

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CO-ORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

10.00 hours on Friday, 14 October 2022, Committee Rooms 3 & 4,

Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Albert Bore (Chair)

Councillors: Akhlaq Ahmed, Deidre Alden, Mick Brown, Mohammed Idrees, Chaman Lal, Ewan Mackey, Alex Yip

Also Present:

Cllr. Brigid Jones, Deputy Leader

Cllr. Simon Morrall, Member of Employment and Skills Task and Finish Group

Cllr. Izzy Knowles, Member of Employment and Skills Task and Finish Group

Richard Brookes, Director of Strategy, Equality and Partnerships

Wendy Griffiths, Assistant Director Customer Complaints and Business Support

Paul Clarke, Assistant Director, Programmes, Performance and Improvement

Christian Scade, Interim Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

Fiona Bottrill, Senior Overview and Scrutiny Manager

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that due to technical issues the meeting would not be live streamed but will be recorded and uploaded to the Council's Internet site (www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6_5dnVnYlw) and that members of the press/public who attend the meeting may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

The Chair also noted that members of the Employment and Skills Inquiry had been invited to join the meeting online for the item on the Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Cllr. Deakin, Cllr. Harmer, Cllr. Jenkins and Cllr. Suleman

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None declared.

4. ACTION NOTES – SEPTEMBER 23 2022 AND ACTION TRACKER

The Action Notes of the meeting on the 23 September were agreed subject to the following amendments:

- Page 2, paragraph 2: read “£1.7 million” not “£1.6 million”
- Page 3, paragraph 2, read “2-4 years” not “3-5 years”
- Page 3, paragraph 3: read “resulted in an increase in visibility of complaints” not “resulted in the increase in the number of complaints”

The Action Tracker was noted. Outstanding actions will be followed up and reported to the next meeting. It was noted that there had been a short turn around between meetings due to the re-scheduling of the September meeting due to the period of public mourning.

RESOLVED:

- The action notes of the formal meeting held on 23 September 2022 were agreed subject to the amendments above.
- The action tracker was noted.

5. DEPUTY LEADER’S PORTFOLIO PRIORITIES (ITEM 6 ON THE AGENDA)

The Chair welcomed the Deputy Leader to the meeting. He explained that as the Deputy Leader need to leave at 11.00 agenda item 6 would be taken before item 5.

The Deputy Leader highlighted the following key points from the presentation that has been circulated prior to the meeting:

The role of the Deputy Leader has two parts, deputising for the Leader and also has Portfolio Responsibilities.

The changes to the Deputy Leader’s Portfolio since May have been the inclusion of Levelling Up, Trailblazer Devolution Deal, Strategic Partnerships and Employment and Skills

The Corporate Performance Framework will be reported to Cabinet in November 2022 and has taken into account comments previously made by Scrutiny and Cabinet. The performance management process will also include quarterly performance meetings chaired by the Deputy Leader that will include information on complaints, performance finance monitoring.

The Transformation Programme includes change programmes across the Council that have previously not been delivered to due lack of headspace and capacity. A

project management framework has been introduced to ensure the transformation and savings are delivered.

The Customer Services Programme is working well. Citizens panels have been set up to help redesign the website. The bereavement service is a good example of how information on the website has improved.

The strategic partnership element of the portfolio involves ensuring that the Council's strategic priorities represented at partnerships and that the Council is working with all the partners needed to achieve outcomes for the city. Some of the key partnerships include the City Board, West Midlands Combined Authority, Local Government Association and Core Cities.

The Deputy Leader leads on Levelling up and Devolution within the Council and working with the West Midlands Combined Authority which involves negotiating with the national government and it is anticipated this will be agreed towards the end of the year.

Employment and Skills moved into the Deputy Leader's portfolio as it links with the partnerships she works with and the scale of the challenge. It was noted that the Employment and Skills Inquiry is taking place and is due to report to City Council in June 2023.

In relation to the Customer Services Programme the Co-ordinating OSC received an extensive report to the September meeting which was followed up by the Task and Finish Group. The Chair had written to the Deputy Leader as agreed in relation to the future funding and received an email response which confirms she is happy to support the recommendations of the Committee. The Deputy Leader will provide a further response on the budget for the Customer Services Programme which is due to end in March 2023.

In response to questions from the Committee the Deputy Leader provided the following information:

- In relation to efficiencies from the customer services programme it has been highlighted that it can be difficult to quantify the savings e.g., those resulting from automating a service response to customers. The Deputy Leader has challenged officers to quantify how staff time that has been saved through efficiencies will be used in other ways.
- The Cabinet Member for Resources has the responsibility for the use of consultants and each Portfolio Holder has to sign off the use of consultants over a certain threshold. Where Consultants are brought in these may be used for short periods of time when it is not appropriate to recruit or where specific skills are required, and salaries do not compete with the private sector. In response to a question the Deputy Leader requested a note and will provide details requested regarding the use of consultants.

- Members discussed the importance of ensuring that performance is recorded and reported accurately. The example was given of missed bin collections where the figure of 95% of bins collected does not reflect the service residents receive where bins can remain out all week or the data that the depots have on the dropped collections and missed roads. Residents who follow up a complaint have several different reference numbers for the same issue. The Deputy Leader responded that it is important the residents continue to contact the Council to report missed collections so that the performance and complaints data reflects the service residents receive and the use of technology in the lorry cabs will also help to record more accurately.
- In relation to reducing the unemployment rate in Birmingham which is above 11% to closer to the national average of 3.75% Skills the Deputy Leader said the city experiences the 'employment paradox' of record unemployment and record job vacancies. Three issues were identified that people in Birmingham do not have the skills for the high skill jobs in the city, there is a higher rate of poor health in the city which reduces people's ability to work and poor access to childcare and transport for hospitality workers at night.
- Responding to a question about how to deliver first class services when staff are working from home the Deputy Leader said that contracts are flexible, and staff should work in the office as much as the service needs them to but the interpretation of this varies across the Council. Officers do not all live in the city, but they need to understand the city and the people they serve. The Deputy Leader will follow up the point about automated email responses from the planning department that officers are working from home with the Strategic Director.
- The Levelling Up Growth Prospectus set out the challenges and most of these cannot be met without Government funding and devolution of powers. The examples were given of the 3 cities retrofitting programme where Birmingham is already working with regional partners and improving transport to increase access to jobs where devolved powers are needed to unlock potential.
- In relation to government support for devolution the Deputy Leader said that different government departments engage at different levels.

RESOLVED:

- The presentation on the Deputy Leader's portfolio priorities was noted.
- The Deputy Leader to provide information requested on the use of consultants.
- Deputy Leader to follow up on working from home email response to emails sent to planning.
- The Deputy Leader to provide further information on the budget for the Customer Services Programme.

6. TRAILBLAZER DEVOLUTION DEAL (ITEM 5 OF THE AGENDA)

The Director of Strategy, Equality and Partnerships gave the presentation on the Trailblazer Devolution Deal which started in February 2022 by the Government Levelling up White Paper which identified the West Midlands and Manchester as trailblazer areas. Birmingham had previously published the Levelling Up Strategy in November 2021.

There is uncertainty about the timing and the process for the Trailblazer Devolution Deal, but the assumption is that the process will continue. The West Midlands Combined Authority has led the process and has 20 workstreams and Birmingham has engaged with all of these while continuing to deliver core services.

The Levelling Up Growth Prospectus sets out progress so far and the case for devolution of funding and powers. This is not a formal position of the West Midlands Combined Authority which would require Board level decision but includes the principles for devolution negotiations.

The East Birmingham and North Solihull Levelling Up Zone includes a population of 375,000 and the proposal is for infrastructure delivery to stimulate private sector growth and integrate public sector services at scale. A joint letter has been sent from Birmingham City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Council and the Mayor of the West Midlands to the Secretary of State putting forward this proposal. Since the letter was sent the Government has announced its intention to establish Investment Zones which will stimulate growth through reduced tax and regulation for start-ups. Birmingham is submitting a number of defined sites within East Birmingham as part of the expression of interest process led by the West Midlands Combined Authority and also resubmitting the wider proposal. The 14 October 2022 is the deadline for submissions.

The Chair said he agreed with the approach set out in the presentation and asked if there is political agreement across the authorities and the Mayor. The Deputy Leader responded that the make up of the West Midlands Combined Authority is the majority of seats on the Board are Labour and there is a Conservative Mayor. Each of the 7 local authorities has its list of things that they want included and those they do not which tend to go along the economic priorities of the 3 Local Enterprise Partnerships. All the proposals are being socialised with all of the Leaders and those proposals will be brought into a package to go to government.

The responses below were given to further questions from members:

- It was confirmed that the Mayor will not be bypassed and has an electoral mandate. The devolution to the West Midlands Combined Authority could be to the Mayor to have personal executive powers or, as is the case for the majority of existing powers, these are devolved to the Board of which the Mayor is the Chair and member. The relationship between the City Council and Town Council is different and the Deputy Leader requested a note on the issue regarding the transfer of Vesey Gardens and will respond to this after the meeting.
- The risks in relation to Levelling Up and Devolution was identified as losing appropriate democratic control for issues that Birmingham City Council will be held accountable for and also being given responsibilities or statutory requirements that are not funded or fully funded.

RESOLVED:

- The Deputy Leader to be invited back once there is clarity from central government regarding the Trailblazer Devolution Deal.
- Deputy Leader to respond to the note requested on the transfer of Vesey Gardens.

7. CUSTOMER SERVICES PROGRAMME TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE

The Chair presented the report and the Assistant Director Customer Complaints and Business Support attended on-line to respond to any questions regarding the programme.

The Task and Finish Group met to follow up a particular aspect of the report that had been considered at the meeting on the 23 September 2022 relating to the recommendations made following the reviews of the Bereavement Service, Waste Management, Highways and Housing Repairs. The Task and Finish Group proposed to continue to meet with senior officers from each of the service areas to scrutinise how the recommendations from the reviews have been implemented. The Chair or Deputy Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be invited to attend the Task and Finish Group meetings. This work will continue to be supported by the Customer Services Programme and will take place over a period of around 1 month. A report will be brought back to the November or December meeting of Co-ordinating OSC.

The Chair outlined a second phase of this work which will involve meetings with the senior managers in the 4 service areas to understand what the feedback has been in each service to the Customer Service Culture Workshops and how these are being responded to.

RESOLVED:

- That the Customer Services Task and Finish Group will continue to meet to hold Directorates to account on how the customer strategy is being embedded with a view to driving up standards and report to a future meeting of the Co-ordinating OSC
- That a second stage of meetings for the Task and Finish Group are held to scrutinise the response to the Customer Service Culture Workshops.

8. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The work programme for the November and December Committees was agreed subject to the addition of the report from the Customer Services Task and Finish Group.

The Chair added the following a question at City Council the response to the Exempt Accommodation recommendations would be sent to the Chair of Planning Committee.

A note had been circulated to Committee chairs to highlight the issues that each Committee can pick up following the report to the September meeting on the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

It had been agreed at the meeting on the 23 September 2022 that the issue of Domestic Abuse will be included in the work programme of Co-ordinating OSC as a cross cutting issue and Cllr. Yip would lead on this work. Cllr. Yip thanked Cllr. Jenkins for raising the profile of the issue of Domestic Abuse with the Committee. He had met with officers and other organisations to consider how to take this work forward. The issues that have been identified included housing, education, cost of living crisis, prosecution, judiciary, policing and crisis payments which highlighted the cross-cutting nature of the work.

Cllr. Yip proposed that the Scrutiny work on Domestic Abuse will link with existing work. A round table meeting could be held in November / December to be followed up by a single-issue meeting of Co-ordinating OSC in January / February to develop recommendations that can be reported to the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities and the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods. This could also identify issues for further scrutiny by other Committees. It was noted that this process will allow scrutiny to engage with the development of the refreshed Domestic Abuse Strategy and potentially to continue the work into the next municipal year.

Members reviewed the work programmes for the 7 Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Chair of the Housing and Neighbourhood OSC reported that there had been a successful exempt accommodation conference and that the Leader and Cabinet Member had attended the Committee to report on Localisation and Housing. It was noted that the issue of cleaner streets will be picked up in the Housing and Neighbourhood OSC over the next 3 months. The link between housing and Domestic Abuse was also noted.

The Chair of the Health and Adult Care OSC reported that the Inquiry on Children and Young People's mental health is progressing and is due to report to City Council in June 2023. The terms of reference have been agreed by the Task and Finish Group including the evidence that will be presented through written submissions and verbal reports.

The Chair of Resources OSC reported the Committee will continue to consider the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the Council's budget including how this will add to existing budget pressures.

The Sustainability and Transport OSC may consider the issue of the cost-of-living crisis on travel. It was noted that the cost of bus fares has been fixed for the next few years.

The Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services suggested that further work will be undertaken to ensure that all Committee have a balanced work programme and a system could be developed to track recommendations made by Committees and to provide challenge to the strength of the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- The Co-ordinating OSC work programme was noted and will be updated to reflect the work agreed on Domestic Abuse in February and the Customer Service Programme to November / December.
- The update on the work programmes of the 7 Overview and Scrutiny Committees were noted.
- A report to be brought to a future meeting of Co-ordinating OSC to consider how to improve how the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees are tackled and monitored and relate to the wider Council including Cabinet Members and Senior Officers.

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

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None

11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that next meeting of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be 18 November 2022 at 10.00

12. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 11.27 hours.