

Birmingham City Council - Priorities for Improvement 2019-20+

The Council is now looking forward to the future, with political leadership and senior officers clear in their accountability and ownership of the Council's improvement agenda. There is no room for complacency and the Council is seeking to build on the substantial progress that has already been made to ensure that change is sustainable and runs through all levels of the organisation.

To maintain momentum, the Council will preserve a concerted approach to good governance, prudent financial discipline, transparency and putting citizens at the heart of decision making. We will continue to develop our use of intelligence, data analysis and insight to ensure that all our improvement programmes rest on a solid evidence base, allowing us to move confidently and decisively to improve service delivery outcomes.

The Council is acutely aware that some of the implementation plans, in support of savings, are not as advanced in their depth, rigour and with assurance regarding capacity to deliver as would be ideal at this time. However, the analysis of feasibility at this stage in the budget process represents a clear step forward for the Council. Continued challenge and support will therefore be required through the PMO and in terms of senior officer and political leadership. Similarly, it will be important for the Council to bridge beyond solely project managing delivery of savings, and increasingly adopt a one Council approach to the programme management of change and modernisation.

Below are the specific areas for improvement that the Council has identified for 2019/20. These priorities map across from the Kerslake themes, the areas of focus for the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel and the activity undertaken in-year 2018-19 through the Council's Corporate Governance Improvement Plan. This approach will enable a consistency to the Council's improvement journey and deepening of the Council's competence and maturity in these areas over time.

This document is intentionally still in DRAFT to enable Elected Members, colleagues, partners and citizens to continue to shape and influence the improvement programme in 2019-20.

Improvement area	Priorities
Political leadership	Developing and maintaining a learning culture for Members, with a robust Member development programme and high levels of Member engagement.
	O&S Committees to evaluate the impact of Member Development Plans using agreed impact evaluation framework, with recommendations fed into development programme.
	Introduction of new Council Constitution.
	Adoption of a new Code of Conduct and Procedure for Members, as included in the new Constitution.
	Review of the new Members Portal online case management system.
	Continuing peer mentoring relationships for Cabinet members and Chair of Audit Committee, monitoring impact and feedback from participants.
	Implementing a medium-term and priority-based budget process for 2020-23, with Cabinet supported in this regard by a robust Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, refresh of the Council Plan and strategic performance framework.
	Parity of esteem for O&S and Audit Committees enabling robust decision making processes with pre-decision scrutiny, aligned work programmes and constructive challenge.
	Reviewing Member appointments to outside bodies, developing a skills programme for appointed Members and moving to a competency/skills-based appointment process by March 2020.
	Implementing the recommendations from the INLOGOV 'Outside the Box' project to ensure effective joint working between managerial and political leadership teams.
Industrial relations	A new, modernised Industrial Relations Framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focusing on constructive challenge and dialogue with trade unions; • incorporating a more efficient and reasonable process flow for required service redesign and transformation; • and, developed in concert with peer Core Cities to test the weight of engagement activity.
A modern and progressive organisational culture	Continued development of a one Council 'transformation' programme for 2020-23 reshaping the Council's service, corporate and citizen offer in line with invest-to-save financial strategies.
	Roll-out of the successful 'Owning and Driving Performance' culture-change programme with agreed evaluation framework to monitor impact and return on investment

Improvement area	Priorities
	Concerted delivery of the Workforce Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-22.
	Building on the Workforce Strategy to enable strategic workforce planning in line with an agreed Medium Term Financial Strategy.
	Improving staff engagement and ownership of the Council's improvement agenda through establishment of Forward Together staff group (up to 300 staff members).
	Developing capacity and capability in the strategic HR function.
	Strategic review of equality and diversity across all levels of the Council's functions.
Managerial leadership	Full, permanent staffing of the Council's management structure following the implementation of the new JNC structure.
	Senior officer development programme to include capacity and capability building, peer support/mentoring.
	Strong engagement from the Council into the governance of the Birmingham Children's Trust through the Birmingham Children's Trust Board.
	Continued implementation of service modernisation and transformation programmes based on a robust evidence base of intelligence and insight, including delivery of agreed directorate improvement plans.
Strategic planning, financial and performance management	Maturing the Council's approach to Information Management – rebalancing from a focus on data collection to deeper data analysis and wider strategic insight to drive service improvements.
	New performance management approach – ensuring that the 'golden thread' of performance management runs through all levels of the organisation.
	A mature, positive attitude to risk, with robust risk management approaches and shared ownership of 'critical' risks across the Council's Extended Leadership Team.
	Full suite of capital governance, budget monitoring and programme management arrangements for the Commonwealth Games, with regular monitoring of risk by the Council's Extended Leadership Team.
	Developing capacity and capability in the strategic finance function.
	Ensure financial 'grip' and ownership of budgets, with people taking responsibility for the financial implications of the budget within directorates, and appropriate monitoring, reporting and constructive challenge from audit (internal/external) and Overview and Scrutiny.

Improvement area	Priorities
	Adoption of a 'one team' comprehensive approach to business partnering with finance.
	Consultation on a 3-year Medium Term Financial Strategy and specific budget proposals for 2020-23.
Key corporate policies to enable effective corporate governance	Refresh of the Council's Policy Framework in line with the new Constitution.
	Review of Forward Plan processes to ensure an integrated pipeline for strategic policy development all the way up from directorates through to Cabinet and Full Council
	Development of the Council's community hubs strategy with clarity around an integrated, local offer and commencement of implementation
	Delivery of Community Cohesion Strategy, including development of implementation plan.
	Localism agenda progressed with further development of ward plans and roll-out of new community governance mechanisms.
	Implementation of the Equal Pay mitigation strategy to deal with current and prevent future claims.
	Implementation of the new 0-25 Policy for Home to School Transport/Home to School Transport commissioning strategy (Travel Assist).
City partnerships	Building on early improvements in partnership working arrangements i.e. City Board, Statutory Partnerships and developing specific delivery mechanisms to positively impact on the lives of people in Birmingham.
	Implementation of Birmingham and Solihull Sustainability and Transformation Programme by April 2021.
	Partnership-working approaches and competencies embedded at all levels of workforce.
	Development of a shared accountability framework linking Council Plan 2019-20 to partners' strategic priorities.
Communications and transparency	Shift in culture towards transparency, with a substantial decline in the number of private/late reports to be comparable with other Core Cities.
	Development of a strategic/shared narrative and approach to external communications.
	Resetting the relationship with citizens with clearer messages about the direct changes that they can make – individually, in families and in communities – to improve outcomes across the city.

Keeping Up Progress

Through the improvement work undertaken in 2018-19, the Council has started to develop a level of maturity in inviting challenge and benchmarking with peer authorities but, with the proposal that Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel stand itself down, alongside our 2019-20 programme it will be necessary to construct a new model to ensure continued internal capacity to challenge and ongoing third-party support and engagement. To that end, the Council is putting in place a new quality assurance framework to monitor pace and quality of improvement work, including personalised packages of support from key national bodies such as the LGA and CIPFA. This will take a 'value-added' approach rather than replicating day-to-day governance arrangements outlined by the new Constitution, to avoid duplication of work.

The key components of this framework are as follows: -

Feedback from strategic partners

In 2019-20 the Council will continue to actively monitor the quality and maturity of strategic partnership working and progress against shared accountability/performance frameworks, through:

- continual formal self-assessment of partnership working practices and competencies, including benchmarking against other Core Cities;
- proactive engagement with regulatory reviews of statutory partnership activity and any recommendations arising;
- regular engagement and self-reflection with key 'critical friends' including Chairs of the statutory safety and safeguarding partnership boards.

Feedback from citizens

At the heart of our Improvement Priorities for 2019-20, and indeed our entire improvement journey, is the desire to deliver the best possible services and outcomes for the citizens of Birmingham. Our most important measure of success is the impact that we have on the lives of the people that we serve.

Throughout 2019-20 we will continue to engage and consult with citizens, listening to their feedback on how they feel that we are performing. This will include formal feedback mechanisms such as the Citizens' Panel, the Residents' Survey and our consultation vehicle BeHeard, as well as informal engagement with citizens online and on social media.

Our new model for localism will provide a range of opportunities for residents to influence services, spending and decision making and take ownership of their local areas. The 21st century role of Councillors will be vital in engaging, facilitating and planning alongside residents.

Internal and External Audit

Risk management

- Revised risk management framework (to be approved by Audit Committee in January 2019) with process for the planned and systematic identification, evaluation and management of risks associated with the Council's activities.
- Audit Committee receiving regular audit reports and monitoring the overall effectiveness of risk management approach, inviting risk owners for a more in-depth review as required.
- Council Management Team receiving monthly update on risks and challenges, challenging the completeness and robustness of mitigating actions.
- Monthly progress report to Deputy Leader.

Internal audit

- Independent internal audit service in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), providing annual opinion on the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes across the whole of the Council and is prioritising the review of improvement agendas in terms of progress and effectiveness.
- New integrated risk assurance framework (based on the 3 lines of defence model) supported by robust risk methodology that is designed to focus target audit activity.
- Tracking high priority findings and issues, including those raised by external audit, until the risks are effectively managed.
- Constructive challenge around the improvement agenda and financial management.
- Regular internal audit activity reporting to Audit Committee.
- Council Management Team receiving monthly update on key issues providing a barometer to measure improvement and target management effort.

External Audit

- Annual independent examination of the Council's financial management and value for money arrangements.
- Key recommendations in the Audit Findings Report 2017/18 and Section 24 issues monitored in a transparent report of progress made to Audit Committee each meeting.

Audit Committee

- Independent assurance to the Council in relation to its internal controls, risk management and governance processes.
- Self-assessment of effectiveness of the Audit Committee, to take place in 2019.
- Focus on risk management in 2019-20, with risk owners providing detailed progress reports.

Business Partners

- Finance Business Partners have appointed as part of the Future Operating Model for Finance to underpin and drive strong financial governance across directorates.
- Support with the development of financial plans and the budget monitoring process.
- Regular financial reports presented to CMT, Star Chamber and Cabinet.
- Where the budget monitoring indicates that the actual position is diverging from the Plan, Business Units required to develop action plans and to then monitor progress against the revised plans.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

We will enable O&S Committees to carry out their Scrutiny function effectively and with rigour, by:

- continuing to emphasise the parity of esteem between Scrutiny functions and the executive leadership, as part of the wider member development programme and shift to an organisational culture based on transparency and constructive challenge;
- undertaking Phase 2 of Review of Scrutiny, with recommendations presented to the Council Management Team, Extended Leadership Team, and Full Council;
- an agreed work programme for 2019-20, aligned with the Council Plan, 2019-20 Improvement Plan and committee timetables;
- Scrutiny to work closely with the corporate Strategic Policy team to develop the Council forward plan, feeding into policy development and priority-based budgeting process at the earliest stages;
- supplying performance management data to O&S committees for their service areas, with specific training for Members on how to interpret, analyse and challenge data.

Performance Management Framework

The new performance management framework will drive progress against the improvement priorities for 2019-20, through:

- third-party benchmarking performance against other local authorities in key outcome areas, with comparisons embedded into routine performance monitoring and reports;
- constructive critique and challenge from the corporate Performance & Insight team to service areas, with resulting improvements to quality and depth of data analysis and performance narratives;

- engaging with teams across the Council to educate colleagues on the importance and potential impact of performance management;
- supplying routine performance management data and analysis to the Council Management Team, enabling greater scrutiny, challenge and in-depth discussion across and between directorates;
- engaging with Members to educate them on the role and function of performance management, enabling Cabinet Members to effectively monitor and challenge performance.

CIPFA

CIPFA will be providing a personalised programme of support, focusing on:

- support around building strategic financial capability and capacity;
- benchmarking against other local authorities.

LGA

The Council is working with the LGA to design a tailored programme of Member development activities and peer support arrangements that will enable Members to develop the skills and competencies they need to successfully carry out their roles. This includes:

- ongoing programme of Member development through the LGA Highlighting Political Leadership Programme, including evaluation of learning aims and outcomes, aligned with the four year political cycle;
- a mentoring programme for all Cabinet Members and the Chair of the Audit Committee, including 1-1 mentoring sessions and whole group meetings examining the Birmingham context;
- LGA peer accreditation enabling Members to be matched with peer councils for each of the improvement themes;
- formal support offer to Council political groups through the four LGA political offices.

Development activities with the LGA will culminate in a formal peer challenge in 2020-21. We feel that this will be mid-way through our improvement journey, with enough time passed to usefully assess progress made and identify any further areas for improvement that have arisen.