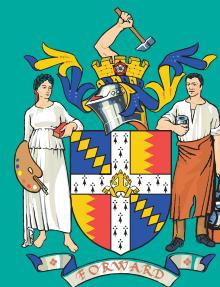




The 2009 Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report**



Contents

Preface	3
About Our Work	4
Engaging People	
Relationships and Sexual Health	5
Child Victims of Domestic Abuse	6
Improving Housing for Older People	7
Tackling People's Concerns	
Road Safety	8
Affordable Housing	9
Swine Flu Preparedness	10
Improving Children's Social Care	11
Tackling Local Concerns	
Reducing Gang Violence	12
Drugs and Alcohol	13
Resources for Improving Parks	14
Tackling the Recession	
Worklessness	15
Birmingham's Growth Agenda	16
Obtaining Better Value for Money	17
What's Coming Up	18
What Else Have We Looked At?	19



1: Preface



Welcome to our fifth Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Annual Report. This year I have introduced a smaller, slimmed down format, in keeping with the financial times we live in. The work of my Member colleagues this year has of course been as valuable as ever – and hopefully this slimmer presentation is a fitting way of highlighting that work.

First amongst many notable achievements this year must be the national recognition of the work of Cllr Jon Hunt, the Children and Education O&S Committee, and their young people representatives. Their work won the Centre for Public Scrutiny Award for community engagement. Birmingham is the only authority to have won consecutive national scrutiny awards, following Cllr Len Clark being last year's "Scrutiny Chair of the Year".

The criteria for these awards were only published after the work itself had been completed. There has been no temptation, therefore, to tailor our work to fit the prize.

So we can truthfully and categorically say that scrutiny in Birmingham is of national quality.

Whilst Cllr Hunt and his colleagues may have taken the honours, Scrutiny provides a route for two-thirds of the City Council's membership to influence improvements in services and conditions in Birmingham. This annual report reflects the quality of the work we all do, and I am very grateful to all who take part.

Scrutiny skills can also be used to good effect elsewhere in the Council. Cllr Martin Mullaney, for example, opened 2009 as the Chair of the Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee, but is now the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture. Several of our officer team, too, moved during the year to other posts within the Council. We welcomed Cllr Karen Hamilton as our new Chair, and made several good officer appointments. The result is that we have as skilful and versatile a team as ever.

Whether considering the work we do, or the national recognition we receive, or the contribution scrutineers make to the City Council, it is clear that Birmingham benefits from better scrutiny.

**Councillor Alistair Dow
Chair of the Co-ordinating
O&S Committee**

2: About Our Work

Our role is to represent the views of Birmingham people in trying to improve both the city and its public services. Most of the services we look at are provided by our own Council. But increasingly we are able to look at other services in the area – particularly health services and those aimed at reducing crime and disorder.

The formalities are that we organise our work through all-party committees of elected Members, reporting our results to the full City Council. Much of our work is carried out by smaller groups of Members, always with the intention of including representatives of the three major political parties.

In the coming pages you can find a short account of a selection of our work. The first section highlights occasions when young people and users of services have involved themselves in our work to an exceptional degree. This makes for really strong scrutiny, but equally most people have limited time and opportunity for exercises like those. They look to their elected representatives to take forward their concerns, wishes and aspirations on their behalf. So in other

sections we report work with less direct public engagement but which tackles either city-wide concerns or those which have particular importance in some local areas, such as the combating of gang violence. Finally, the key priority for the whole city council this year has been to help Birmingham deal with the recession, and we present here some of the contribution Scrutiny has made to this.

We have not attempted to showcase all the work we have been undertaking. We show on page 19 a fuller list of what we have looked at, but hopefully this selection of our work provides a good illustration of how we are trying to make a difference.

We also hope our account shows how we listen to a range of views directly from the public, and certainly to the experiences and opinions of elected Councillors. We aim to treat all contributors fairly, whilst coming to incisive conclusions. The end product is to help bring about changes which Birmingham people desire and deserve.

3: Engaging People

Relationships and Sexual Health

“The review came from young people from the very start and all the way through they were the drivers for the review. There was clear commitment from the council leadership to the findings.”

Centre for Public Scrutiny Judge

The Children and Education O&S Committee recently completed a piece of work on the effectiveness of Sex and Relationship Education within Birmingham. The original idea for the review came from the young people who are members of the scrutiny committee. They felt that young people did not always receive the highest quality Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) within their schools and they wanted to see how this could be improved.

This piece of work has now gained national recognition for involving young people, other groups including the faith communities, young parents and the voluntary sector by winning the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Award for “Community Engagement”. The award judges strongly felt that the involvement of young people in the planning and delivery of the project was a key factor in its success.

The review provided a valuable opportunity for community debate about what was, in some communities, a sensitive subject. The establishment of a multi-faith forum, to enable

this debate and dialogue to continue, is a key strength of this piece of work, and demonstrates how scrutiny can successfully bring people together. The review challenges the existing model of SRE provision within the City, suggesting that there should be a clear focus on relationships as well as meaningful consultation with parents and involving pupils in deciding what they would like to see delivered.

The young people also carried out their own consultation, and used their own contacts to interview young people from across the city. In addition our governors’ survey and the teachers we spoke to gave us an insight into the issues relating to SRE within schools. The young people participated fully in all of the sessions and asked many challenging and often uncomfortable questions.



Cllr Jon Hunt, Chair of Children & Education O&S Cttee (centre) with (left to right) Cllr Alistair Dow, Tyrone Fowles, Iram Choudry, Paula Fowles and John Cade at CfPS Good Scrutiny Awards Ceremony

Child Victims of Domestic Abuse

The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people is huge and may have lifelong consequences. Responding to domestic abuse requires services to work together to prevent it taking place, to maximise opportunities for identification and to provide appropriate support to victims.

The Vulnerable Children's O&S Committee looked at how to challenge the mind set of potential future perpetrators and victims by examining awareness raising programmes that children and young people can access. Domestic abuse that is not challenged increases in scale and severity over time.



It is therefore essential that it is identified and tackled purposefully and that appropriate support is given where necessary in order to minimise the detrimental consequences for future generations.

As part of the review an event was held, chaired by Cllr Margaret Sutton the Chairman of the Committee, during which Members had an opportunity to discuss awareness raising work and experiences with young people. Northfield Young People's Forum (INVOLVE) talked to Members about their work with the Lantern Project to develop ways to convey messages to young people. A pupil from a local school read a poem that she wrote at the 'Is This Love?' conference which endorsed healthy relationships to young people. A young person and Youth Leader from Base K/S presented information about services available to support young people who experience domestic abuse in Kingstanding.

Posters, artwork and the opinions of children and young people living in Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid refuge accommodation were displayed and Members had the opportunity to think about items they would have to leave behind if they were forced to flee. It was not appropriate for children living in the refuge to attend the event, but their views were represented imaginatively and skillfully by having their clothes hung behind their comments on a washing line.

Cllr Margaret Sutton (left), Chairman of Vulnerable Children O&S Cttee at Listening to Children and Young People's Views Event



Improving Housing for Older People

Our ageing society poses one of our greatest housing challenges.

In Birmingham, our population will increase by 100,000 to 1.1 million people over the next 10 years, a large percentage of which will consist of elderly households. The review explored how the City Council will address the challenges of an ageing society on the provision for housing, particularly as it is now clear that housing, health and care are becoming increasingly interdependent. These days most people as they get older wish to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. But as people live longer, and their needs intensify, the level of demand on the care and support system increases, resulting in inevitable difficulties in service funding. Good housing is therefore critical to managing the mounting pressures of care and support expenditure and it is clear that services need to be planned and integrated to reflect this.

The review was undertaken jointly by the Housing and Urban Renewal and Adults and Communities O&S Committees. It was essential to the Members that they heard the views of as many older people as they were able and that they went out and spoke to people living in different types of accommodation. As a result the group visited five sheltered housing schemes within Birmingham as well as the new Norman Power Care Centre and met with a number of the residents. They also received evidence from the Chair of the City's Sheltered Housing Liaison Board and Birmingham Advisory Council of Older People and the Older People's Reference Group.

Finally Members visited the Lovett Fields Extra Care Retirement Village in Milton Keynes and met residents living in a scheme similar to those that will shortly open in Birmingham. All of the views gathered were drawn together and were fundamental in shaping the findings and recommendations of the final review report.



4: Tackling People's Concerns

Road Safety

Birmingham's road safety figures have greatly improved over recent years, with a reduction of nearly 50% of road traffic casualties, during the period 1990 to 2007. The city is meeting its targets to reducing death and injuries of all road users. However, there is still much to do – numbers of people being killed or seriously injured have reduced but are still unacceptably high.

The Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee decided to undertake a Scrutiny Review to ensure that



momentum is kept up. We were particularly pleased that the Cabinet Member accepted our recommendation that a significant percentage of the Road Safety Performance Reward Grant will now be ring fenced

for further improvements with a view to our achieving Beacon Status for the service.

As part of the Review Members looked to more radical ideas that are being suggested: for example 20 mile per hour zones in all or most residential areas. Another idea is that of “shared space”, a new approach to public space which aims to do away with the sharp distinction between the highway, where motor vehicles have priority, and public space, which pedestrians are able to use freely. We need to consider carefully how we implement such schemes in this city to ensure they are appropriate for all users.

With this in mind, we will be looking at this issue in further detail with disability organisations. During our evidence gathering, witnesses told us that sometimes they felt they had inadequate opportunity to get involved in consultations about changes to the highway, and that some changes posed particular problems for those with disabilities. We will therefore invite a range of representatives from different disability groups to tell us about their experiences and needs, and we will report back to the Cabinet Member.

Left: Cllr Karen Hamilton, Chair Transportation & Street Services O&S Cttee

20

Affordable Housing

Having access to a decent place to live is a basic requirement for everyone. Ensuring that there is a good supply of sustainable, well designed affordable homes to suit the full range of needs in Birmingham is also key to future growth of the City.

This piece of scrutiny work, which is currently underway, arose from concerns about the availability and affordability of housing in the city both now and in the future. The provision of additional affordable housing is a key target in the City's Housing Plan, the Council Plan and the Local Area Agreement, as well as regional targets set by Government. However the official definition of affordable housing relates only to subsidised housing – where the cost to the occupier is less than market cost/rent. In reality the issue is much wider than this and it is important that affordable housing is taken to mean that which comes at a price which people can actually afford.

At a time of growing demand for affordable housing, the economic downturn has created specific challenges for the housing market. The provision of affordable housing and regeneration has been severely affected by the reduction in private sector activity and investment.

There are several key lines of enquiry for the review. What is the pattern of housing need in the city and the demand for affordable housing? How can affordable housing best be delivered by the Council and its partners in light of the current economic climate and changes to funding regimes? We are keen to explore how new tenures (intermediate rent, try before you buy, flexible tenure models etc.) might meet housing need and respond to demand and sustainable balanced communities. The group aims to take evidence from a full range of partner organisations such as housing associations, local housing partnership groups, private developers as well as local residents.

Above: Cllr Emily Cox, Chair Housing & Urban Renewal O&S Cttee



Swine Flu Preparedness

When the 2009 swine flu epidemic (later to be classified as a pandemic) struck Birmingham, the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee quickly realised that it would be useful to scrutinise how the various agencies were coping and identify what lessons could be learned. As Birmingham experienced one of the first large clusters of swine flu cases it led the way on scrutinising the issue.

The aim of the brief review was to swiftly work out any areas where improvements could be made and for those changes



Cllr Deirdre Alden, Chairman of Health O&S Cttee, reviewing emergency service provision at the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Site

to be made quickly. Unlike other Scrutiny reviews, the report did not contain recommendations to be implemented at some stage in the future. As we identified issues we raised them immediately with the relevant agencies so that actions might be put in place straight away while the virus was still spreading and also in case of any future pandemic which could potentially be more harmful.

The final report concluded that local agencies recognised the need to work closely together and that good contingency planning had been done before the virus struck but its behaviour was unexpected, which exposed problems at first. We are pleased that our investigation helped with the early identification of problems and encouraged local agencies to quickly respond. For example, an early issue was confusion around the power to close schools. This was brought to our attention and in response the Director of Public Health worked with partners to develop a protocol setting out the decision-making process in relation to school closures.

Since the review has been completed Members have received regular updates, for example on the swine flu vaccination programme. The city remains on alert, and the Members continue to monitor the pandemic as it affects Birmingham.



Improving Children's Social Care

This all-party Scrutiny Inquiry was set up in January 2009 to look at the reasons for the poor performance of children's social care.

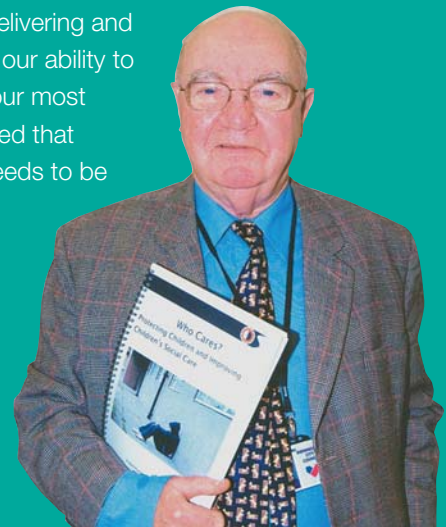
This review entitled 'Who Cares?: Protecting Children and Improving Children's Social Care' received much national publicity earlier this year.

Whilst many of the findings did not make comfortable reading for the Council, there has been praise from the social work profession for the Council's "unusually brave candour" in producing such a report.

Scrutiny Members were clear that they wanted their recommendations to act as the necessary catalyst to ensure that children's social care is given the priority it needs and deserves to put it on a firm footing for the future. Early indications are that it will.

The Inquiry acknowledged that many of the problems identified were national issues but found that the difficulties in children's social care were systemic and deeply ingrained and there could be no quick fix. The delivery model for this crucial service was ultimately not delivering and the issues highlighted were compromising our ability to provide quality services at the frontline to our most vulnerable children and families. It concluded that addressing these very serious concerns needs to be the Council's top priority to ensure that standards are improved for the future.

Councillor Len Clark, Chairman of the review into Improving Children's Social Care



Reducing Gang Violence

Members of the Equalities and HR O&S Committee are examining how the city tackles violent street gangs, through the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence partnership. This partnership includes agencies and community groups who work together to try to eradicate the violent and negative aspects of gang lifestyles. The review aims to ensure that the partnership is working to its full potential and to see what more can be done to address the negative impact gangs have on young people and the community around them.

The review group heard from agencies such as the Police and Housing, but were keen to speak to those living in the areas most affected to see what people's experiences and opinions were. We visited some of the community groups working in the areas of Handsworth and Lozells and were able to have honest and frank discussions with the community leaders and the people they work with, to get to the root of the issues around gang activity and violence.

In the course of the review we met some of the young people who attend one group, Young Disciples, and heard how staff helped them improve their attendance at school, and change their attitudes and aspirations. We also had the

opportunity to meet parents of children who had suffered at the hands of gangs and hear about the types of support currently provided to victims and their families, and about some of the things that could be improved.

The Chairman was so encouraged by the work he saw from these groups that all were nominated for the United Streets of Birmingham Community award, of which Street Pastors, based in Lozells, received a prize.



Cllr Keith Barton (left), Chairman of Equalities & Human Resources O&S Cttee and Gerald Nembhard of Street Pastors receiving a United Streets of Birmingham Community Award

Drugs and Alcohol

Over 25,000 people in Birmingham are dependent on alcohol and there are over 13,500 opiate and crack cocaine users in Birmingham. The impact of substance misuse on individuals is wide, for example, in Birmingham one in four deaths on the road involves drivers over the legal limit. The impact on communities is also great. West Midlands Police's Feel the Difference Survey of residents puts drug misuse as the third biggest social problem across the force area.

The Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee therefore decided to look at the impact of drugs and alcohol on communities and to investigate the services in place to reduce this.

We have learnt of the important role the Birmingham Drug and Alcohol Action Team plays in analysing need and commissioning services to ensure treatment services are in place. They are currently undergoing a three year refresh of their services. To ensure an appropriate range of treatment services a number of organisations

Cllr Mark Hill (right), Chairman of Local Services O&S Cttee, meeting members of the drug and treatment user service

have been commissioned and these services have started to deliver. A new residential provision is also being built so for the first time Birmingham residents will be able to stay within the City for that intensive treatment.

Young people's use of illegal drugs and alcohol has been of particular concern and we have heard about the steps taken in school and through the youth service to educate them to prevent misuse and also of treatment in place to tackle misuse.

The report will examine these issues and look to recommend actions to maximise the Council's impact in this area, particularly in ensuring that services match local need.



Resources for Improving Parks

The idea for this Review came from concerns expressed by Members about the ability of parks and playing fields to meet the needs of residents for sport, recreation and healthy leisure. The Review found that parks have not been a particularly high priority for Council resources – the associated reduction in quality has led to a cycle of decline, which has left some parks in a poor state of repair which has turned people away.

However local people are very proud of their parks. Parks are important to communities as they promote healthy lifestyles, moderate the effects of climate change and provide outdoor meeting places where people of



different ages and cultures can meet and get involved.

Birmingham possesses some 470 parks, recreation grounds and open spaces covering 3,200 hectares which are the responsibility of the City Council. The City has

a unique history of providing parks for public use and this has resulted in a wealth of open spaces making Birmingham one of the greenest cities in Europe.

The Review recommends that parks need champions to ensure that they are cherished and improved. Celebrating the heritage of our parks needs greater emphasis, so that their role in the City is enhanced. Given the decline in Council resources allocated to parks, we need to become more knowledgeable about the possible sources of external funds and how to access them, including new sources of funds through Be Birmingham. The voluntary and community sector has a vital role to play in the management of good quality, safe public spaces and the Review suggests more support to Birmingham Open Spaces Forum

Above: Cllr John Alden, Chairman of Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Cttee



5: Tackling The Recession

Worklessness

Prior to the current recession, the Regeneration O&S Committee commenced a scrutiny review of the Effectiveness of Employment Strategies. This aimed to look beyond performance data to the actual impact these schemes have in communities. Significant resources have been focused on prime areas in Birmingham – we believe this to be over £200 million. Members wanted to identify what impact this has had and what had succeeded.

The review found insufficient tracking of participants to be able to monitor long term effectiveness; confused governance and delivery with agencies operating at different spatial levels; and a “democratic deficit” with regard to the spend of these large amounts of public money. Recommendations to address this are now being implemented.

One of the recommendations was for the City Council to take a lead on the use of apprenticeships and encouraging apprenticeships within contracts for the procurement of services, products and capital programmes.

A broader review has also been undertaken on the merits of looking to re-establish a Bank of Birmingham given the loss of trust in private banking.

Whilst the report concluded that there would be too many hurdles to overcome in establishing a Council bank, a niche in providing loans to small businesses was identified. This is now being taken forward.

It is also important to attract new investment and we have been impressed by the way that the NEC Group has still managed, despite a difficult trading environment, to enhance its offering.



Left: Cllr Timothy Huxtable, Chairman of Regeneration O&S Cttee, visiting the newly refurbished LG Arena at the National Exhibition Centre

Birmingham's Growth Agenda

At this time of economic recession, we seem to hear regularly that large-scale commercial developments planned for the city are being postponed. It would be easy to think that the only action the City Council and its partners should take is to concentrate solely on the immediate effects of the recession. But that would be a mistake.

As the recession starts to ease and the economy begins to recover, Birmingham will again have to compete with other locations to attract investment and activity.

One key to success is clarity about the city's strengths and ambitions, based on a realistic assessment of what can be offered.

We have closely examined the prospects for Birmingham over the next twenty years. Employers and University representatives contributed greatly to our discussions. The city will continue to be attractive, with a growing population that is, on average, younger than most, and of course very diverse. The heart of the issue, in our view, is in growing the prosperity of Birmingham's people and businesses, rather than in population growth for its own sake.

The clearer and more resolute the city can be about the changes that Birmingham wants to see, particularly in uncertain times, the more likely it is that the city will succeed in attracting investment. We concluded that the City Council is very clear on the physical developments it wants to occur, but that it needs to complement these with more clarity about:

- developing skills, particularly amongst less-qualified people;
- retaining more highly skilled people through a range of measures including housing, leisure, digital and transport infrastructure;
- implementation of projects, particularly involving a range of agencies to bring about holistic improvement in an area and also involving elected Members to help highlight and tackle the concerns of local people.

**Cllr Alistair Dow, Chair Co-ordinating O&S Cttee
visiting recently refurbished offices**

Obtaining Better Value for Money

Making sure that the City Council provides good value for the money it spends is a central concern of the Birmingham public. This is a simple idea, but the devil is very much in the detail. We work intensively to be sure that the City Council is improving this aspect of its operation. The Council has a very ambitious programme – Business Transformation – to make major changes to services and reduce overheads. It also has a smaller Efficiency Programme to trim the costs of existing operations. We monitor both of these and remain anxious whether the promised savings from Business Transformation are arriving in their entirety.

With the economy in recession, many people in Birmingham are concerned that the City Council's budget next year should be affordable. A series of scrutiny sessions is taking place with City Council finance officers aimed at looking ahead at the various demands and constraints the recession may bring, including the likely restraint on Council and public spending overall.

The City Council is an asset-rich organisation. This has supported the approach of the last few years of making much more use of borrowing than many similar cities.

Examples include economically-beneficial projects including the remodelling of the city's major railway station and the work under way on a new Library of Birmingham. Rigorous business case methodology has been used when considering potential capital projects. We are satisfied that there has been adequate control over these past decisions. But equally the position now is that Birmingham has higher levels of debt per head than other cities.



consequences for the amount that the City Council can spend next year.

On the revenue side, we see that Council Tax collection has held up well, but a number of smaller income streams – leisure services, car parking, markets, for example – are under pressure. If this continues, there will be clear

Above: Cllr James Hutchings (left), Chairman Finance & Performance Sub Cttee

6: What's Coming Up?

We have a full programme of major inquiries underway. Reports will be published regularly over the coming months.

- Child Victims of Domestic Abuse
- Reducing Gang Violence
- Drugs and Alcohol
- Procurement Outcomes
- Overview of Building Schools for the Future
- Trading Services
- Marketing Birmingham
- Functional Literacy and Numeracy
- Maternity Services
- Overview of Affordable Housing
- Allotments
- Flood Risk Management and Response
- Learning Disability Opportunities
- Recycling for Businesses

There are also plenty of other pieces of work. We will carry on chasing progress on the City Council's business transformation programme, which at a cost of £677m over 12 years aims to improve services significantly and at the same time reduce running costs by £1.5bn. Work will continue on major City Council priorities such as sustainability and climate change, and making services responsive to local needs and requirements.

Particularly high profile, we suspect, will be our joint committee work with neighbouring Sandwell and Solihull responding to proposed changes to maternity services.

We shall also have to prepare for new duties in 2010. People who lodge well-supported petitions with the City Council will have a right of appeal to scrutiny, should they be dissatisfied with the response they receive from the Council.

7: What Else Have We Looked At?

Individualised Budgets
Adults and Communities Business Transformation Programme
Independence and Well Being

Academies – regular monitoring of developments
School Attainment
Integrated Youth Support Service

Strategic Equality and Diversity Monitoring
Pay and Grading updates
Improving HR management

Health Consultations including: Tobacco Control; NHS Constitution, Sexual Health and Health Care Developments
Directorate plans to tackle health inequalities
Constituency Health Plans

Housing Partner organisations; Decent Homes; Repair and Maintenance performance monitoring
Contributing to Housing policy development e.g. Allocations, Empty Properties, Homelessness strategies

Neighbourhood working
Constituency budgets
Partnership working in reducing crime and disorder

Birmingham Cultural Partnership and support to the arts in the Constituencies
Grounds Maintenance Contracts – improving the service and financing the new contracts.
Golf provision – balancing falling demand with supply

Big City Plan
Longbridge Area Action Plan
Planning Enforcement

Progress with Highways PFI
Traffic Regulation Orders
Parking on grass verges

The Referral Process – Common Assessment Framework/
Domestic Abuse Referrals
Improving Arrangements for Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Young People
Fostering – including Foster Care Inspection, Recruitment of Foster Carers by Foster Service and Private Fostering

Sustainability and Tackling Climate Change
Library of Birmingham
Localisation and Devolution

How to contact us

We would welcome your comments on this report. You might also feel able to help with some of the work we are doing, or suggest a topic for a future inquiry.

You can contact us by:

Email: scrutiny@birmingham.gov.uk

Phone: 0121 464 6872

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You can also find out more about what we do at:

www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny



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 **Birmingham City Council**