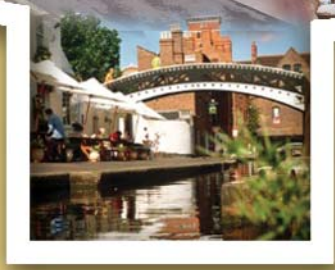


The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2005



# 1. Preface

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**By Councillor Michael Wilkes  
Chair of the Co-ordinating  
Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

Thank you for taking an interest in this booklet. What we want to do is to tell you about some of the work we have been doing in Overview and Scrutiny and some that we have planned. We hope it is of interest.

But even more importantly, we want to hear from you about whether you think we are looking at the right issues or whether you think there are other matters that we should be considering. It is very important to us that our work is relevant to the issues that affect your day-to-day life.

I would also like to thank all of the Scrutiny staff for their work and support. It is a pleasure to work with such a professional and committed team.

There are a number of ways that you can contact the Scrutiny Office

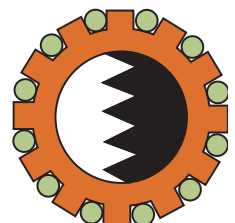
– by telephone on 0121 303 9787

– by email at  
[scrutiny@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@birmingham.gov.uk)

– by post to The Scrutiny Office,  
Council House, Victoria Square,  
Birmingham, B1 1BB

– by text to 07786200403 by using  
the word scrutiny, followed by a  
space and your message

*We look forward to hearing from you.*



## 2. What Is Overview And Scrutiny?

**Until quite recently, political decisions in Birmingham were taken by the City Council, primarily through Council Committees (e.g., Education, Housing). This system had operated for well over a century.**

All this changed in 2001 when the Government set up new governance arrangements for Local Councils. Decisions in Birmingham are now taken by the Leader of the Council and a nine member team of Cabinet Members, each of whom has a portfolio in a similar way to a Government Minister.

Overview and Scrutiny, which we often refer to as O&S, is part of the "checks and balances" necessary to ensure that the Cabinet is accountable to

the 120 Member City Council as a whole. The role of the O&S Committees is to oversee the decisions of the Cabinet to ensure that they are fair, practical and represent the best interests of the public. It is another way of introducing more challenge and improvements to public service provision.



### 3. WHO ARE THE O&S COMMITTEES?

There are 9 Committees made up from the Councillors who are not part of the Cabinet. O&S Committees are all-party, generally in proportion to the party's representation on the City Council as a whole. Each Committee has a Chairperson who is the main point for organising its work. Committees usually meet monthly throughout the municipal year and all are open to the public. For this year the Chairmen of Committees are:

Co-ordinating	:	Councillor Michael Wilkes
Education and Lifelong Learning	:	Councillor Jon Hunt
Health	:	Councillor Deirdre Alden
Housing and Urban Renewal	:	Councillor Frank Coyne
Leisure, Sport and Culture	:	Councillor Ray Hassall
Local Services and Community Safety	:	Councillor Timothy Huxtable
Regeneration	:	Councillor Mark Hill
Social Care	:	Councillor Len Clark
Transportation and Street Services	:	Councillor Alistair Dow



**From left to right**

Standing - Cllrs Coyne, Huxtable, Wilkes, Hill, Dow and Hunt    Seated - Cllrs Hassall and Alden  
Inset - Cllr Len Clark

## 4. SCRUTINY REVIEWS

**The most visible part of what O&S Committees do is the scrutiny review. This is an inquiry into a specific subject.**

**The outcome will be recommendations for how things may need to change. The aim of scrutiny reviews is to evaluate the effectiveness and practice of decisions of the Council with a greater degree of independence, as a critical friend.**

Reviews will, therefore, often involve not only Elected Members and Council officers, but also people from outside the Council – service users, experts in specific fields and members of partner organisations.

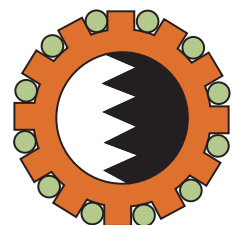
Reviews gather information in a variety of ways which need to be appropriate to the subject. In some cases this is gathered in formal meetings, similar to House of Commons Select Committees. In other cases the Members may work in small, informal groups to look at the subject and see how things work in practice.

All our reviews are available on our website at [www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny) or by contacting us to ask for a copy.

We 'track' or monitor all the recommendations we have made to make sure they have been followed up.



Community Policing in action



## 5. WHAT HAVE WE BEEN ENQUIRING INTO?

Outlined over the next pages is a flavour of some of the work that we have been recently undertaking. We have deliberately not done this Committee by Committee, but rather under the more general themes of work that we have been undertaking. Quite often more than one committee contributes to the findings of a particular review. The pictures below are drawn from some of the reviews we have done.



Former Lord Mayor, Councillor Mike Nangle and colleagues observing a CCTV camera on Birchfield Road, Perry Barr



Healthy eating - more than Jamie Oliver!



An abandoned vehicle - not just an eyesore but dangerous



## **RESPONDING TO TOPICAL ISSUES OF PUBLIC CONCERN**

**The Scrutiny function is very flexible and allows us to look at the wider issues that matter to peoples everyday lives. Many aspects of what we do are therefore undertaken in direct response to issues of concern raised, either directly to us or through locally Elected Representatives. We would particularly like to highlight two specific areas of work which we have undertaken this year. MRSA and the Siting of Mobile Phone Masts on Council owned land.**

### **❖ MRSA**

This review was conducted amongst growing public concern about the threat of MRSA infection, known commonly as a hospital "superbug." The review set out to examine what was being done by local hospitals, both to control and reduce the spread of MRSA and to raise public confidence in the health service.

The review was successful because it:

- ❖ Provided a forum for patients and the public to raise their concerns and experiences about MRSA
- ❖ Dispelled some of the myths and misinformation around MRSA and how it is transmitted
- ❖ Stimulated actions in the NHS to respond to public concern

Key outcomes from the review included commitments from the NHS to ensure a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to infection control across the city, more patient information and education and wider dissemination of surveillance data.

### **❖ The Siting of Mobile 'Phone Masts on Council Land**

Practically everyone has a mobile 'phone. Whilst we all want the convenience and sense of security they can provide, few of us want to live or work next to a mobile 'phone mast.

We took a very wide range of evidence including national experts in their field, the various pressure groups, the mobile 'phone operators and local community groups. We held two meetings in local community centres, one in the north and one in the south of the city. We also took balanced soundings by using the Council's Peoples Panel made up of a representative cross-section of people in Birmingham.

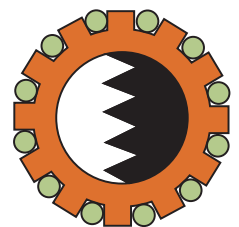
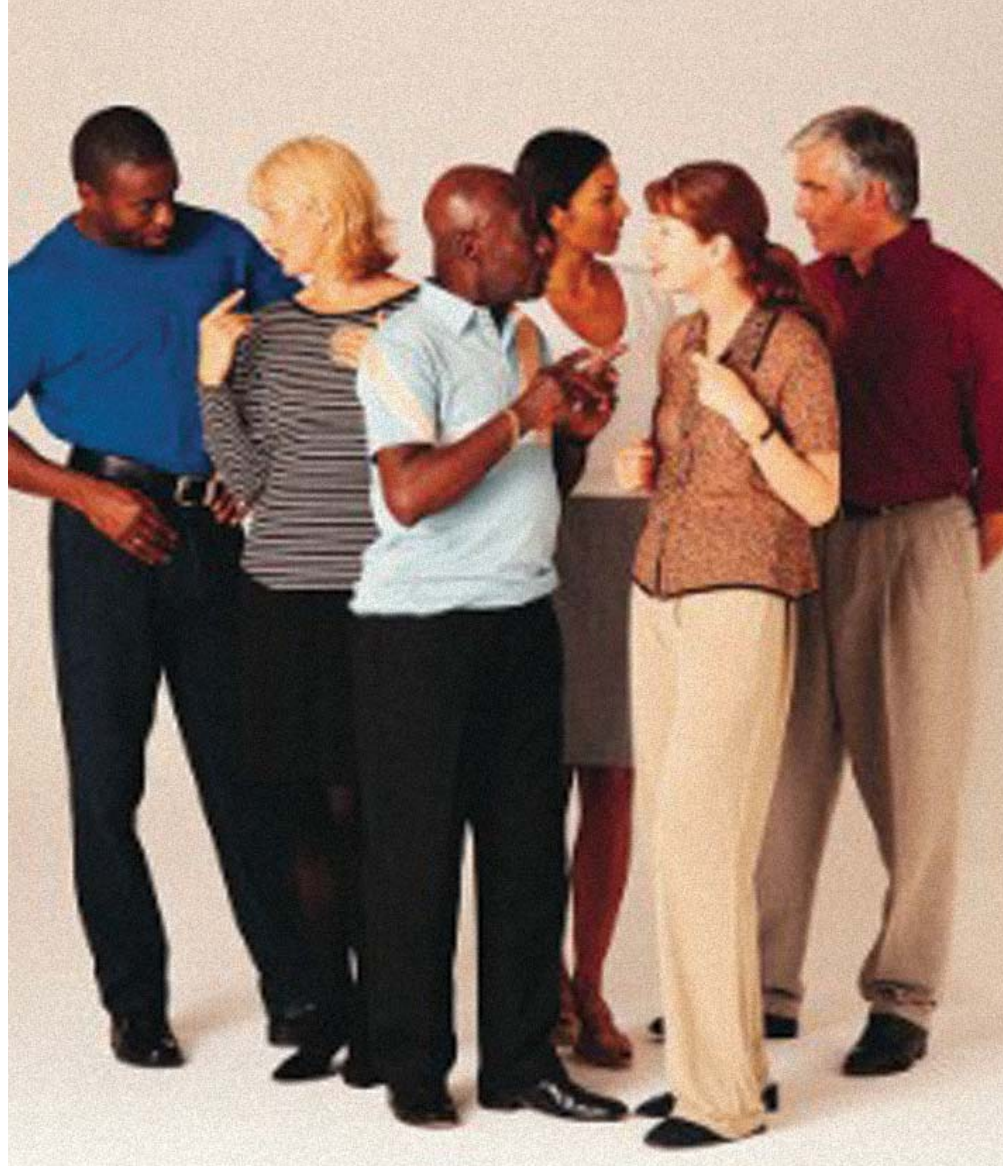
Taking everything into account, we put our emphasis on maximising the City Council's limited influence over siting (given planning requirements fixed at national level) on the current proliferation of masts and sites.



## RESPONDING TO TOPICAL ISSUES OF PUBLIC CONCERN

We did not want to see a displacement of mobile 'phone masts/sites which could well result in them being put in worse locations.

What we were clear about is that any lifting of the moratorium would need to be accompanied by a much tighter regulatory regime. The City Council must not be a soft touch and, in the interests of the well-being of people who live and work in Birmingham, must make it clear that any proposal for a mast to be installed on Council land and/or premises must be on the City Council's terms and not those of the operators. All our recommendations about this tighter regulatory regime were agreed by the City Council and are now being put in place.







## Improving Educational Standards And Better Engagement With Young People

**Last year Education and Lifelong Learning O&S Members devoted a significant proportion of their time to looking at the performance of our schools, paying particular attention to those groups of pupils who are currently under-achieving. We want to make sure that the needs of these vulnerable groups are being properly addressed.**

Members became further involved in the Government debate about measures to improve the flexibility and choice for young people and to create opportunities for the development of personalised programmes in response to their needs. The review undertaken in response to this, entitled **Learning in the 21st Century**, examined the development of the 14-19 curriculum and its impact on the City Council's provision for school pupils and young people moving on to further education.

Young people need to have more structured opportunities where their opinions and views can be expressed.

**A Young People's Parliament Scrutiny Committee** was set up in order to hear from young people themselves as to what they feel could be done to get their views better heard in decisions which affect their lives. Their report, **Involvement of Young People in the Strategic Decision Making Process**, was presented by the young people themselves at the full City Council meeting where it was

very well received and recommendations agreed.

Disadvantage and underachievement are closely linked and it is important for us to ensure that individuals living in poorer communities are not denied the opportunities the rest of us are able to enjoy. The review of **Education and Training in Regeneration**, investigated the way in which we currently try to regenerate communities by empowering local people through education and training programmes. This review investigated the benefits gained by these programmes and considered whether they really do make a difference to peoples' lives. This was looked at by a group of Members from both the Education and Lifelong Learning and Regeneration O&S Committees. Following an assessment of the range of programmes that have been introduced in many parts of the city, the Committee have identified ways of improving how these programmes can be implemented and monitored more effectively in the future.





Winning the interest and motivation of all young people is vital for their, and the City's, future.





## Improving Health And Well-Being In The City

**The Health O&S Committee scrutinises health matters across the city and works with the Birmingham and The Black Country Strategic Health Authority, nine NHS Trusts, four Primary Care Trusts and a range of other groups that represent patient and public views. The Committee has a statutory role in responding to NHS consultations when major service changes are proposed.**

The Committee has undertaken a review into MRSA (already mentioned on page 6) and completed two reviews examining how difficult it can be for people in the city to find an NHS Dentist or G.P.

**Access to NHS Dentists** showed that Birmingham has a reasonable number of dentists accepting patients for treatment under the NHS, however, this number has fallen significantly. Many of us have experienced problems trying to register for dental treatment with the NHS.

Only 50% of dentists in the city appear to be accepting new NHS patients and there is a four fold difference in the availability of dentists between PCTs. Areas with a higher proportion of ethnic minority communities find it more difficult to register. Compared to other areas, we have a reasonable number of dentists, mainly because we have a School of Dentistry in the city.

The review also found that many of us are unaware that we can be allocated an NHS dentist by contacting NHS Direct. As a result of our work, the health service initiated a comprehensive publicity campaign to raise awareness of this issue.

**Access to GPs** looked at different processes for registering with a GP, particularly when some surgeries operate 'closed' and 'full' lists. The review examined the impact of new arrangements for contracting GPs (General Medical Services Contract) and how this should lead to improvement in standards across the city.

The Committee undertook several monitoring exercises during the course of the year, including:

- Management arrangements for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- Waiting times for Audiology Services and hearing aids



- West Midlands Ambulance turn-around times
- Change to GP out-of-hours services

The Committee responded to formal consultation on proposals to build a new Dental Hospital and School of Dentistry in Birmingham. We offered our support, with the proviso that there was no reduction in services for the

people of Birmingham and that the option was affordable. The Committee also continued working jointly with Sandwell M.B.C. to scrutinise proposed changes to health provision as part of the "Towards 2010" programme and Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust.



The new Castle Vale Health Centre, part of the NHS ongoing programme of service improvement.





## Moving Towards Better Housing Provision

**As the largest local authority in Europe, the City Council has a high level of responsibility when it comes to looking after the interests of private tenants and owner/occupiers as well as the 68,000 properties directly managed by the Council. Co-opted onto this Committee are representatives from these various tenure groups.**

Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Members have been looking at a number of contentious issues. One of these is the inter-agency management of housing high risk offenders. This also forms the working arrangement with multi-agency protection panels to manage, monitor and minimise any risk posed to ex-offenders or to the general public.

The Committee has also taken a lead role in developing a more stringent response to anti-social behaviour. It has closely monitored the recommendations it made to ensure that these are being carried out. The impact of this review is that there has been an increase in the number of legal actions being pursued against people committing anti-social behaviour in all tenures and the publicity which has resulted from this has resulted in increased public confidence. The Council's zero tolerance approach to anti-social behaviour has helped people to feel safer in their local environment.

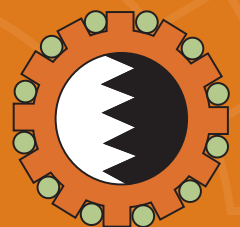
The **Review of the Housing Service** followed the Audit Commission's report of the re-inspection of the Repairs Service. The tracking exercise found that specific improvements to services had been made, such as the breadth of management information, the turnaround of void properties and the improving quality of sheltered housing. These specific improvements have wide-ranging benefits for the management of Council properties across the city.

The Committee was also able to respond to concerns raised regarding the high costs incurred by the Housing Department as a result of disrepair litigation from tenants living in Council owned properties. The improvements made in carrying out repairs much quicker have significantly reduced the number of legal actions being taken against the City Council, which is also now much more able to defend itself against unfounded claims.





There is a housing shortage across much of the country and we need to encourage the building of new houses - above is a new housing development in Kings Norton.





## Developing Our Leisure, Sport And Cultural Facilities

**Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Members have worked on a variety of projects to ensure the enhancement of the diverse facilities across the city.**

**The conservation of the city's magnificent and historic Aston Hall and Park is of national importance, but to the local community they provide much needed local leisure facilities. Plans had been drawn up to conserve and promote the Hall and Park but as the Members started their review, it was flooded with concerns that problems had developed in securing funding for the proposed improvements. It became clear that unless these difficulties were overcome, the whole project was threatened. Members of the Committee visited Aston Hall, heard evidence from local people and received information about the progress of obtaining funding from a variety of sources.**

The resulting report, Review of **the Funding of the Aston Hall and Park Development Project**, greatly assisted in achieving the required funding. The recommendations also dealt with the need for us to protect our heritage, be able to administer complicated projects better and to ensure the engagement of our new District structures.

The committee has also been successful in influencing decisions made by the Cabinet. For example, in May 2005 O&S Members met to discuss and respond on the Support to the Arts Budget. They expressed a number of concerns about funding arrangements for 2005/06 for grant aid to arts organisations and following this, it was agreed that O&S Members would carry out an overview of funding for the arts. This piece of work has now been included into their current work programme.

In June 2005, Committee Members met to discuss a decision to relocate

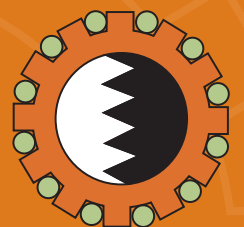
the firework display celebrating **Guy Fawkes Night**, from Pype Hayes Park to a fireworks spectacular, without a bonfire, at Edgbaston Cricket Ground. Concerns were raised about this by the general public and particularly the local community and local Members had been insufficiently consulted. Following discussions, this popular celebration in Pype Hayes Park has been re-instated and also the bonfire.

Tracking the recommendations of the review of **Parks and Open Spaces** highlighted that a majority of recommendations had been fully achieved and that good progress was being made. However, concerns raised around the progress made with regard to the **Swimming and Fitness** review means that they will continue to closely monitor progress.





Aston Hall and Park is not just a national historical treasure but a local community resource.







## Safer Communities

**Community Safety is a priority issue for people in Birmingham.**

**It is a complex area with many partners involved: the Police, Fire Service, council departments, business sector, housing associations, voluntary and community organisations.**

**Making the community safer and making people feel safer makes a substantial improvement to the quality of life for all of us.**

**The Management of Community Safety**

was therefore examined to consider what the City Council is doing alongside its partners to achieve these aims. It emphasised using an intelligence-based approach to tackling specific crimes, concluding that partnership-working is key to making progress. It also looked at the importance of the street environment and how this can sometimes encourage some types of criminal activity.

One of the areas we have taken a particular interest in recently is the increasing use of **CCTV** cameras.

The original debate was concerned about the possible intrusion that CCTV would make into people's lives. This generally seems to have moved on with emphasis now more on how effective CCTV cameras are. Whilst recently there have been some very high profile national examples where CCTV has played a significant part in helping to identify culprits, this is not always the case.

The review noted that across the city a number of different bodies are involved in CCTV provision, namely the Police, the City Centre Partnership, Residents and Traders Associations, Centro, West Midlands Travel, as well as the City Council. Committee Members found that while these bodies worked together reasonably well as a general rule, the arrangements varied in how they functioned, with no single forum where they could all meet

regularly to develop CCTV provision in the city.

The resulting report has led to the Council adopting a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to CCTV provision across the city with improved joint working with partner organisations. This review also shaped the way forward for securing long term revenue for local schemes, encouraging Council directorates to treat CCTV as one of the Council's infrastructure priorities - comparable to highways or street lighting.

One of the main benefits already drawn from this review was the appointment of a CCTV Co-ordinator from September 2005 to lead in this important area of community safety for the city.



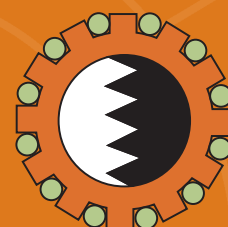
We also looked at the City Council's campaign **You Are Your City: Clean and Safe**. Under this campaign, a partnership was formed between the Council's Regulatory and Waste Management Services, the West Midlands Police and the West Midlands Fire Service to remove as much fly tipping waste as possible. Coupled with this was the work with the Police to ensure that as much help as possible was

given in keeping safe people's property and belongings.

We found that the campaign had made a marked difference to the environment in which many people were living and recommendations focussed on trying to ensure that these improvements were sustainable.



We need to tackle the fear of crime as well as crime itself.





## Improving Local Areas

**Environmental health and hygiene is one of the traditional functions of Local Authorities and a number of key issues have been tackled this year.**



Firstly, a major review entitled **Pest Control: Rats and Rubbish** was undertaken. This review examined how the Council responds to reports of rats and what proactive measures it can take. Members spoke to users of the Pest Control Service, looking at their experiences as well as speaking to pest control and environmental professionals. The review's recommendations included looking at the effectiveness of how

the service is publicised and encourages the use of Environmental Wardens and training them effectively to recognise pest problems. It further encourages more effective

liaisons between Pest Control and other departments on pest management issues.

The matter of support for **Local Centres** was examined by the Regeneration O&S Committee and in particular, the issue of access to essential local services. Whilst the activities taking place within local centres are subject to national market trends, there are a number of issues that the Council can influence:

- Well signposted, secure conveniently located car parking
- Public transport access
- Public safety
- Street cleaning, pavement maintenance and the enforcement of parking and other controls within centres

Town Centre Management represents an important way in which these issues can be addressed, as can upgrading the quality of both design and the environment within centres, holding significant benefits both in terms of encouraging more visits and by



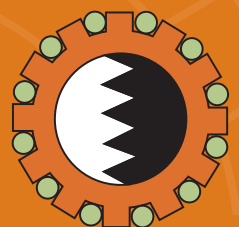
## Improving Local Areas

making a centre more attractive and pleasant for those who use it regularly.

The Regeneration O&S Committee also responded to public concern by examining the issue of Post Office Closures in the city. There was deep disquiet not only about the closures themselves but around the lack of consultation with the public and discussion with the City Council. It is a matter of disappointment that we were not able to stop the Post Office's overall decision regarding the closures, but we were able to raise the issue of how consultation on such sensitive and locally important issues ought to be pursued in the future. As a result, we have also recently been contacted by Post Watch (The National Official Watchdog) about joint monitoring.



The prompt removal of rubbish not just makes an area cleaner but often stops further fly tipping.





## Addressing The Needs Of Vulnerable Groups And Improving Our Social Care Provision

**Birmingham's Social Care and Health directorate provides a range of services for adults, children and families, within the community and in people's homes.**

Services the city provides for children and the processes used to deliver them, has been a key focus of Scrutiny in 2004/5. **The Review Process for Looked After Children** was initiated to ensure that the services being delivered to this vulnerable group were of the highest possible standard. The review covered areas of concern such as the council's information systems, partnership working with the health sector, social care practices, processes for review, accommodation, kinship care and ensuring that views of looked after children are taken into account more fully in the future. This review was followed up and all of the recommendations have been fully achieved. It has brought about significant changes that have improved the service to these children and young people such as improved

working relationships with the Housing Department to secure accommodation for Looked After Young People leaving care and improvements to the review process.

The priority given to Looked After Children by the Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), emerged as a key outcome of the **Education and Health of Looked After Children Review**. During the tracking of this review the Committee saw evidence of improved working relationships between the Social Care department and the Looked After Children's Education Services (LACES) and improved partnership working between Social Care, Education Service and Health Service. Tracking of the **Aspects of Internal Fostering Review** also highlighted a number of achievements in areas such as recruitment and retention of foster carers and improved training for these carers.

The Social Care function of the Council has a £345m budget and involves complex relationships and

cross working with numerous departments, partners and agencies to deliver high quality services to vulnerable people. It was not surprising then for a review of budgetary arrangements to be a high priority for Scrutiny in 2004/5. In the **Budget Delegation Review** the Committee was able to find out how effectively budgets were delegated to the new area based Social Care structure. This new arrangement for locally handling budgets was introduced on 1 April 2004, and a review to coincide with the financial year end, was timely and relevant. The review recommended improvements in a wide range of areas such as policies and practices, management arrangements, information processes and service re-organisation.

The Social Care O&S Committee remains vigilant on recommendations made in a previous report resulting from the **Information for Social Care Review**. This review, having already highlighted a number of significant improvements such as

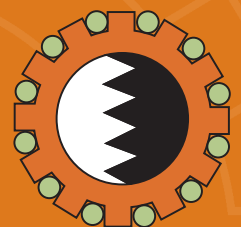


better provision of information about available services, enhancing service level agreements between Social Care and Health, business solutions and IT, improvements to the Care First System and the establishment of a new development programme; these continue to be closely monitored by the Committee through its tracking process.

Scrutiny has influenced and monitored key policies and practices including the Youth Justice Plan, the Commissioning Strategy for Older People, the work of the ACPC (Child Protection Committee), the Department's response to the Victoria Climbié inquiry and many other issues that are essential for an effective Service.



It is important to ensure that our standard of provision constantly improves and is responsive to the needs of families, children and adults, which includes the elderly, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems and the sick.





## Tackling Congestion And Improving Transport And Parking Provision In The City

**Tackling congestion is a key area of work for the Transportation and Street Services Members. Given the scale and complexity of the subject this is being approached through several pieces of specific work. The first of these was a review of Enforcing Parking in Birmingham.**

Parking enforcement is a controversial activity, both locally and nationally. In recent years, many councils (including Birmingham) have taken over parking enforcement from the Police. This has led to parking restrictions being enforced more rigorously, although the increase in the number of tickets issued has drawn criticism from the media. Parking restrictions, however, exist for a reason, usually to either make roads safer or to keep traffic flowing. If they are not enforced, people ignore them and this does not work.

The City Council's responsibilities for **traffic management and parking enforcement** were reviewed,

particularly in terms of effectiveness. It was found that whilst enforcement is carried out relatively effectively, it is important to focus on tackling congestion and furthermore, to show that this is the case. Other important recommendations included:

- Tackling accusations of attendants 'lurking in the shadows' head-on by making them more visible
- Providing a forum for stakeholders to discuss issues
- Increasing enforcement outside the city centre

Another way of tackling congestion involves the proposed **Highways Maintenance Private Finance Initiative**. PFI's are preferred Government arrangements for financing. This is a massive undertaking, potentially involving £2 billion of investment and a 25-year period in which our highways would be refurbished and maintained by a private contractor. This not only covers much of the

physical fabric of the city's streets but also traffic signals, lighting and other parts of the street scene.

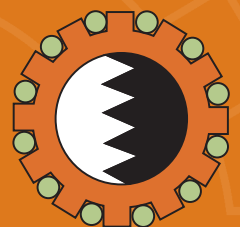
We took a first look at the proposal so that the Council could be sure that this way of financing the work was the best available. Our report also highlighted the need to be certain that Councillors would be able to adjust the services delivered in their local areas to reflect the wishes of local people throughout the life of the 25-year contract.

The task of developing a PFI of this magnitude is a long and complex process and is due to be completed by the end of 2006 for implementation in April 2007. This process will be closely monitored by O&S Members, to ensure the best outcomes for Birmingham residents.





Congestion will not just go away, public transport must be improved.





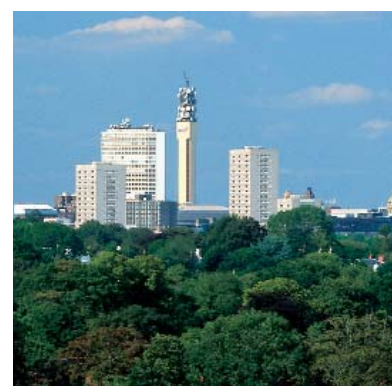
## Controlling Expenditure And Achieving Greater Efficiency

**A consistent feature across all the work that we have been doing is to continually look at ways for improving efficiency, particularly in the way that the City Council delivers its services. This continues to be part and parcel of all our work.**

Every three months we consider the latest information on how the City Council is meeting its targets and make comments to Cabinet Members on how things might be picked up. Similarly we regularly look at the City Council's expenditure to make sure that spending is under control, and that there is a sufficient understanding of the effects budget changes have on services. The whole of the City Council's budget is examined in this way several times during the course of the year, but we paid special attention to the Social Care and Housing budgets because of the need to be sure that these particular services were improving.

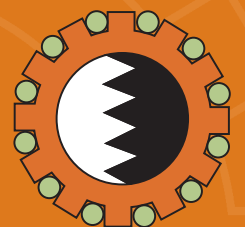
One of the City Council's most important and sizeable assets is its **property portfolio**, valued at £4.85 billion, with £339m being let commercially. Our work this year highlighted that not all this property is in good repair – the maintenance backlog amounts to some £420m. The City Council cannot afford the

whole of this sum, and therefore must sell more of the property and reinvest more of the proceeds into repairing the rest. With more City Council services being controlled in local areas, there is also scope to move staff from expensive city centre offices to less expensive buildings elsewhere in the city and closer to the points of service delivery.





The Bullring Shopping Centre has been hailed as one of Europe's most successful redevelopment projects and has had more than 54 million visitors in the two years it has been open.



## Strengthening Our Own Governance Structures

**It is important that we keep trying to improve the way Birmingham as a city is run – the governance arrangements. These range from the most basic democratic essentials – the conduct of public elections – to making sure that people and their elected representatives can have an effective say in making decisions. They also include the ways in which the City Council, other public services such as the police and the health service, voluntary and community services and businesses can work together to improve Birmingham’s future. We have tackled aspects of all of these issues in the past year.**

Mention has already been made of how Government changes in 2001 meant that the traditional way of local councils taking decisions through committees was changed to a Cabinet system. It is important that all Councillors elected to the City Council, not just those appointed to the important positions on the Cabinet, are able to properly represent your interests.

We, in a review of the **Role of Members and City Council**, therefore, put forward a range of recommendations to increase the “checks and balances” which backbench Councillors can make in the running of the City Council and also ways in which Cabinet Members can be seen to be more accountable for the decisions which they are taking. These changes are now being introduced, with Cabinet Members taking reports to the full Council on their stewardship. We will continue to watch how these developments take shape.

There were a number of concerns around the **Local Elections** in June 2004 which were also held at the same time as the European Elections. Some of these, mainly around postal voting, led to legal challenges to the election results in particular wards. Whilst we had to put our review in suspension for a period of time whilst the Election Court set up in Birmingham undertook its hearings, we have now come forward with a series of recommendations to improve the administration of the elections arrangements. However, we believe that full reassurance that postal vote fraud has been eliminated will require changes in the law and we have made representations to the Government accordingly.

The Birmingham Strategic Partnership is the formal body in which representatives of the City Council, other services, businesses and voluntary organisations come together. Working in partnership with other agencies and organisations is

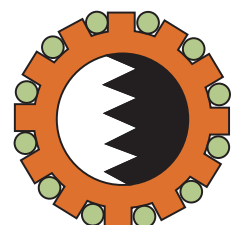


## Strengthening Our Own Governance Structures

increasingly being seen as the best way to do our business in the public sector. When it works it can result in better services being provided as more co-operation develops between the different agencies. It can also allow for more people and interests to be involved in decision making. However partnership working can also have its downsides, it takes time to

develop and it can add complexity as it is not always clear to the public who is responsible for what and it may result in a loss of local democratic accountability if Councillors do not have a role in the decision making. The review of the **Birmingham Strategic Partnership** explored these issues in relation to what is the key strategic partnership in the city.

It found that the Partnership does have a key role to play in the city in driving forward a joint vision for the future of the city, but more needs to be done to ensure that it is accountable to the citizens of Birmingham and that it is open to scrutiny for the actions it takes on their behalf.



## 6. What's In The Pipeline?

**In the previous section we told you a bit about the range of activities that were undertaken during the last 15 months. In this section we want to share with you the work that we have either already started, but have not yet completed, or that we intend to start very soon.**

This will give you a feel for what is underway and outline the areas that we have already prioritised.

You may want to make a contribution to one of the reviews.



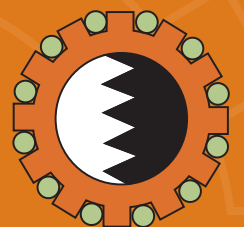
Alternatively, you might want to make a suggestion for a new review you might like us to undertake.

Either way, our contact details can be found on page 1.





Through good husbandry the Council must protect its magnificent heritage of trees.



## Reviews In Progress/Planned

### Adult Day Care Services

Adult Care Services provide support to older people, those people with mental health needs, learning disabilities and physical disabilities. Day Care services for adults have not been comprehensively reviewed in recent years, this makes this review particularly challenging. The Review aims to consider whether day care services are meeting the needs of current users fully and whether they will meet the needs of future service users. Visits have been made to a range of day services across all sectors and to Local Authorities whose day services are cited as



examples of best practice. The principle outcome of the review will be to identify service improvements.

### Anti-Social Behaviour in Schools

Pupil safety is an important subject for every parent, who needs to feel reassured that schools can effectively supervise their children during the school day. However, there have been concerns raised by some parents about the anti-social behaviour caused by a minority of pupils. This review will investigate these concerns.

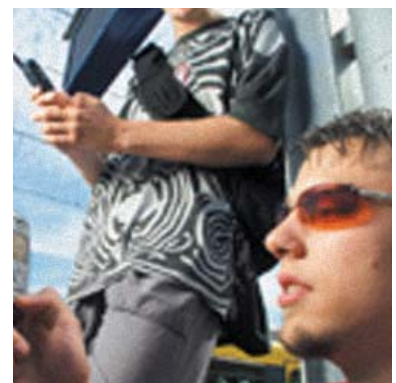
There are many good practices already in place in many schools and this review will identify what works well as we seek to develop a new policy around this, which will tackle anti-social behaviour in a consistent way in all schools and will therefore seek to ensure the safety of every young person during school hours. It will also ensure that we gain a clear understanding of the types of problems faced by parents, schools

and teachers. Discussions with the Police around the legal implications have already proven to be very useful.



### Birmingham's New Library

Birmingham Central Library is the busiest library in the UK, attracting over 5,000 visitors every day. However, it is now over 30 years old and it has been recognised for some time now that investment is now needed to renew or create a modern new library for the city, befitting for the 21st century. Complex issues are involved in this decision for example, the role of a new library in regeneration and the important



## Reviews In Progress/Planned

question of funding and delivery.

The City Council's Cabinet has

already

received and acknowledged a report on the possible options

for a new library.

However before making a formal decision, they have asked

Scrutiny to look at

the options and the information that is available to underpin them. This review is involving a fact finding analysis of the options, but two in particular. One is a two-centre option locating the lending and reference library in Centenary

Square and providing a separate Heritage Centre at Millennium Point for archives and other historical material. The other is a new integrated library in the Eastside part of the city close to Millennium Point.

### Construction Costs

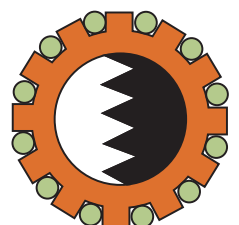
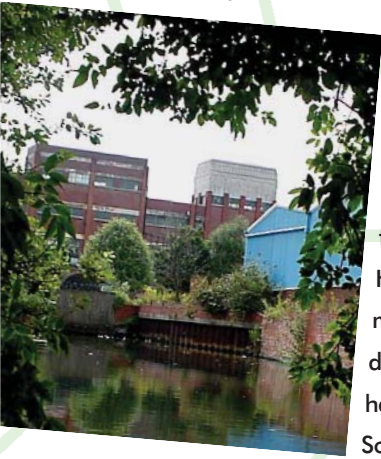
There have recently been a number of high profile construction projects where attention has been drawn towards the costs of the work undertaken by the Council's own in-house providers of professional services - Urban Design. A review around their services will look at their pricing structures and will ask whether they really do offer value for money and a quality service.

In order to do this their costs, fees and trading arrangement will be investigated thoroughly and a full examination of the range of construction and property services

undertaken. This will include a comparison of costs, fees, staffing and charging arrangements for both private and public sector organisations which will help to determine whether the right charging system is in place.

### Engaging the Voluntary Sector to Address Health Inequalities

How the NHS engage with the voluntary sector in order to address health inequalities is very important in ensuring that everyone feels that they have the same access to good quality health care no matter where they live. The Government intends the Voluntary Sector to be right at





## Reviews In Progress/Planned

the heart of NHS plans to address health inequalities but how well is this currently being carried out?

This is the subject of a review by the Health O&S Committee as they consider how this engagement actually happens. Their review of existing practices will establish whether the right approach is in place to engage, define and evaluate the voluntary sector's role in addressing this issue. In order to do this the committee will look at how voluntary sector organisations are currently monitored and will pay particular attention to health inequalities within black and minority ethnic communities so that they can assess the level of engagement being achieved.

### Funding for Arts Organisations

During discussions with the Cabinet Member it was agreed that we would look in more detail at how we fund



and support arts organisations. This review will help to identify areas in our existing arrangements which need to be strengthened. For example, we need to ensure that when we support an organisation there is a clear demonstration of "value for money" in return for our investment. There may also be areas where there is a need for the Council to do more. We also want to ensure that there is a consistent approach across all parts of the Council, towards our partners when delivering services, in return for grant aid funding.

### Homelessness

There is currently a homeless procedure which offers help and assistance to those who need it. This assistance is delivered by trained staff



through our network of housing and neighbourhood offices. However, there are some weaknesses in our processes and this review will take a

close look at this to consider whether we can do things differently in order to improve this service. This will involve initially identifying the good practice already in place so that we can use this as a starting point to develop service improvements. The implications are far reaching because it could result in us managing homelessness in a completely different way in the future. One of the areas we will look at will be to explore new ways of working such as whether we can avert certain types of homelessness by intervening at a much earlier stage than we do currently.





Just as the skyline of Birmingham will change, so the work of Overview and Scrutiny will need to keep pace with these changes.



## Reviews In Progress/Planned

### Improving Owner-Occupied Private Sector Housing

The Council has a responsibility to provide assistance to owner occupiers to support them in their own homes where there is a need to do so and has in place a variety of policies aimed at achieving this. Collectively this is known as the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy and is very important in ensuring that everyone in the city can enjoy good quality housing. This review will consider whether the interests of private owner occupiers is adequately catered for and whether we are doing everything we can to ensure that vulnerable groups receive adequate assistance and support. It will look at the benefits of schemes such as:

- The HomeWorks Service, which provides advice, information and guidance to homeowners relating to a variety of matters.
- The Safety Net Scheme, which supports vulnerable



people who are living in homes that are below standard.

- The HouseProud Scheme, which provides a complete home improvement package for people over 60, together with the option of affordable loans to help to pay for repair work.

### Localisation and Devolution

It is very important for us to ensure that local services are responsive to the needs of local people. Localisation and Devolution has involved delivering decision making powers to local (District) Committees and localising staff and budgeting out services to a local management structure. All this is with the primary aim of giving local people opportunities to make known their priorities about services that affect their lives and to ensure that locally Elected Members have the right structures in place to ensure that this happens. One way in which you can become involved at a local level is by attending the ward and district

committee meetings in your area. They enable you to have a say on a range of matters unique to your area and in the past this type of public involvement has led to local people coming up with solutions to local problems such as improved street lighting or local parking schemes.

Localisation and Devolution is leading to a shift away from having the majority of our services controlled from centralised offices. Birmingham is the largest authority in the UK and because of its size, has introduced this new way of working in phases. The first phase was introduced last year with some services devolved to the local area. However, before the Council begins the next phase, we need to assess the extent to which the arrangements are working, what the benefits are from the first phase, what are the costs, how best practices may be shared, what is the best structure and what are the lessons to be learnt.



## Reviews In Progress/Planned

### Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) is one of the ways in which the Government funds Local Authorities. In Birmingham, this money has been spent at ward level to provide services such as Environmental Wardens and Play Workers for local communities as well as major schemes in

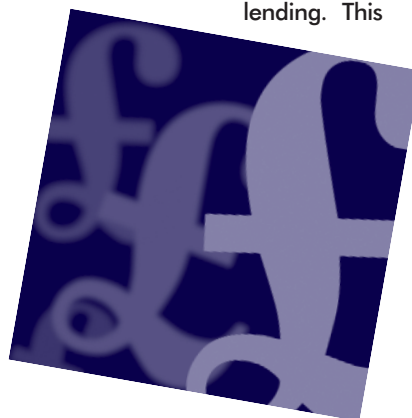


underprivileged areas. However, as yet there is no indication whether the Council will continue to receive this funding beyond 2008. For the NRF funded projects and schemes within Birmingham, this raises problems of financial insecurity, service provision and retention of key staff. This review will therefore examine the use of this

money and to assess the extent to which it is desirable or possible to fund these projects through mainstream Council budgets.

### Problem Debt

It is important that people with money problems are assisted in a way which helps them to resolve their problems in a sustainable way. With this review we want to ensure that people in debt get the support they need and that they know about their rights and the services they can freely access. It was launched in the face of two successful high profile court cases, which were the first of their kind for the city Council, who took legal action against two illegal money lenders. It will include an evaluation of the scale of the problem and explore whether we can introduce new arrangements which will encourage responsible lending. This

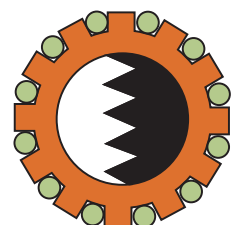


review will establish what can be done and will consider the key factors which lead to problem debt in the first place. It will also consider whether there is anything we can do to build better relationships between council departments and voluntary sector organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau, which will help to support individuals better.

### Procurement

The Council purchases products and services on a very large scale to enable the delivery of our diverse range of services. This expenditure can range from us renting office space to purchasing a whole new suite of computers, for example.

The Council is seeking new processes which will ensure that the public money is spent to maximum effect and that before any decisions are made on purchases consideration towards savings and service improvements are taken into account. This review is all about getting value



## Reviews In Progress/Planned

for money for the goods and services we buy. It is clearly very important for us to save money and to achieve this we need to make sure that there is a set of procedures which ensures that all staff who are responsible for spending money on behalf of the Council has adequate guidance. With this review we will take a look at what we do currently and ask whether there is anything we can do, to not only improve, but also to identify where financial savings can be made. This review is of particular importance because more efficient procurement will enhance the capacity of the Council to offer services and may also influence the way in which we deliver some services in the future.

### Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

Every school relies on good teachers



to improve the attainment of their pupils. However, there has been national concern in recent times about the high number of teacher vacancies coupled with the levels of those teachers leaving the profession. This review will consider some of the issues which affect their day to day job such as changes to the school curriculum and, most recently, changes made to their terms and conditions of service.

It will enable us to have a current understanding of our teaching workforce and will investigate the reasons why they choose to change profession by looking at their pay, workload and the behaviour of pupils. Where possible it will identify whether there are any particular issues that affect teacher recruitment and retention and come up with ideas on how these may be addressed.

### Recycling: Looking to the Future

The City Council regards recycling as most important in environmental terms. It also has to meet recycling targets set by Central Government in order to avoid financial penalties. There is also increasing public demand, both nationally and locally, for recycling services to be provided. A number of pilot recycling schemes are now underway and the scope for extending them more widely throughout the city must be explored. This review will consider the action we need to take in order to meet these targets and to ensure that we positively respond to the needs of the public.

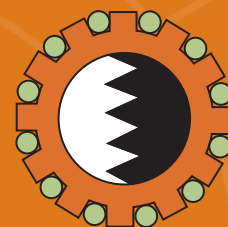
### Safer, Stronger, Communities Fund

Earlier we mentioned our planned review into the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Closely linked to this is our planned overview of how we engage with our communities with another type of funding – the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund. This is another way in which some local





We want to look at progress on introducing safe walking to school routes.



## Reviews In Progress/Planned

authority services can be funded by the Government and specifically targets local communities. We will establish the timescale for Birmingham to receive these funds and identify the best possible way that community can benefit from it.

### Section 31 Partnership Agreement between Birmingham City Council and the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust



from www.johnbirdsall.co.uk

New powers to enable health and local authority partners to work together more effectively came into force on 1st April 2000. These were outlined in Section 31 of the 1999 Health Act.

These partnership arrangements for health bodies, such as Strategic Health Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, together with any health-related local authority service such as social services, housing, transport, leisure and library services, community and many acute services. The aim was to enable partners to join together to design and deliver services around the needs of users rather than worrying about the boundaries of their organisations. This review will consider the current Section 31 partnership agreement between Social Care and Health and the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust. The review will focus on

areas including staffing and governance arrangements.

### School Admissions

School Admissions is an issue which has created a high degree of public interest and a number of concerns have been expressed by parents and carers whose children have been unable to obtain their preferred choice of school. This review will look at the current school admission process and consider the adequacy of our practices in providing the best placements for our children. It will also consider the role of the Independent Appeal Panel as well as how far parental preferences can be



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catered for at the year of entry.

This review will also assess the extent of the problem in all parts of the city by taking a close look at the number of children who have been unable to obtain a place at their nearest school.

### Support to Small Businesses

The role of small businesses is very important to the economy of the city and this review will analyse their significance as well as review the current mechanisms in place for supporting them. Small businesses generate local jobs for local people and help to stabilise our local economy. This review will clarify what the role of the City Council should be and identify ways in which we

can assist small businesses to help them to develop their role within diverse communities, take stock of existing support and discuss any specific requirements they may need in order to create a positive business development environment.

This review will help us to understand the infrastructure required for new and emerging businesses with specific reference to technology-based business and industry and will also play an important role in us gaining an understanding of how we can provide ongoing support to them, especially with regard to the manufacturing industry.

### Traffic Management and Control

Tackling congestion is a key priority for the Council. This review will examine the management of traffic in the city and how this can reduce the potential for incidents and consequent gridlock. As part of the review Council Members will be visiting the National Traffic Control Centre in Quinton to observe the technologies used and to assess how the Council works in partnership with other Local Authorities and external agencies such as the Highways Agency.

### Travelling to school

Congestion associated with travelling to school is a national problem and a prominent local issue. Can the Council do more to reduce congestion at peak school times? This is the question we want to consider when we look at how we manage congestion around school gates. During the course of the review, schemes such as Safer Routes to School and School Travel Plans will be considered as well as





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the current options available to pupils. Members have undertaken visits to Wyndcliffe School, Small Heath and St. Francis' School, Bournville to see how School Travel Plans have already started to influence pupils and parents to use public transport or to walk to school.

### Trees in the Public Highway

The city is proud of its magnificent heritage of trees. They bring a wide variety of benefits to those who live and work here and provide a welcoming environment to visitors to the city. Our heritage includes the great legacy of trees from Victorian times that ornament our streets and parks as well as ancient trees and those in woodlands and gardens. Trees matter to the quality of life of



the city; they keep us healthier, they bring environmental benefits, they increase community pride and contribute to economic regeneration. However, our legacy of trees is now under threat from pressures for development and the need to service a rapidly growing and changing modern city.

Urgent action is needed to raise awareness of the many benefits that trees can bring. To do this we need to foster an appreciation of the vital importance of trees, protect our existing tree heritage against needless damage and removal and positively manage and conserve them.

This review will look in particular at ways of safeguarding our trees.

### Youth Services in Birmingham

We want to look at the services that are currently being provided by Birmingham's Youth Service and



consider whether the money available for providing these services is distributed in a fair and equitable way. We must ensure that all youth in the city can benefit from the same services no matter where they live. It will also

look at whether what we currently provide is what young people really want and will consider whether we need to broaden the range of activities on offer. We want to establish, at the very least, what a minimum standard should be within each locality which all young people can expect to receive.



