

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

COORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1000 hours on Friday 14th July 2023, Committee Rooms 3 and 4,

Council House, Victoria Square, B1 1BB

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Albert Bore (Chair)

Councillors: Akhlakq Ahmed, Jack Deakin, Mohammed Idrees, Lee Marsham, Ewan Mackey, Kerry Jenkins, Alex Yip, Morriam Jan.

Also Present:

Richard Brooks, Director (Strategy, Equality & Partnerships) - Online
Wendy Griffiths, Assistant Director (Customer Services and Business Support)
Nikki Spencer, Digital Projects Manager - Online
Sheraz Yaqub, Business Change Manager
Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny & Committee Services
Ed Brown, Committee Officer

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised the meeting to note that this meeting will 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 are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors, Mick Brown, Shabrana Hussain and Darius Sandhu.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. MINUTES – CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the public minutes of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

5. CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER

It was requested that where there had been a change in the relevant Cabinet member or Scrutiny Chair that it be ensured that issues were carried through.

The Action tracker reflected that there had been some Terms of Reference Changes and as such relevant actions were being picked up by the relevant committees, such as actions pertaining to the Domestic Abuse Strategy being considered by the Neighbourhoods OSC.

With regard to the action on the Cabinet Member Social Justice, Community Safety & Equalities meeting with the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership, the issue had been raised with the Leader and it was hoped that there would be an update by the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Action Tracker was noted.

6. CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAMME TASK AND FINISH GROUP

It was noted that Appendix B (Customer Service Programme Task & Finish Group Supplementary Report (Highway Repairs)) and Appendix C (Highway Repairs – Recommendations Presented to Service Leads) had been circulated via a second agenda despatch.

The Assistant Director (Customer Services and Business Support) introduced the report providing an update to the 9th December and supplementary 27th January report on the actions of the Co-ordinating Overview & Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group, established following the Customer Service Programme update report to Co-ordinating Overview & Scrutiny Committee in September 2022.

The Chair noted that there was one issue of outstanding activity for the Task and Finish group on governance workshops to look at issues raised at these workshops could be understood in terms of lessons that could be learned.

The Chair thanked the Digital Projects Manager for her work on the issue.

Cllr Marsham, Chair of the Sustainability and Transport Overview and Scrutiny committee stated that the Sustainability and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee were happy to look at the transport element again.

The Chair suggested that a number of relevant issues were raised and if the recommendations were fully acted on then there should be an improvement in the service and perhaps a transformation in the services, particularly with regard to waste management and housing repairs. However, this would be dependent on reports being followed through in the detail of the recommendations. This was echoed by members of the Committee.

The Digital Projects Manager was again thanked for her work and the Assistant Director (Customer Services and Business Support) and the Business Change manager were also thanked for their work and the Task and Finish Group was held up as an example of how Scrutiny could make a difference.

RESOLVED:

- That the Committee note that the Task & Finish Group has completed its review of the recommendations submitted to service leads for Bereavement Services, Housing Repairs, Waste Management and Highway Repairs.
- That the Committee agree that the Task & Finish Group should ask service owner Committees to follow up any further action required to ensure that the identified end-to-end customer service improvements are implemented:
 - Neighbourhoods: Waste and Bereavement Services.
 - Sustainability and Transport: Highway repairs.
 - Homes: Housing repairs.
- That the Committee support the further work of the Task & Finish Group to scrutinise how senior managers are responding to feedback from the Customer Standards Workshops to embed the Customer Service Strategy.

7. CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

During the discussion the following issues were raised:

- With regard to the issue of the Elections Act, it was suggested that the upcoming neighbourhood referendums could be explored in terms of how the requirement

of voter ID impacted these elections, particularly given the demographics of the areas. This would give an opportunity for the Committee to learn from elections within the Council as well as those from other authorities.

- The Cost of Living Task and Finish Group needed to be considered.
- It was suggested that where food banks were mentioned in the terms of reference of the Cost-of-Living Task and Finish Group that food pantries, the wider food Justice network and community fridges could be added.
- With regard to the terms of reference of the Cost-of-Living Task and Finish Group, the Chair would sit with Officers to explore the possibility of meeting before the end of July to set out a work programme. Officers would need to bring in people who represented community issues from September onwards.
- There had been offers of interest in the Cost-of-Living Task and Finish Group. The Chair had also requested that a Co-opted person be part of the Group. He noted that a member of the Labour Group was a Chief Executive of a community organisation in Castle Vale who was knowledgeable about issues surrounding the cost of living. As such a note had been put to the City Solicitor, as if he was asked to join, it would help the group to understand the issues, but a dispensation would be needed. The secondment of members who were not on Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) was being considered and would be followed up once a response was received from the City Solicitor.
- The Chair would consider how the issue of Equal Pay claims and their effect on the Council could be addressed.
- It was suggested that the Committee needed to discuss how the individual OSCs could contribute to looking at how the Council could save money in the long term in a way that would not affect the services delivered to citizens. The Chair responded that the issue had two aspects (Budgetary issues and Human Resources issues), and both of these were under the remit of the Finance and Resources OSC. However, each OSC had a role to play in that there would be an impact on service delivery. It was therefore incumbent on OSCs to consider issues to establish what the impact of potential cuts in budgets might be and whether service delivery could be maintained by changes in the way services were delivered. This could come through recommendations from OSCs. It was therefore suggested that each OSC have an agenda item to consider what the Committee could do in terms of advising the executive and management of changes they could recommend. It was further requested that such issues be in public session as much as possible.

RESOLVED:

- That the membership of the Cost of Living Task and Finish Group be confirmed as Councillor Bore, Councillor Deakin, Councillor Jan and Councillor Sandhu.
- That the Committee note and agree, the draft Terms of Reference / Work Outline for the Cost of Living Task and Finish Group set out in Appendix 2 with an amendment to mention food pantries, the wider food Justice network and community fridges be mentioned as well as food banks.
- That the issue of Equal Pay claims be included on the agenda for each OSC, perhaps as a standing item.

8. UPDATING THE SCRUTINY FRAMEWORK

The Chair introduced the report and made the following points:

- A version of the framework with the changes visible had been circulated.
- A more flexible Scrutiny Function for the 2023/24 had been endorsed.
- The Chair was happy for the OSCs to adopt the updated framework.
- There had been issues updating the appendices. This may affect issues such as how the call-in process was handled. Updates would be given as they became available.

During the discussion the following issues were raised:

RESOLVED:

- That the Committee agree the draft Scrutiny Framework attached as Appendix 1 for further consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader.
- That the Committee agree that the Scrutiny Procedure Notes are reviewed and updated as set out in Section 3.3 of the report presented.

9. WEST MIDLANDS DEEPER DEVOLUTION DEAL

The Director (Strategy, Equality & Partnerships) introduced the report and made the following points:

- The Levelling-up zones and investment were important elements of the Devolution Deal.
- It had been proposed to the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) that a levelling up zone is within Birmingham. A trilateral working

group with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) has developed a proposal for bringing significant investment to the area that would change outcomes for those living there. This proposal (East Birmingham North Solihull (EBNS)) had been secured in the Devolution Deal along with other levelling-up areas. EBNS is the furthest advanced of the proposals in terms of scope and scale.

- A significant programme of work was underway on a levelling-up zone proposal, which was looking to capture business rates growth in this area of the city on a selection of sites and retaining these business rates for public investment in infrastructure and development. The sites were being negotiated with the Treasury. It would be a significant development to secure these.
- The government approach had changed significantly during the devolution deal process and specifically on investment zones. The Liz Truss government had proposed an approach with multiple sites able to be put forward to potentially secure occupier tax incentives. The Council had pivoted work towards this and sent lots of information to support to the approach which was then scrapped. The revised government approach of investment zones instead focussed on a region choosing a sectoral strength with and a mixture of incentives for specific sites with a total value of approximately £80m, partly direct spending and partly tax incentives and potentially for business rate retention sites alongside. The investment zone covers the whole West Midlands. The sector identified for the West Midlands was advanced manufacturing.
- The likely sites had yet to be fully decided upon but were likely to include Coventry Gigafactory and other sites, potentially including the Innovation Quarter in central Birmingham.
- An announcement was expected in the Government's Autumn statement about the outcome of these discussions and the funding likely to be agreed in the Spring budget.
- The wider deal was a very broad-based proposal, largely about devolving funding and powers from central government to WMCA with additional funding in a number of areas including brownfield land remediation and building affordable housing. There was a lot of detail in the deal and a number of workstreams were underway with the WMCA engaging multiple officers from around the local authority.

- The timetable from here was that Cabinet was expected to formally endorse the deal in September. There would then be a board meeting of WMCA in October. If the deal was agreed, it would allow the government to proceed with laying the orders to take forward elements within the deal and for implementation to move forward.
- There was only one element of the deal which required consultation which the WMCA was undertaking through a governance review and scheme in relation to the devolution of the bus service operator grant.

During the discussion the following issues were raised:

- Parts of the deal would be able to be taken forward by legislation worked through Parliament and further legislation will take place once the deal is agreed.
- It was expected that the detailed implementation plan would come to a WMCA Board in October.
- A cabinet paper was going to Warwickshire County Council regarding the authority potentially becoming a constituent member of the WMCA. There were a set of unanswered questions, including the implications for funding shared across the WMCA as it was not yet clear how it would be shared. It was also unclear as to what the implications for voting would be.
- Issues surrounding transport infrastructure in Warwickshire were raised and the implications of this should Warwickshire join the WMCA. In particular it was noted that rail fares appeared expensive in Warwickshire compared to elsewhere in the West Midlands which made people more dependent on road travel. The possibility of subsidised rail fares was raised. However, there was little clarity on the issue at this time.
- It was not thought that any decisions had been taken across the combined authority in terms of implementation of greater scrutiny to go with extra powers. This was currently a work stream in the implementation of the deal.
- In response to a question about how it could be ensured that local residents were trained for the jobs created rather than skilled labour being imported from other areas, it was suggested that this was an issue for the city beyond the deal. There was a supply of skilled people in the city and a high level of qualified young people, including those at the universities within the city. Whether these skilled people stayed in the city depended on a wider range of

issues including the quality of public services and house prices and was a broad-based issue.

- There was currently no suggestion that the Mayor was personally deciding applications for housing money allocation. Most of the powers on this sat with the WMCA as a whole. More clarity would be sought on housing implications.
- The Our Future City Plan highlights significant land for affordable housing. Land was not the constraint in Birmingham. However, the £400m across the WMCA would not meet the demand for affordable housing.
- Issues were raised concerning the proportion of affordable housing in the regeneration in Ladywood.

The Chair noted a number of points raised which could be reflected into the report to Cabinet:

- Cabinet needed to acknowledge the issues raised by members.
- Issues on governance and accountability set out in the deal paper needed transparency in the Cabinet report, especially regarding the requirement that members of the WMCA OSC and Audit Committee would be remunerated as a consequence of the deal being agreed.
- It was raised that the two-year term for WMCA Committee Members was not in the constitution and this would need to be addressed.
- The issue of the Chairs and Deputy Chairs needing to be from the opposition to the Mayor of the WMCA needed to be addressed.
- It was suggested that the Birmingham City Council constitution might need to reflect the requirements of any Members who were appointed by the City Council to these roles.
- There was concern about devolution, particularly in terms of MPs representing West Midlands Parliamentary constituencies having a scrutiny role.

RESOLVED:

- That the report to Cabinet reflect the issues raised by the Committee.
- That the Committee endorse the Levelling-up Zone proposals and the Investment Zone approach.

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

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

11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no other items of urgent business.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would be 15 September 2023 at 1000 hours.

13. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

‘In an urgent situation between meetings, the Chairman jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee’.

14. EXEMPT INFORMATION – POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that the report at Agenda item 17 contained an exempt appendix within the meaning of Section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972.

RESOLVED:

That in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, which includes exempt information of the category indicated, the public be now excluded from the meeting: -

(Paragraph 3)

15. PRIVATE MINUTES – COORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the private minutes of the Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

The meeting ended at 11:00