

# Birmingham City Council

## Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18 April 2024



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**Subject:** Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme

**Report of:** Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

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### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets out the work programme for the Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2023-24. Following the findings and recommendations from the independent Governance Review of the Council, and specifically recommendation 5, the Committee reframed its work programme to be aligned to the Council's improvement and recovery priorities.

### 2 Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the report.

### 3 Background

- 3.1 The Committee's Terms of Reference is to fulfil the functions of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee as they relate to any policies, services and activities concerning:
  - 3.1.1 Council Housing management services, repairs and maintenance programmes.
  - 3.1.2 Best use of housing stock across all housing providers.
  - 3.1.3 Neighbourhood management initiatives and the housing growth agenda (Birmingham Social Housing Partnership).
  - 3.1.4 Private rented sector, licensing and regulation.
  - 3.1.5 Tenancy engagement in the management and development of social housing and Housing Liaison Boards.

- 3.1.6 Exempt accommodation.
- 3.1.7 Housing Options for vulnerable adults, children, young people and offenders.
- 3.1.8 Temporary accommodation provision.
- 3.1.9 Homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 3.1.10 Supply of homes to meet housing need.
- 3.2 The Committee is chaired by Cllr Mohammed Idrees. Its cross party membership comprises Cllrs Ziaul Islam, Saqib Khan, Lauren Rainbow, Rinkal Shergill, Ron Storer, Penny Wagg and Ken Wood.
- 3.3 The [statutory guidance for local government overview and scrutiny](#) sets out the role it can play in holding an authority's decision makers to account. This makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy. Effective Overview and Scrutiny should:
- Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge.
  - Amplify the voices and concerns of the public.
  - Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role.
  - Drive improvements in public services.
- 3.4 The role and functions of Overview and Scrutiny Committees are outlined in [The City Council's Constitution | Birmingham City Council](#) They will:
- Make reports and/or recommendations to the full Council, the Executive and/or other organisations in connection with the discharge of the functions specified in their terms of reference.
  - Consider any matter covered in their terms of reference that may affect or be likely to have an effect on the citizens of Birmingham; relevant to the Council's strategic objectives; relevant to major issues faced by officers in managing a function of the Council; and likely to make contribution to moving the Council forward and achieving key performance targets.
- 3.5 Effective scrutiny needs to add value. A well planned and timely work programme enables Overview and Scrutiny Committees to be involved at the right time and in the right way, and ensure their involvement is meaningful and can influence the outcome.
- 3.6 Members often have a number of topics suggested to them and are therefore required to **prioritise** matters for consideration. The Scrutiny Framework sets out the following factors to be considered:
- Public interest: concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen.
  - Ability to change: priority should be given to issues that the Committee can realistically influence.

- Performance: priority should be given to areas in which the Council and Partners are not performing well.
- Extent: priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or a large part of the city.
- Replication: work programme must take account of what else is happening to avoid duplication.

3.7 Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified a 'menu' of issues (including policy development, policy review, issues of accountability and statutory functions). Each Committee has then regularly reviewed their 'menu' and decided which issues needed to be examined further, and how that work would be undertaken. Committees have been advised to consider where they can best add value aligning to the Council's priorities and improvement journey, and how it can prioritise topics for consideration based on the Scrutiny Framework referred to in paragraph 3.5 above.

3.8 There are a range of ways to undertake scrutiny. In line with statutory guidance from 2019, the approach for 2023-24 has enabled a more flexible scrutiny and outlined a shift from monthly formal meetings to a combination of approaches. The Committee has chosen the most effective scrutiny method to achieve the desired aims and objectives for each topic.

#### **4 Outcomes from 2023-24**

4.1 During June 2023 – February 2024, the Committee considered the following topics:

4.1.1 Regulatory Compliance – the Committee agreed to undertake quarterly sessions to provide scrutiny, oversight and productive challenge as the Council moves towards regulatory compliance (September); the first session was held in January 2024. The Committee attended further training on how they should carry out this scrutiny in an externally facilitated session (December).

4.1.2 Financial Challenges and Budget Savings and Recovery Plan (September-November) – the Committee received reports on the s114 notice, the Medium Term Financial Plan and the context for services falling under the remit of this Committee including performance on current savings.

4.1.3 Scrutiny Inquiry: Exempt Accommodation (November) – the Committee reviewed progress on the outstanding recommendations from this inquiry.

4.1.4 Request to 'Call In' – the Committee considered a request to 'call in' the decision: Contract Award for Repairs and Maintenance 2024-26. After reviewing the information provided, the Committee recommended not to request the Executive reconsiders the decision.

4.2 The Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 December 2023 acknowledged the recommendations in the Governance Review of Birmingham City Council agreed by Cabinet on 12 December 2023. Recommendation 5 stated the

need to reframe scrutiny work programmes on the Council's improvement and recovery priorities, and that alignment of work programmes should focus on:

- a) Having an active part in the 2024/25 budget development process.
- b) The safe and effective delivery of key services supporting vulnerable people.
- c) Critical performance issues emerging "by exception".
- d) Equality and equity issues arising from the development of the 24/25 Budget, the Emergency Budget (to be identified by exception), and other priority scrutiny activity relating to the Budget.
- e) Culture, behaviour change and organisational development.

4.3 On 15 February 2024, the Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee met informally to consider the developing Improvement and Recovery Plan and the findings and recommendations of the Governance Review. The Committee reconsidered its work programme for March - April and reframed it to ensure it aligns with the issues set out above.

4.4 In light of this, the Committee considered the following topics in February and March:

4.4.1 The proposed budget for 23-24 and specifically how the City Housing Directorate is mobilising to deliver these savings (February).

4.4.2 A briefing on the proposed Improvement and Recovery Plan (February).

4.4.3 A workshop to inform a new corporate performance management framework (February).

4.4.4 Scrutiny Inquiry: Exempt Accommodation – a further report tracking the outstanding recommendations.

4.4.5 Affordable Housing – the Committee received a briefing report.

## **5 Inquiry – Improving the Standard of Re-let Properties**

5.1 In September 2023, the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into improving the standards of Council houses. In November 2023 and following reassurances about the progress achieved addressing the concerns of the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman, the inquiry was refocused to improving standards of void properties only.

5.2 Evidence gathering commenced for this inquiry in December 2023. The inquiry group has taken part in two site visits to Council properties, as well as an external visit to Pioneer Housing, another Birmingham based provider. Pioneer subsequently provided evidence to the Committee in March 2024. Further evidence gathering sessions are arranged for May. The inquiry is scheduled to conclude in the new municipal year.

## **6 Looking Ahead**

- 6.1 In April, the Committee will be holding an informal Budget Task and Finish Group to consider the delivery plans for relevant savings for 2023-24. In May, the Committee will be continuing with the evidence gathering for its inquiry.
- 6.2 Other areas the Committee identified include (any future work will need to consider how it contributes towards the delivery of the Improvement and Recovery Plan and Governance Stabilisation Plan):
- 6.2.1 Birmingham Social Housing Partnership
  - 6.2.2 Scrutiny Inquiry: Exempt Accommodation – tracking of inquiry recommendations
  - 6.2.3 Customer Services – Housing Repairs
  - 6.2.4 Tenant Engagement
- 6.3 The Council's latest [Forward Plan April 2024](#) may assist Members in identifying further areas for the Committee to explore.

## **7 Any Finance Implications**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

## **8 Any Legal Implications**

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

## **9 Any Equalities Implications**

- 9.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 9.2 The protected characteristics and groups outlined in the Equality Act are Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Marriage and Civil Partnership; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion and Belief; Sex, and Sexual Orientation.
- 9.3 The Committee should ensure that it addresses these duties by considering them during work programme development, the scoping of work, evidence gathering and making recommendations. This should include considering how policy issues impact on different groups within the community, particularly those that share a relevant

protected characteristic; whether the impact on particular groups is fair and proportionate; whether there is equality of access to services and fair representation of all groups within Birmingham; and whether any positive opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and/or good relations between people are being realised.

9.4 The Committee should ensure that equalities comments, and any recommendations, are based on evidence. This should include demographic and service level data and evidence of residents/service-users views gathered through consultation.

## **10 Appendices**

10.1 There are no appendices.

## **11 Background Papers**

11.1 [Birmingham City Council Constitution](#)

11.2 Birmingham City Council Overview and Scrutiny Framework April 2021