

Birmingham City Council

Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 17th March 2023



Subject: Cabinet Member Priorities, Leader
Report of: Councillor Ian Ward, Leader
Report author: Richard Brooks, Director of Strategy, Equality and Partnerships

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with an overview of current priorities and issues relating to the Leader's responsibilities covered by the Committee, specifically:
- West Midlands Combined Authority
 - Other Policy and Partnerships

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee consider the report and identify issues for further scrutiny as part of their future work programme.

3 Report

3.1 West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

- 3.1.1 The most important work with the WMCA at present relates to the **Trailblazer Devolution Deal** (TDD). The West Midlands and Greater Manchester were identified as places for new and "deeper" devolution deals in the Levelling Up White Paper in February 2022. These deals are intended to act as a template for other mayoral combined authority areas.

3.1.2 The WMCA has developed a wide- ranging set of proposals for the deal and engaged with officers and members from local authorities over the last 6 months to refine them. In Birmingham, the Deputy Leader holds the [portfolio for levelling up and devolution on the WMCA and has played a leading role in the TDD, including attending ministerial meetings. Birmingham City Council has been particularly active in advocating for:

- A double devolution” approach, recognising the role of the local authorities alongside the CA across all aspects of the deal, e.g., net zero, housing investment, employment support
- Specific powers and flexibilities for local authorities, to support our place shaping role
- Levelling Up Zones – based on our work to develop the East Birmingham North Solihull partnership with proposals for fiscal flexibilities and the alignment of infrastructure investment with public service improvements.

Negotiations are now at the stage of considering detailed text with inputs from various government departments. The intention is to announce the deals at the time of the spring Budget.

3.1.3 Other important issues recently addressed by the WMCA Board include:

- **The WMCA Budget for 2023/24.** This year’s budget relied upon an increase in transport levy and use of reserves. Over the medium term the budget is forecast to be in significant deficit, so there will be ongoing discussions about how to make it more sustainable. The TDD could provide for more certainty, but this cannot be assumed.
- **The Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund.** In addition to an underspend returned directly to the city council, the government has provided £70m from its own underspend on the Games for a legacy fund. This is being allocated to the West Midlands Combined Authority for joint decisions on how it is spent. We are currently working through those plans. One issue is that the fund is only for two years, whereas our legacy plans need to run much further ahead.
- **The Very Light Rail (VLR) Regional Package** – proposals to DfT for £36.5m funding to develop VLR demonstrators in Coventry and Wolverhampton and potentially build a new industry in the West Midlands.
- **The Transition Plan for the Local Enterprise Partnerships.** The Local Enterprise Partnerships are being wound up and their functions transferred to the combined authorities or the local authorities. Birmingham City Council is taking on functions including the management of the Birmingham city centre Enterprise Zone and some business support functions (to be funded through the Shared Prosperity Fund).

- **Progress with the HS2 Growth Delivery Plan** and the need to counter the negative stories about the project appearing in the media and hold the government to account in seeing the project through.

3.2 Core Cities

3.2.1 As the largest cities outside London, the Core Cities remains a key partnership in terms of influencing the national and international agenda on urban policy. The Chief Executive in Birmingham has taken on the role of Chair of the Chief Executives group within Core Cities. The group appointed a new Director in September 2022 and has been reviewing and refocusing its work.

3.2.2 The group is focusing on three main areas of work during this year:

- **The UK Urban Futures Commission** - The commission will develop a practical action plan for cities and city-leaders to maximise the potential of the UK's city regions, supported and encouraged by national policy. The Commissioners have now been announced.
- **The 3CI Cities Commission for Climate Investment.** This commission, founded by Core Cities in partnership with the Connected Places Catapult and London Councils has now engaged with the Key Cities group and the County Councils Network and secured funding from the former BEIS department. Its aim is to develop innovative new finance models and an investable pipeline of projects aimed at tackling climate change.
- **International work.** This includes developing the C7 group of cities networks within the G7 conferences, which has now become a permanent part of the G7 events and pushing for a greater role for the cities in inward investment, trade and international diplomatic functions.

3.2.3 In addition, Core Cities has regular discussions and correspondence with government officials and ministers, including on local government finance, housing and the Autumn Statement and is jointly hosting the annual Urban Summit with the LGA on 22 March.

3.3 Levelling Up Birmingham All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

3.3.1 The Levelling Up Birmingham All-Party Group was constituted in May 2022, with the following purpose:

- To showcase and advocate for *Prosperity and Opportunity For All: Birmingham's Levelling Up Strategy*, putting the city at the forefront of this emerging policy agenda.

- To use the APPG as a vehicle to engage with key influential stakeholders including Government, investors, businesses and public sector partners, with a view to securing the resources, powers and system change required to deliver the strategy.
- To promote the city as a *global city*, articulating that whilst there are many challenges, we also have the solutions in Birmingham, with huge potential and untapped talent. We need Levelling Up to be the key to unlock a 'golden decade of opportunity'.

3.3.2 The APPG uses the five Levelling Up Accelerators outlined in the city's Levelling Up Strategy as an overarching framework for its work programme and has been deliberately designed to operate on a cross-party basis, bringing together a coalition of advocates for Birmingham to lobby for the interests of the city and its levelling up ambitions on the national stage.

3.3.3 It is co-chaired by Preet Gill MP and Gary Sambrook MP (replacing original co-Chair Andrew Mitchell following his appointment to Cabinet).

3.3.4 Cratus currently act as formal secretariat to the APPG, with the Council/SPEACL providing advice and guidance on the development of the work programme and meeting structure.

3.3.5 Previous meetings

- The APPG was launched in June 2022 with a summer reception at the Library of Birmingham, jointly hosted with the West Midlands Forum. Speakers included the Leader, then co-Chairs Preet Gill and Andrew Mitchell, Liam Byrne MP, and Andy Street.
- In October 2022, the APPG held its first business meeting in Birmingham to coincide with the Conservative Party Conference. The agenda centred around the 3 Cities Programme (Levelling Up Accelerator 5), making links to the current Cost of Living Crisis and climate emergency.

3.3.6 Work Programme - The next business meeting of the APPG will take place in May 2023 (location and date TBC). It is envisaged that this will take a panel discussion format, inviting representatives from across local and national business communities, as well as national government, to discuss:

- Challenges and opportunities for Birmingham businesses, including the impact of the current cost of living crisis
- The Our Future City Plan (OFCP) as a long-term policy framework for the city, cementing Birmingham's status as the country's premier regional destination while proactively tackling challenges including the climate emergency

- How businesses, the APPG and national government can work together, using the OFCP plan as a guide to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, address the climate emergency and level up Birmingham

The draft work programme for 2023 is attached at **Appendix A**

3.3.7 During its first year, the APPG has already proved to be a valuable asset for the Council and its wider external affairs programme. Supporting the Council's maturing working relationship with national government, it provides a unique cross-party platform for advocating for the city's interests on the regional, national and Parliamentary stage.

3.3.8 APPG events have already proved successful in attracting high-profile speakers and contributors from policy thinktanks, national media and national government, opening Council events up to new audiences. Going forward, the APPG will be managed by the new SPEACL division as a core part of its external affairs offering.

3.4 Birmingham City Partnership Board (BCPB)

3.4.1 Founded in 2018, the Birmingham City Partnership Board (formerly Birmingham City Board) provides a strategic forum for partners across Birmingham to come together and discuss the policy opportunities and challenges facing the city. It provides a unified voice for the city on the regional and national stage, advocating for the Council's levelling up agenda in the context of the Covid-19 recovery.

3.4.2 BCPB is a non-statutory partnership and does not hold any formal decision-making or budgetary powers for the city of Birmingham.

3.4.3 Membership - The Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council chairs the Board. Membership is from across Birmingham's public, private and voluntary sectors, with organisations chosen based on whether they can provide strategic leadership, sponsorship, and direction to help Birmingham respond to the risks, challenges, and opportunities it faces. Chairs of statutory partnerships across Birmingham are also included in board membership.

Member organisations include:

- Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce
- Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP)
- Birmingham Voluntary Services Council (BVSC)
- West Midlands Police (WMP)
- West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (WMPCC)
- NHS and Integrated Care System (ICS)
- Birmingham City University
- WMCA.

3.4.4 Strategic goals and workplan - In 2022, the Board agreed six strategic goals:

- improve employability and employment
- increase living standards for all citizens
- engage with and empower our communities
- create a safer lived experience for our residents
- improve health and happiness
- work towards net zero

3.4.5 Since Autumn 2022, meetings of the Board have focused on exploring aspects of the cost-of-living crisis related to the strategic goals, identifying both short-term opportunities to work together and develop a joint city-wide approach and long-term opportunities to level up the city.

A workplan for 2023 was agreed by the Board at its February meeting. This is attached as **Appendix B**.

4 Any Finance Implications

- Not applicable for this report.

5 Any Legal Implications

- Not applicable for this report.

6 Any Equalities Implications

- Not applicable for this report

7 Appendices

- Appendix A – APPG Work Programme
- Appendix B – Birmingham City Partnership Board Work Plan

APPG for Levelling Up Birmingham Forward Plan 2023

May 2023

London

Business meeting
focusing on: Our Future
City Plan, business impact
of cost of living, and 3
Cities Retrofit

Sept – Oct 2023
Party Conference
Season

July 2023

Birmingham

Business meeting
focusing on East
Birmingham,
followed by drinks
reception

November 2023

Birmingham

Business meeting
focusing on early
intervention and
prevention

Birmingham City Partnership Board

Work Programme 2023

Meeting date	Topic and Draft Agenda	Links to Strategic Goals
12 th April 2023	<p>Part 1 - Our shared approach to data and insight</p> <p>Part 2 – Homes (sufficiency and sustainability)</p>	<p>Underpins all goals</p> <p>Goal 2 – Increase living standards for all citizens</p>
15 th June 2023	Homes (decency and affordability)	Goal 2 – Increase living standards for all citizens
12 th September 2023	Energy and the climate crisis	<p>Goal 2 – Increase living standards for all citizens</p> <p>Goal 6 – Lead the way to net zero</p>
15 th November 2023	Health inequalities	Goal 5 – Improve health and happiness

2023 Timeline

