

REPORT OF THE FORMER CO-ORDINATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**THE FUTURE OF THE CIVIC FUNCTION****1. PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW**

- 1.1 The passing of the Localism Act 2011 has brought to the fore discussions around governance arrangements in Local Authorities. The possible change as a result of this provision raised a number of constitutional issues for Birmingham which required attention. The future of the Civic Function and the role of the Lord Mayor was one of these.
- 1.2 Given Scrutiny's past involvement in considering the operation of the Lord Mayor's Parlour it was felt that a sub-group of the former Coordinating O&S Committee would be appropriate to carry out some work examining the impact of different constitutional scenarios on the Lord Mayor, and that now was an opportune time to do so. The key question the working group sought to answer was:

What role would best be played by the Lord Mayoralty in future, given the different possible constitutional scenarios?

- 1.3 This report does not intend to come to a view on which constitutional arrangement is the most appropriate for Birmingham. It is intended to identify the possibilities and issues for the role of the Lord Mayor of Birmingham both now and in the future. It will suggest areas which warrant further detailed work in order to ensure that the role remains prominent and relevant for Birmingham today, and to allow the city to maximise the benefits of having a Lord Mayor.

2. THE CIVIC FUNCTION

- 2.1 Birmingham has had a Mayor (and an elected Council) since 1838. The office was raised to the dignity of Lord Mayor and 'First Citizen' when Queen Victoria issued Letters Patent on the 3rd June 1896. The underlying objective of the Lord Mayor and the Parlour is to serve and represent the people of Birmingham and operate in the context of Birmingham: its values, heritage, customs and practices, as well as upholding the broad interests of the wider Council, communities and citizens as a whole.
- 2.2 Responsibilities are many and varied and include, as examples:
- Presiding over Civic functions and social occasions as the ceremonial head of the Council;
 - Hosting events, receiving and welcoming members of the Royal Family, dignitaries and visitors, at all times observing the recognised protocol;
 - Taking part in functions as a representative of the people or the Council;
 - Working proactively for the Mayoral charities and supporting many other charities;
 - Maintaining close links with the armed forces and veterans' organisations;
 - Supporting voluntary activities that benefit local communities and people as a whole;
 - Celebrating local success and recognising achievement both internal and external to the Council.

3. FINDINGS

- 3.1 The initial feedback from those we spoke to was that the office of Lord Mayor is of great value to Birmingham and is a time honoured role of great distinction which has served the city well. An important element of that is the office's political neutrality. Witnesses were keen to emphasise the importance of a Lord Mayor to Birmingham and the dominant view was that the

existence of such a post ought not to be brought into question under any type of governance model.

Benefits of the Civic Function

Heritage

- 3.2 The first and unique benefit of the Mayoralty in Birmingham is having a representative to personify and celebrate the heritage of the city. One witness suggested that the heritage aspect of the Civic function could be further strengthened with each incumbent Lord Mayor having a full understanding of the civic history of the city, which they could then promote and discuss with visitors. After all, the Lord Mayor's office and Parlour is a reserve of 'institutional memory' of the civic affairs of the city, which it is essential to preserve and share.

Supporting the Local Economy

- 3.3 Traditionally the Lord Mayor has always had a role in the maintenance and development of friendly relations between Birmingham and other cities and regions at home and abroad, which of course helps promote the city and support the local economy. More directly, we were told that the office of the Lord Mayor can play a part with regard to helping the city to attract foreign direct investment. Birmingham has to differentiate itself from other international cities in the fight for investment; a strong civic function, building on the heritage of the city, is one way of doing so.

Links with Communities and supporting charities

- 3.4 In addition the Lord Mayor is a key figurehead for and within communities, providing a non political link between the City Council and those communities. We felt that residents have a strong appreciation for the Lord Mayor and see it as a special position. Those who have served as Lord Mayor in the past continue to be recognised by residents and it was felt that this would not happen for other senior positions in the Council. Similarly a real benefit of a Lord Mayor is someone who does dedicate a large proportion of their time to supporting local and national charities.

The role in the future

- 3.5 Our evidence shows that the Lord Mayor has an important role to play and can be a positive force in a number of areas. We are clear that Birmingham's Lord Mayoralty should remain strong and influential.

Defining the role of the Lord Mayor

- 3.6 We believe it is important to first come to a conclusion about what the role of the Lord Mayor and the Parlour should be and what would be most appropriate for Birmingham today. We would not wish to see the role of the Lord Mayor being simply the Chair of the City Council. Focusing solely on this role would detract from the core purpose of the Lord Mayor, the heritage of the position and the benefits the role brings to the city.
- 3.7 We would like to ensure that the charity arm of the Lord Mayor's work is not diminished as this is already a strong and very positive part of a Lord Mayor's work and is something unique to the role.
- 3.8 We have already seen that there are benefits to the Lord Mayor being involved in the promotion of business and tourism; however this is perhaps an area which has not been explored fully. There does appear to be room for the Lord Mayor to be more involved with agencies/organisations involved in promoting the city.
- 3.9 For this to happen, there needs to be a better understanding of the rules and responsibilities associated with the Lord Mayor. Organisations would then be better placed to identify opportunities for the Lord Mayor's participation.

The relationship with the person leading the Council

- 3.10 Evidence suggests that in recent years there has been some tension between the Parlour and the Leaders office. This has been evidenced around the allocation and acceptance of

invitations and the observance of protocol at events. The issue of invitations currently centres on the proper roles of the Lord Mayor and the Leader in civic life. It was accepted by all our witnesses that there are some functions or events which should properly be attended by the Leader, others the Lord Mayor and some jointly. Agreement on this however, is not always easy to achieve.

- 3.11 It is in Birmingham's interest to ensure that both positions are well managed and work to support the needs of the city. It is therefore important that the City Council set clear parameters, to give clarity to those outside the organisation, to reduce confusion and embarrassment and to ensure that officers do not have to spend time negotiating on individual invitations or visits.
- 3.12 Communications between the offices of the Lord Mayor and a Leader or Elected Mayor is of key importance. This is something that was stressed in Scrutiny's previous review on the Parlour, and we were disappointed to hear evidence that the situation had not greatly improved. Filtering arrangements and closer joint working, particularly around events, are necessary as are good will and a willingness to compromise.

Resources

- 3.13 There have been some ongoing changes in terms of resources, both financial and staffing, which have influenced how the Lord Mayor's Parlour operates. The reductions in the hospitality budget over recent years have resulted in there being little left to host events after the costs of Remembrance Day and the Annual General Meeting are accounted for. As a result the Parlour cannot undertake or offer support to an increasing number of worthwhile events. With events that are still held, it was felt that often the budget available doesn't provide the level of hospitality that some of the occasions deserve.
- 3.14 We are of course aware of the difficult balance in delivering an effective service in the Parlour, against the current need to address workforce numbers and create financial savings as a result of the current economic climate.

The impact of different Constitutional Scenarios

- 3.15 We began this Review with the possibility of significant constitutional change in Birmingham. Of the three options, the feeling amongst Councillors and witnesses was that an Elected Mayor created the greatest potential risk to the Lord Mayor, given the greater range of powers that an Elected Mayor would be likely to have. Much of our discussion therefore focused on the role of the Lord Mayor in the event an Elected Mayor was adopted in Birmingham.
- 3.16 However we now know that the Leader and Cabinet model will be retained for the immediate future. This does not mean there are not problems to address and we feel that the issues we discovered through our evidence gathering are applicable to the chosen way forward. These concerns cover two main areas; the potential for the duties of the Lord Mayor to be reduced and the role diminished or even removed; and the confusion amongst the public of the differences between a Lord Mayor and an Executive.

Diminishing or removing the role of the Lord Mayor

- 3.17 We were provided examples of where this is perceived to be occurring at the moment, for example through the reduction in the Parlour's hospitality budget, the lack of presence at Citizenship Ceremonies and difficulties experienced around the Lord Mayor's attendance at city events. Examples were also provided to the working group highlighting where the Lord Mayor has not taken precedence at events and in some cases where the Lord Mayor's office has not been made aware of visits where it would have been suitable for him/her to attend.

Public awareness and understanding

- 3.18 A further potential effect is on the understanding of the wider community about the role of Lord Mayor. Evidence received suggested that there is currently not a clear understanding of the differences between the Leader of the Council and the Lord Mayor, what is expected in each role and in particular which office businesses and organisations should approach. This is

something we believed would only have been exacerbated by two roles with similar titles, had Birmingham adopted an Elected Mayor.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	That this Council reiterates its support for a strong Lord Mayor fulfilling the role of First Citizen, reflecting the value of the civic function and its role in the life of the city.	City Council	June 2012
R02	The charity arm of the Lord Mayor's work is unique and should be retained. Further investigation should be undertaken to see how this can be enhanced, without diminishing the other aspects of the role. This work should be carried out by the Lord Mayor's Advisory Group (Recommendation 05).	Council Business Management Committee	November 2012
R03	The Lord Mayor has a role to play in supporting Birmingham as a business and tourist destination. More could be done with partners such as Marketing Birmingham to exploit these opportunities. This should be explored.	Council Business Management Committee	November 2012
R04	Further work should be undertaken to educate the public on the roles and differences between the Leader and the Lord Mayor. It may be helpful if the possibility of the Lord Mayor having a free standing website be considered as part of a wider review of the Council's website.	Council Business Management Committee	November 2012
R05	<p>That a framework for partnership working between the Lord Mayor and a Leader is put in place, to support the Lord Mayor in the role of First Citizen and to ensure observance of the protocol. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved communication between the Lord Mayor and the Leader's office; • Regular meetings between the two offices. <p>This framework would be overseen by an advisory group, composed of former Lord Mayors, Group Secretaries and relevant officers who may also provide advice on other matters in defined terms of reference. (Suggested initial TOR in Appendix 3).</p>	Council Business Management Committee	November 2012
R06	That a report on progress is provided to a future meeting of the Governance, Resources and Member Development O&S Committee.	Council Business Management Committee	December 2012

MOTION

That the recommendations shown in section 4 above and summarised in the attached report be approved, and that the Executive be requested to pursue their implementation.