

Council owned Assets Inquiry – Call for Evidence

The purpose of this Inquiry is to find out what more could the Council do, through the use and management of its property estate, to ensure small and medium-sized businesses and community organisations and enterprises can play a full part in the city's economic development and regeneration.

Members of the Committee are aware of concerns that the current operational management of the council's rented assets and disposal arrangements can disadvantage small businesses and community organisations (including the process of designating Assets of Community Value) and questions as to whether the process of obtaining best value from assets is able to weigh social and economic value against financial gain.

This inquiry will encourage people and organisations to share their experiences of property dealings with the Council, and interview and seek information from Cabinet Members and senior officers. Through this we will examine how well the service meets the aims of the strategy, how best the Council can balance financial propriety in obtaining best value from its assets, against supporting communities, small and medium-sized enterprises and the voluntary sector to take part in economic development and the regeneration and share in maximising the benefits.

Key lines of inquiry include: -

- **Establish** the extent and status of Council-owned assets as a baseline
- **Compare** progress made at this mid-point on the 2018-22 Birmingham Property Strategy against aims set out in 2018, to include rationalisation of stock; and the work of the Property & Assets Board and sub boards
- **Explore** experiences of tenants and prospective purchasers (including SMEs and community organisations) around the entire estate management process to include negotiating and maintaining tenancies, the sale process, and Assets of Community Value listing
- **Explore**, by comparison with other local authorities and reviewing research including into community wealth-building, how the Council, the city's businesses and community organisations can get the most out of its property assets, with particular reference to economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and inclusion in local regeneration programmes
- **Explore** how Council management of property assets could contribute to wider economic strategies, such as the East Birmingham Inclusive Growth strategy; job retention schemes; job creation; skills and training, looking explicitly at how property contributes to supporting communities and local economies
- **Explore** any equalities considerations

An inquiry is only as good as the evidence it receives. This is why we want people across the whole of our city to get involved. We would welcome a written statement of your views and experience on any of the above points, along with any other comments you might have. We will collect all the written submissions and use these as evidence to support our work.

We hope that you will use this opportunity to get involved in what we believe will be an influential piece of work.

Councillor Lou Robson, Chair of the Economy & Skills Overview & Scrutiny Committee at Birmingham City Council.

If you would like any further information about this Scrutiny Inquiry or how to submit written evidence, please email baseema.bequm@birmingham.gov.uk or call 0121 303 1668.

The Inquiry group asks that written submissions are in Microsoft Word format wherever possible and are no longer than four pages. Please include contact details of the person or organisation submitting the evidence. We may ask individuals or representatives of businesses or community groups to give verbal evidence at a scheduled meeting.

*The deadline for written submissions is the **Thursday 3rd December.***

Frequently Asked Questions

Reporting the Findings

The Inquiry is due to present its findings, based on the evidence received, to Members of the City Council on **13th April 2021**.

3 evidence-gathering sessions are planned as follows and will be held **online**:

- 1. Wednesday 11th November @ 1pm**
- 2. Thursday 26th November @ 6pm**
- 3. Wednesday 9th December @ 1pm**

Following conclusion of the evidence-gathering a report will be drafted. We will share a copy of the draft report/and or relevant sections if you provided us with evidence and we will ask you to check for accuracy if we have used specific information that you provided us with.

The report will be presented to City Council by Councillor Lou Robson, Chair of Economy & Skills Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 13th April 2021 where all Members of the City Council will discuss the report and agree recommendations for implementation. Once the report and recommendations have been agreed it will be up to the Council's Executive (those with the power to make decisions) to put these in place. The relevant Scrutiny Committee will undertake 6 monthly "tracking" or monitoring of progress made on the implementation of the recommendations until such time that all recommendations are concluded. Scrutiny Committees are held in public and you are welcome to attend should you wish to do so. The first of meeting monitoring the implementation of the recommendations included in this report is anticipated for October 2021.

Please note Inquiry meetings are primarily for discussion by Members of the Committee only. It is at the discretion of the Chair should they wish to engage members of the public.

Live-streaming of meetings

All Council meetings including full Council meetings and Scrutiny Committee meetings are filmed and available to watch on-line live or via the archive. You can access the archive via this link <http://www.birmingham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

Please note that due to the coronavirus pandemic meetings will be held online only and electronic invitations will be sent to those asked to participate. It is expected that there will be a number of contributors and speakers and therefore time limits will be in place (and listed on the agenda) to allow time for discussion.

To allow the Council's IT system to work effectively those participating in meetings will be asked to keep their cameras and microphones turned off when not speaking and to avoid interference. Attendees are welcome to turn their cameras on when speaking. The Council uses 'Microsoft Teams' to hold virtual meetings and further details on how to use this will be sent to those invited to meetings nearer the time.

Social Media

Public meetings of the Council are open to the use of Social Media by attendees to report on any part of the meeting via Twitter, Youtube, Facebook and blogs.

Filming Meetings

Anyone wishing to film or record the meeting may do so, though any member of the public attending the meeting has the right not to be recorded. If you wish to record the meeting, please notify the Scrutiny Office at least one working day before the start of the meeting.

We will ask for recording to stop if the meeting goes into private session where the public is excluded for confidentiality reasons.