

REPORT OF THE LEADER TO CORPORATE RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE O&S COMMITTEE

4th January 2017

This report provides an update on key areas of my portfolio for the year ahead as background for the meeting on 4 January.

This report covers:

- Vision and priorities for the year ahead
- Improvement Panel
- Political and managerial leadership
- West Midlands Combined Authority – including lead on economy brief
- Bereavement Services

VISION AND PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Our Vision is for Birmingham to be a city of growth where every child, citizen and place matters.

We have identified four key priorities:

- Children - a great city to grow up in
Make the best of our unique demography and create a safe and secure city for our children and young people to learn and grow.
- Housing - a great city to live in
Provide housing in a range of types and tenures, to meet the housing needs of all of the current and future citizens of the city.
- Jobs and Skills - a great city to succeed in
Birmingham will be renowned as an enterprising, innovative and green city.
- Health - a great city to grow old in
Helping people become healthier, especially relating to physical activity.

We want to address Birmingham's big challenges and, since my last report to scrutiny, we have made very clear progress in the delivery of these priorities.

HOUSING

In November we received the welcome news that the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) setting out a 15-year strategy to deliver thousands of new homes and jobs can be formally adopted and approved by Birmingham City Council. The BDP sets out proposals to address the city's housing crisis by building 51,000 homes in Birmingham, including up to 6,000 at Langley in Sutton Coldfield.

This represented a significant milestone for the city and, subject to council approval; we can now proceed with the vital task of building homes and delivering the jobs that our fast-growing population so desperately needs.

This is an ambitious plan for growth which will deliver 51,100 new homes and significant new employment opportunities.

In September I signed an agreement with Chinese property development company Country Garden worth up to £2 billion to the Birmingham economy. The Joint Statement of Investment Commitment will initially see the Guangdong-based company:

- Explore large scale investment opportunities in Birmingham city region area with particular focus on regeneration and investment options related to the HS2 project.
- Work jointly to find areas of collaboration with regard to delivering significant new housing stock in Birmingham city and the surrounding area.

The Country Garden deal gives a clear indication that we have widened our search for shovel-ready capital to build houses at scale and pace in Birmingham. We must build an additional 80,000 homes in the next 15 years and to succeed will work with a range of partners.

CHILDREN

In May we announced our intention, as part of the children's services improvement journey, to explore a trust model. A report to Cabinet in July outlined two options for a voluntary children's trust for further development.

Further to an appraisal of 19 possible options, a wholly-owned company and an employee-owned mutual have emerged as the best options to secure sustainable improvement.

I was elected council leader on a pledge that 'every child matters', and protection for children will always be at the very top of my agenda for Birmingham. To this end, I have been instrumental in pushing forward with plans to transfer the running of children's services to a Children's Trust, crucially negotiating cross-party agreement for this new venture.

The formation of the Trust represents a unique opportunity to set Birmingham children's services on a fresh course to deliver the improvement that all of us want to see.

I am delighted that our former Commissioner for Children's Social Care, Andrew Christie, has agreed to chair the Trust.

ECONOMY

The city economy continues to show significant growth and in 2016 Birmingham recorded the highest rate of business growth of any UK city. That was double the national average, and higher than London, Manchester and Liverpool.

There are now more businesses in Birmingham than any other city outside the capital. With 9,151 new companies created in the first six months of 2016, Birmingham is set to retain its position as Britain's number one regional city for start-up creation for the fourth consecutive year.

In September we were named the most entrepreneurial city in Britain and can look forward with optimism to the arrival of the HS2 high speed rail service, now clearly on the horizon, which will deliver a game-changing economic boost not just to Birmingham but across the West Midlands.

IMPROVEMENT PANEL

Since I last reported to Scrutiny we have continued to make significant progress in addressing the recommendations of the Kerslake review.

In its latest letter to the current Secretary of State, Sajid Javid (9 November) Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel (BIIP) has acknowledged that, just two years into a five-year improvement programme, that Birmingham City Council has already made considerable progress.

The panel correctly noted that the 'new skills, insights and contributions' from additional senior management staff have made a positive difference and the council 'has made progress in addressing many of its own improvement priorities and handled effectively some unexpected external events and challenges'.

While recognising the extremely challenging circumstances facing the council as it focuses on developing a robust medium-term financial strategy, the panel acknowledged that the council is actively addressing concerns raised by the Kerslake Review and is strengthening how it manages its corporate performance by putting in place improved collaborative working between elected members and officers is also welcomed.

I was particularly pleased that the panel was fully supportive of my decision to appoint four assistant council leaders who are leading a drive towards greater devolution and developing new ways of involving and listening to the views of citizens.

I very much welcome the latest report from the Independent Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel which recognises the tangible progress the city council has made since the start of 2015, and also points to some tough challenges that ahead.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

In my last report to this committee I outlined my vision that 'members should lead the council, while officers should focus on the running of it.'

The BIIP has acknowledged progress here, noting: 'The Council has made progress in facilitating improved complementary and collaborative working between elected members and officers and it has strengthened how it tracks and seeks to manage its corporate performance. The Council Leader and new Cabinet have focused on re-setting the Council's vision and priorities, at the same time demonstrating improved cross-party working in this process and in other important areas of the Council's business.'

There is now a more systematic approach to cross-party working and monthly meetings between the Chief Executive and three group leaders, which started in March 2016, are still ongoing.

ASSISTANT LEADERS

In June I appointed four Assistant Leaders to oversee the next phase of devolution in Birmingham. The appointments provide an opportunity to develop a genuinely radical agenda for change.

Our ambition is to put Birmingham at the vanguard of reform and new ideas on local governance and community leadership, building on the tremendous diversity and vibrancy of our civil society and its social enterprises, community and voluntary organisations and restoring the reputation for good governance that once characterised the city.

The new roles have been welcomed by the BIIP. John Crabtree noted: 'The Council's four Assistant Leaders are taking an innovative approach to developing new ways of involving, and listening to, the city's residents. While these developments are at a very early stage they demonstrate a much-needed commitment to looking outward from the Council House and responding to the views and experiences of residents in each local area.'

MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP

As the BIIP acknowledged in November: 'Since early 2016 additional senior management staff have joined the Council. The new skills, insights and contributions are welcome and making a positive difference. Many new arrangements and plans have been put in place. The Panel recognises that the Council has made progress in addressing many of its own improvement priorities and handled effectively some unexpected external events and challenges. Focused activity has enabled the Council to further address some of the outstanding recommendations from Lord Kerlake's review.'

WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY

Since my last appearance before this committee in July, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has transferred £36.5million directly to the new West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) through the region's devolution deal – the first of payments totalling £1.1 billion over the next 30 years.

Other notable WMCA milestones in recent months include:

- **West Midlands Land Commission**

An independent panel of prominent UK property and infrastructure experts was officially launched to help the newly formed West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) unlock hundreds of hectares of undeveloped land.

<https://westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/news/west-midlands-land-commission-launched-to-help-unlock-sites-for-development>

- **The Greater Icknield and Smethwick Housing Growth Prospectus**

A blueprint to accelerate the building of more than 5,000 new homes in Birmingham and the Black Country has been unveiled.

The Greater Icknield and Smethwick Housing Growth Prospectus has been developed in conjunction with Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and will drive a £400 million development of 5,160 new homes on five brownfield sites in the adjoining areas of Greater Icknield, in Birmingham, and Smethwick, in Sandwell.

<https://westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/news/west-midlands-combined-authority-unveils-housing-growth-prospectus-for-greater-icknield-and-smethwick/>

- **Business Rates pilot**

The region will be able to retain all business rates generated locally from April 2017. The seven West Midlands metropolitan councils will form one of six pilot areas nationally to test out the new arrangements in advance of the scheme being introduced for the whole country in a few years' time.

<https://westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/news/authority-welcomes-government-announcement-on-business-rates/>

- **Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper**

A programme to support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions into employment has had a boost from Government - potentially worth millions of pounds.

<https://westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/news/programme-to-boost-employment-support-for-people-with-disabilities-and-health-conditions/>

- **The Midland Metro Alliance**

A new partnership to revolutionise the £1.2 billion construction of future tram routes across the West Midlands has been formally launched.

The Midland Metro Alliance establishes a team of planning, design and construction specialists building four new tram extensions over the coming decade on behalf of the newly formed West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

<https://westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/news/new-era-in-public-transport-begins-as-midland-metro-alliance-is-formally-signed/>

In addition:

- **Strategic Economic Plan 2016-2030**

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Economic Partnership (GBSLEP) has launched a strategy to add £29bn to Greater Birmingham's economy by 2030, aiming to create 250,000 private sector jobs and make the region the major driver of the UK economy outside London.

GBSLEP's new plan, the 'Strategic Economic Plan 2016-2030' – an update on previous targets set in 2013 – outlines how the LEP is aiming to make Greater Birmingham a global city-region in line with the ambitious goals set by the newly established WMCA.

<http://centrefenterprise.com/sep2016/>

BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Since my last report to this committee in July, progress has been made on a range of measures and initiatives to drive the service forward and meet community needs.

These include:

- Construction of the next phase development of Sutton New Hall cemetery commenced in December 2016. This is an 18 month 8 million pound contract which will provide 20400 graves serving all communities who favour burial.
- Provision of a new section for Muslim burials at Handsworth Cemetery
- Introduction of Digital Book of Remembrance onsite to enable families to access entries when the book room is closed
- Introduction of mini graves for cremated remains to provide more choice
- Refurbishment of Garden of Remembrance at Yardley Cemetery and Crematorium

Ongoing projects include:

1. Working with various community groups to meet their needs:
Provision above ground mausoleum - Chinese and Southern European communities
Discussions with a section of the Jewish community to set aside ground for burial.
2. Re-opening of Lodge Hill Cemetery for full burial by the provision of grave vaults with integral memorials
3. Digitisation of burial and cremation records to make available for viewing online
4. During January and February roadshows are to be held which highlight the services provided by the above three service areas together with input from Dr Anna Locke Palliative care consultant and Dawn Chaplin Head Nurse for Patient Experience Heart of England. The initial roadshow is to be held for members and will then be rolled out to communities within Birmingham.

CORONERS AND MORTUARY UPDATE

- Recruitment of three employees following the provision of funding by the Leader to help reduce the release times
- Reduction in release times- Average time (days) from receipt of notification to release of the deceased to the bereaved – where no PM or inquest required down from 2.6 to 1.7 days,
Average time (days) from receipt of notification to release of the deceased to the bereaved – where PM undertaken but no inquest down from 4.8 to 3.2
- Regular training conducted by the Coroner with GPs to reduce the number of necessary referrals

- Although non-invasive post mortems may be obtained at facilities in Oxford and Sandwell where appropriate, the Senior Coroner is working with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to identify a facility within Birmingham.
- An additional phone line has been installed to improve access for service users.
- Working toward the introduction of a portal which will enable hospitals to input deaths directly onto the City's IT system.

REGISTER OFFICE UPDATE

- Introduction of an Out of England registration service at the weekend to facilitate short notice repatriation
- Change of work practices to facilitate more short notice registration appointments
- Change of work practices to reduce the waiting time for birth registrations
- Introduction of online birth appointments, there is an ongoing project to roll out online death registration appointments
- Working with faith groups to inform and advise on legal requirements to effect a death registration