **That the update by the Lead Commissioner be noted.**

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

There were no requests for Call In for Co-ordinating OSC.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 19th April 2024.

The meeting ended at 12:28 pm.