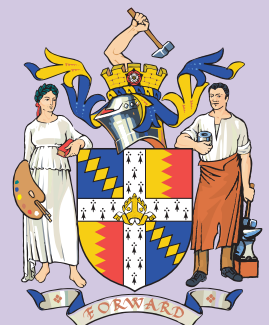


# The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2007





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## Preface

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



The prime reason for putting this Annual Report together is for those of us who undertake scrutiny to be accountable to the City Council and the wider public for the work we do. But it also serves to remind us all what our function is about and why we need to do it.

Our work as overview and scrutiny committees was introduced by Act of Parliament in 2000. From the beginning, the statutory guidance has emphasised that we have two roles. To quote:

“Overview and scrutiny committees are the key element of executive arrangements. Their roles should, therefore, include both developing and reviewing policy and holding the executive to account. These committees are the main way by which the executive is held to account in public for the discharge of the functions for which it is responsible. They should have important roles in reviewing the local authority’s policies and other matters of more general local concern and making recommendations, either to the full council or to the executive, on future policy options.”

Our annual report has been designed so that you, the reader, can make up your own mind as to whether my colleagues and I have carried out these two roles diligently.

It is always good to hear comments from people outside the City Council. Earlier this year, the Audit Commission’s Corporate Assessment of the Council highlighted that our scrutiny processes are good and our scrutiny reports are detailed and informative. It was especially gratifying to hear from the Audit Commission’s lead inspector that these were the most positive comments about scrutiny that he had written about any local authority.

The need for change and improvement, however, applies to overview and scrutiny as to other City Council activities. In May we made a structural adjustment and introduced a tenth overview and scrutiny committee. This deals solely with Vulnerable Children thus maintaining a focus on these very important and improving services. We also introduced two Sub-Committees, to allow us to deal more coherently with issues at the heart of the City Council’s operation. The first highlights matters of finance and performance, while the other deals with selected themes from the Human Resources and Equalities areas.

Both in looking back at the achievements of the past twelve months, and in anticipating further improvements ahead, I would like to give my thanks to two groups of people. First there are all those who have helped our inquiries and deliberations, particularly the staff in the Scrutiny Office. They have proved to be “dedicated” in both senses of the word; they work hard and take pride in achieving useful outcomes, but are also dedicated in being devoted full-time to helping our work. All good practice across the country, and this has been reflected in a Government White Paper, shows that the key to successful overview and scrutiny is adequate dedicated resourcing.

Finally, I must particularly thank all the Members of the City Council who take part in overview and scrutiny work. This relies on their dedication, skill and enthusiasm. In return it offers – and with the forthcoming developments, will increasingly offer – substantial opportunities to represent our constituents’ needs and views, and to improve their lives and prospects.



## 1. Who Are We?

Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committees were created to act as a check on executive power and to contribute to improvement by undertaking analysis of broad policy areas.

As in our two previous O&S Annual Reports, we want to try to give you a flavour of the work we have been doing by putting this in the context of the key issues facing the City Council.

Whilst we are structured in a traditional fashion, by operating through 10 Committees (as outlined below), we pride ourselves in the way we seek to work on a cross portfolio and thematic basis.

That is why we have organised this report around the City Council's strategic themes rather than talking about our work on a Committee basis. It is also why we have used the term "we" for the work we undertake.

*"The Council has good scrutiny processes in place... Scrutiny reports are detailed and informative."*

**Audit Commission Corporate Assessment Report, February 2007**

### Overview and Scrutiny Committees

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#### **Co-ordinating O&S Committee**

Chair: Cllr Alistair Dow  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr James Hutchings\*  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Ian Ward

#### **Adults and Communities O&S Committee**

Chairman: Cllr Len Clark  
Vice-Chair: Cllr Jim Whorwood  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Steve Bedser

#### **Children and Education O&S Committee**

Chair: Cllr Jon Hunt  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Reg Corns  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Jan Drinkwater

#### **Health O&S Committee**

Chairman: Cllr Deirdre Alden  
Vice-Chair: Cllr Zaker Choudhry  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Paulette Hamilton

#### **Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee**

Chair: Cllr Emily Cox  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr John Beadman  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr John Cotton

#### **Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee**

Chairman: Cllr John Alden  
Vice-Chair: Cllr Paula Smith  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Penny Holbrook

#### **Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee**

Chairman: Cllr Mark Hill  
Vice-Chair Cllr Robert Wright  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Zoe Hopkins

#### **Regeneration O&S Committee**

Chairman: Cllr Timothy Huxtable  
Vice-Chair: Cllr Jerry Evans  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Tahir Ali

#### **Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee**

Chair: Cllr Martin Mullaney  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Timothy Huxtable  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Kath Hartley

#### **Vulnerable Children O&S Committee**

Chairman: Cllr Keith Barton  
Vice-Chair: Cllr Jon Hunt  
Opposition Spokesperson: Cllr Jan Drinkwater

\*Also Chairman of the Human Resources and Equalities O&S Sub-Committee





*Alistair Dow*



*Len Clark*



*Jon Hunt*



*Deirdre Alden*



*Emily Cox*



*John Alden*



*Mark Hill*



*Timothy Huxtable*



*Martin Mullaney*



*Keith Barton*



*James Hutchings*



## 2. What We Do

Our role is both to help the Executive (i.e. the decision makers) in shaping policy through our Overview work and ensuring that decisions are taken on the basis of all available information through our Scrutiny work. We do this by taking evidence from interested parties.

This is a big responsibility and it is therefore very important that we work in close co-operation and partnership with other service providers, users and customers.

Overview and Scrutiny forms an important part of the City Council's "checks and balances" and provides one of the most important ways in which Councillors can pursue the interests of local people. Nine of our O&S Committees are closely aligned to Cabinet Member portfolios, whilst the Health O&S Committee concentrates on health issues and works very closely with the NHS.

Sharing the nature and outcome of our work is very important because whether you live, work, study or visit Birmingham, there is bound to be an area where your contribution to our work programme can help. As well as regularly updating our website with up to date and informative information, we place articles in a variety of Council publications such as *Birmingham Forward*.

On the following pages you will see some of our work and, in particular, how we seek to make a contribution to the Council Plan 2007 – 2010.

We have developed this in three ways:

- To outline some of the work we have been doing this calendar year;
- To show how we have been tracking previously agreed Scrutiny recommendations to ensure that they have been implemented (this also demonstrates how the tracking process itself has helped us to consolidate on work done previously); and
- To identify some work we have just started or are proposing to start and on which any views/contributions you have would be welcome.

*"To have the greatest impact, successful scrutiny must be based on evidence – in all its forms... Effective scrutineers hear that evidence, weigh it and reach a judgment to inform their recommendations."*

**Jessica Crowe, Executive Director for the Centre for Public Scrutiny**



### 3. Succeeding Economically: benefiting from education, training, jobs and investment

#### Raising Educational Attainment

We have continued to place a high emphasis on looking at initiatives for raising the performance of our children and young people and then monitoring their attainment by analysing the city's annual secondary **school examination results**.

During the year our priority has been to help to close the gap for groups at particular risk of underachieving. We have kept a particularly close eye on the attainment levels of African Caribbean boys and white working class boys by considering the benefits of a wide variety of initiatives in place in schools across the city. This goes hand in hand in with some other work we have been undertaking around **Birmingham Academies**.

**Birmingham Academies** are state schools specifically set up to take on the challenge of addressing poor educational performance in deprived areas of the city. They receive sponsorship from private businesses as well as funding from Central Government and it is proposed that 7 academies be developed in the city, in partnership with local businesses and community partners who will provide around £1.5m worth of investment. The Birmingham model is unique in the UK and this is why we have been heavily involved in how they are being developed to ensure that any arrangements made will secure the best possible outcomes for Birmingham pupils.

We are also undertaking an overview of **special education needs** to complement the development of the city's Strategy for Special Education.

One part of this exercise involved us undertaking a consultation exercise with parents and carers of children with special educational needs. Six public meetings took place across the city in June where we obtained the views and opinions of more than 300 parents. The events were organised in partnership with head teachers from the primary, secondary and special school sectors. We were also supported at each of the events by colleagues from the Parent Partnership Team, a semi independent body funded by the City Council.

Our findings were presented to Full Council in October and prompted an intense debate amongst Members. Our findings will now form a major contribution to the final strategy for the Council on special educational needs, expected to be concluded in 2008.

*"It was an instructive and humbling experience for members of the Scrutiny Review Group to meet so many parents face to face during June and hear their experiences of raising children with special needs.*

*We heard many stories of determination and frustration – as well as happier stories where children are doing well."*

**Councillor Jon Hunt, Chair of the Children and Education O&S Committee**





A video of the Council debate was made available via our website, a copy of which can be downloaded from [www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny).

Another vulnerable group we have focussed on is **Looked After Children**. Here we were able to question the type of educational support received and whether this was adequate enough to enable the children to reach their full educational potential.

We were pleased with the level of service provided by The Looked After Children Education Service and were also able to track a previous Scrutiny recommendation about the priority given by the schools admission policy.

We recognised that the attainment of looked after children educationally is fundamentally linked to their care provision and were able to visit a number of residential children's homes and speak to care staff about the support provided to children

and young people in respect of their school attendance, homework, parents' evening and the availability of IT. More about our work with residential children's homes can be found in Section 5 of this report.

Our work reviewing the **school admissions process** enabled us to establish the extent to which the current arrangements for all pupils in Birmingham provided the optimum placements for children, taking into consideration the availability of school places.

Our inquiry highlighted the need to ensure that the right arrangements were put in place to ensure a fair school admissions process. During our evidence gathering, we found that there needed to be communication improvements with parents. As a result, one of our recommendations was to ensure that the existing website available for parents was regularly maintained with up to date and relevant information.

Tracking our previous work has been an important element of our work here. We were able to consider the progress made in implementing the recommendations of an earlier review which looked at the **recruitment and retention of teachers**. The report, which went to Full Council in 2006, included a recommendation on recruiting more ethnic minority teachers and male teachers into the primary sector, where there is known to be a considerable shortfall.

We are pleased that progress is being made and that a number of initiatives had been implemented successfully, resulting in more teachers being recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds.

We also tracked a series of recommendations from our **youth services** review which looked at corporate policies and the framework for the delivery of youth work in Birmingham. Our recommendations were designed to increase the Youth Service's support in relation to partnership working and to develop a





targeted youth work support service. During this exercise we were pleased to note improvements to the quality of services provided as well as increased levels of effective working with our partners.

We will continue to take a keen interest in the **Young People's Parliament, building schools for the future/school place planning** and the development of an **Integrated Youth Service**.

### Tackling Congestion

An ongoing theme of work for us has been how the city addresses traffic congestion. Having an effective transport system is a critical part of the city's infrastructure, underpinning its growth. However the West Midlands have been experiencing a decline in bus use for some time. Our **building bus use report**, which went to Full Council in January 2007, provoked a significant level of public debate on the standard of bus services in the city. This debate took place in the local press and on TV and covered areas of public interest ranging from our attitudes to using buses; the standard of services and whether this is what people want and whether road pricing might realistically offer any solution to congestion in the city.

We tracked progress towards these recommendations in July 2007 and were pleased to find that many achievements had been made. For example:

- Discussions have started with partners on potential routes for Performance Improvement Partnerships (small, informal partnerships) to make visible improvements to bus services.
- The Council has lobbied the Government for more effective mechanisms to hold partners in delivering bus services more accountable.
- A Car Share Matching Service was launched in September 2007.
- Targets have been set for public transport use promotion schemes such as Travelwise.
- The Cycling Strategy is currently being consulted upon.





This review demonstrated partnership working at its best and involved consulting with Centro-WMPTA and Travel West Midlands.

This report complemented other work we have undertaken concerning **enforcing parking**, a report on which went to Full Council in April 2005.

Although sometime unpopular, effective parking enforcement is a necessary part of what the Council does because it ensures that Traffic Regulation Orders work as intended. One of the key recent outcomes following on from

this review is that the Council now has a Parking Board. This meets regularly to resolve issues around parking between our partners. Membership consists of the Cabinet Member, Council Officers, representatives from contractors and the Police. This recommendation was initially put forward based on a successful board that works for Westminster City Council.

The Council has a plan for managing traffic, which identifies priority points on the network which forms part of the traffic management plans for the city. Our review on **traffic management and control**, which went to Full Council in April 2006, contributed to the development of this plan.

Outcomes that have resulted include that the Traffic Manager is now formally involved in advising on traffic relating to all planning decisions. There is now also a clear agreement between the City Council and the Police on how we will work together on managing traffic in the city, particularly where incidents occur. Use of traffic CCTV has also been prioritised in the city and the Council is extending this by using existing CCTV cameras by working with the Community Safety Partnership.

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Because of our previous work around tracking traffic congestion we were able to contribute to the Council's overall response to the Government's Draft Local Transport Bill. And since the Bill predominantly covers improvements to bus transport, many of the proposed changes were structural changes that Members wanted to see as a result of the Building Bus Use Review.

We were also able to consider the impact of transport currently provided and purchased by the Adults and Community Services Directorate. Whilst it is important that accessible, reliable transport is essential for people to access both Council services and community well-being facilities, we are keen to hear how the issue of transport is being addressed corporately. We will shortly, therefore, be exploring whether the current transport arrangements could be improved.



## Supporting Jobs and Creating Employment

**Local centres** form the basis of economic vitality outside the city centre. Their importance within communities was of concern to us when we tracked the recommendations of our previous report, which was agreed at Full Council in April 2005. The review was initially carried out to ensure that local centres received an improved level of support.

Results include measures to improve car parking facilities at local centres now being a priority in the action plans for local centres under the Local Centres Development Strategy. These are now better integrated with capital works initiated by Highways to improve parking schemes. Additionally, Constituency Committees now have a closer involvement in reviewing priorities for local centres.

Small businesses provide employment opportunities in the city, but also form a key part of a diverse entrepreneurial sector. This is the key to our future growth, particularly in creative and technology-based industries. We have followed up on the recommendations of a previous review, which looked at how we could provide **support to small businesses**, which went to Full Council in 2006.

Some of the benefits include the Council creating a focal point for interactions with businesses. This now provides for a clearer remit for dealing with small business matters for the Council and provides a conduit through which communication can be channelled.

Advantage West Midlands have also demonstrated how they plan to improve access to business support in the West Midlands through Business Link. Additionally, ongoing discussions with the Birmingham Economic Development Partnership will shortly produce a 'route map' to assist small businesses when seeking support.

Persistent unemployment in certain areas of the city has been a feature of the local economy for some time. With reducing worklessness identified as a key priority for the Council, we will consider the **effectiveness of employment strategies** as part of our future work programme. It follows on from meetings undertaken last year with the Employment Strategy Group in considering how worklessness is currently being tackled.

We currently have concerns about how progress is being measured especially following the allocation of considerable levels of funding to deal with the problem. The proposed outcome of this piece of work is to consider how effective strategies to tackle worklessness have been and how the work of the Council and its partners can be better co-ordinated. The Review will include working with the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus to examine how partnerships can be improved.

*"Entrepreneurship is vital to Birmingham's local economy. Encouraging entrepreneurs, particularly throughout all deprived areas of the city, is one of the ways that we can tackle deprivation and get people into work. This task is not just for the Council but for our partners, such as Advantage West Midlands and Business Link."*

**Councillor Mark Hill, Chairman of the Regeneration O&S Committee 2006 – 2007**





Economic development underpins the city's ability to attract and retain businesses. **The Local Development Frameworks**, known as the LDFs, has replaced Unitary Development Plans. It is a three-year project to replace the key policy framework for planning and development in the city. Rather than (as was previously done) examine the whole plan in one process, this is now done on a modular basis. We have agreed aspects of the LDF we wish to examine in detail and provide feedback as they develop. We have included these on our future work programme.

The key outcome is that our views will be included at an early stage in the development of the policy framework documents.

**Regeneration in the South West of the City** is an emerging picture, which has been given greater priority by the Council following the collapse of MG Rover. The approach to regeneration taken here is substantially different to 'area-based' regeneration that has taken place in the city so far. It is not driven by the availability of Government funding and is based on the Council setting a vision and developing its potential. This overview provides an opportunity for us to contribute to the developing vision.

The South West of Birmingham has potential to provide economic benefits to the city as a whole. We are therefore examining the extent to which the Council has set a clear vision for regeneration in this part of the city. It will also involve close working with a number of key partners, including developers, Centro-WMPTA, South Birmingham PCT, private housing partners and the Learning and Skills Council.

The City Council has developed proposals to increase the city's population by up to 100,000 over the next 20 years. These proposals seek to secure sustainable population and economic growth over the long-term to improve the quality of life of citizens and deliver a long term vision for the future prosperity of Birmingham.

The success of this growth agenda is a high priority for the City Council and the Birmingham Strategic Partnership and for this reason we are currently engaged in a review of the **Birmingham Growth Agenda**.

This review aims to ensure that the policy is comprehensive, coherent and well-founded and that projects are well-designed and correctly implemented. Outcomes expected from conducting this work will include:

- Recommendations aimed at filling any gaps there may be in the Growth Agenda.
- To produce interim reports before important decisions are made e.g. the identification of three urban centres within the city and options and models for using City Council land as property assets to drive regeneration.
- Recommendations aimed at using the Growth Agenda to make Birmingham more attractive to the existing population as well as to new growth.
- Recommendations aimed at using the Growth Agenda to promote community cohesion.

*"Our Birmingham Growth Agenda review will help the Council to identify what its priorities should be in meeting the needs of the city's population up to the year 2050.*

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





## 4. Staying Safe: living in clean, green and safe communities



### Cleaner and Greener Communities

We have made improving recycling and increasing recycling rates a consistent theme of our work for some years. Our last major review was in 2006, but when we tracked its progress in 2007 we saw considerable improvement. The review had given impetus to plans to extend **kerbside recycling services**, which started to be rolled out across the city from April 2006. As a result the City Council exceeded its target of 20% recycling and composting in 2006/7, also meeting its statutory performance standard a year earlier than required.

We followed this up this year by considering the evidence on the options available for containers for collecting residual domestic waste and recycling and how use of these might increase **recycling**. We looked at the different methods and compared them on the basis of cost, efficiency and volume of waste collected. The advantages and drawbacks of different collection methods were also compared with best practice along with the satisfaction levels of services provided across the country.

During this review we gathered information from other core cities (e.g. Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle), West Midlands Authorities and authorities in Greater Manchester to compare methods of collecting waste in Birmingham by different methods with those authorities.



Our findings will enable Constituencies to consider what the best options are for containers for recycling in their areas. However, not all our Members agreed that this was the best way forward, and for the first time in over four years a Minority Report will be presented to the City Council.

### Safer Communities

In 2006 we produced a report on **anti-social behaviour** and how it is being tackled in Birmingham. This requires a group of public services – including the City Council, the Police, Fire and Probation services – to work together. Our report also looked at the experience of people who report anti-social behaviour and how this could be improved.

So this year we have looked at how our report has been implemented. The Community Safety Partnership has now agreed an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy which helps them work together better. Clear standards are now in place to deal with reports of anti-social behaviour, including response times and when to provide feedback to complainants.

We have also continued to keep a close eye on crime figures, to test whether Birmingham's targets for crime reduction – set by the Government – are being met.

A different aspect of safety, affecting fewer individuals but of great importance is to make sure that children and young people are kept safe from abuse or neglect. This is the job of the **Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board**, set up in 2006, which brings together organisations which have a responsibility for services to children or have regular contact with children. They can then agree how best to co-operate to safeguard these children.

We have recently looked at how the Board has been operating and plan to monitor its work in relation to serious case reviews, missing children and child deaths.

We will also be looking at a similar arrangement to protect vulnerable adults, a topic we have not previously looked at. A key area for the City Council is to improve its services to protect vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect and poor standards of care. A Safeguarding Adults Board was established in June 2007. It is a city-wide, multi-agency board which is made up from partners from key agencies operating in the city. We will be considering how best Scrutiny can help to bring about improvements in these services.

More often in the public eye is the issue of **domestic violence**, the need to help victims/survivors and prevent the violence in the first place. During 2006 the City Council and partners launched the Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy. We are going to investigate how the City Council is playing its part in this agreed approach, and assess what progress is being made. Our work will focus on the impact

*"By 'partnership working' we do not mean the City Council deciding something and expecting partners to agree to it. We mean partners working together, pooling knowledge and resources, and jointly deciding the best course of action."*

**Councillor Timothy Huxtable, Chairman of the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee 2006 – 2007**



on victims/survivors and of those related to them, particularly children. We are also looking at how the change in the way the police refer domestic abuse to the Children's Duty and Assessment Teams may have contributed to a 40% increase in the number of referrals to the service. We will also look at the use of civil orders in Birmingham. Our concluding report will be presented to Full Council in April 2008.



We also look at other ways of improving the cleanliness of areas. The arguments for having **environmental wardens** to support the Clean and Green agenda in neighbourhoods were re-visited after our Scrutiny Review of 2006. We welcomed the full evaluation of the warden schemes that had been completed. A recommendation from that Review had asked for a full assessment of the impact and performance of Environmental Wardens, and this was reported to the Public Protection Committee in September 2007.

The evaluation showed 86% of members of the public surveyed thought that wardens had helped to improve their local neighbourhood. Furthermore, 81% stated that the wardens had helped them to use Council services better than before. Partners and Elected Members were also very positive about them. The survey results demonstrate a significant desire by respondents to retain the Environmental Warden service and continue the excellent work which they are undertaking in

local communities. This is now a key matter for the Council as the specific Government funding comes to an end in 2008. We will continue to keep a close eye on this issue.

Next we will be looking at another activity which can affect the appearance of the street scene, namely, **graffiti**. This is a crime if done without permission and its presence can make areas appear intimidating and deprived.

We are investigating the best mix of ways to contain graffiti. Suggestions have included trialling graffiti walls and closer working with partners such as Travel West Midlands to remove problematic graffiti and tagging effectively. As is often the case, we want to ensure that Council services work better together in tackling the problem. In our work we will involve the Police and others who can work with the City Council to tackle graffiti crime. We will also be meeting with those who carry out graffiti and former taggers to find out why they do it and what the City Council can do to deter tagging.

*"It is important that the City Council and its partners are working effectively together to both remove graffiti quickly and take enforcement action against the perpetrators."*

**Councillor Martin Mullaney, Chairman of the Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee**





## 5. Being Healthy: enjoying long and healthy lives

### Addressing Health Inequalities

One of the key drivers of the City Council's priority around being healthy is the need to reduce health inequalities within the city. It is our role to help shape the agenda around health inequalities through challenging work undertaken to increase services to the most marginalised communities in Birmingham. This work runs across all Committees as the determinants of health are wider than merely those services provided by the NHS.

The primary vehicle for delivering a reduction of health inequalities in Birmingham is the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing partnership team that has been created under the Local Area Agreement. The Local Area Agreement has created very specific action plans around such inequalities as male life expectancy and infant mortality. We have regularly assessed progress against these action plans to ensure that commitments made by partner organisations result in an actual reduction in inequalities.

In this section you will see how we have addressed health inequalities in many aspects of our work. For example, during our work around looked after children, whilst undertaking visits to children's homes, Members made it a priority for the well being of children to ensure that the children they met were registered with GPs and dentists. More around the specific needs of children, adults and families is explained in detail on the following pages.

### Children

In 2005, a Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) recommended that "services for children with disabilities required priority attention and development with key partners..." This comment prompted the Children, Young People and Families Directorate to commission a review into services for disabled children and young people. As a result of this review, an **Integrated Strategy for Disabled Children and Young People** was produced.

This strategy covers key elements relating to the needs of our most vulnerable children i.e. their transition from childhood to adult services, streamlining referral and assessment processes, developing a comprehensive database of needs, commissioning and service design and developing an appropriately skilled, qualified and trained workforce.

**The transition arrangements** for disabled children moving to adult services is an issue that is in need of urgent improvement. We will jointly be doing some work around this, especially following the Social Care Directorate splitting its Children's and Adult's functions. We recognised that failure to embed effective models and processes in transition will result in poor planning, lack of provision and poorer outcomes for disabled young people. For this reason we will be considering the draft strategy for transition in February







2008 where we will be able to contribute to its content and action plan and will consider whether this issue should be included for further review on next year's work programme.

It is important for us to ensure that these arrangements provide a streamlined service for all individuals affected, especially as this was one of the areas of concern highlighted in the **Joint Area Review (JAR)** external inspection report of February 2007, which looked at **children's services**. The JAR sets out those areas that the inspectorate felt needed further development and improvement and we were able to adjust our work programme in response to these areas of concern identified by the inspectors in generally a very positive report.

We were also able to respond to the new White Paper, **Care Matters: Time for Change**, which was published earlier this year. It sets out the steps that the Government will take with local delivery partners to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. The white paper focuses on corporate parenting; family and parenting support; the quality of placements; education, health and well-being; transition to adulthood and the role of the practitioner.

All of these key areas have been included in our work and we have been working to ensure that we, as a Council, can meet our obligations in this important area of service delivery. We will be carefully monitoring progress of the Children in Care Bill and keeping a close eye on the resulting financial and service implications.

Whilst scrutinising the performance of children's social workers concerns were raised about the Directorate not meeting some of its performance targets. One of the reasons identified was a shortage of frontline experienced children's social workers. Members were concerned that this shortage would impact on social work teams and their ability to deal with increasing levels of referrals resulting in additional pressure on existing staff.

*"Regarding children's Social Workers... It is important that we assess our recruitment and retention practices to establish whether there are any specific areas that we can address.*

*My committee will be linking closely with the Children, Young People and Families Directorate on this issue to ensure that together we can work towards bucking the national trend."*

**Councillor Keith Barton, Chairman of the Vulnerable Children O&S Committee**

Whilst acknowledging that there is a national shortage of social workers, it was felt that Birmingham needed to think of innovative new ways of attracting newly qualified and experienced workers, especially given the competition from neighbouring Local Authorities. We have been reviewing the efforts being taken by the Directorate to recruit and retain staff and were pleased with the number of innovative steps taken to fill vacancies. We will actively monitor this situation and have included the **recruitment and retention of children's social workers** as an important element of our work programme up to the end of the municipal year.

We previously mentioned our work around the **children's residential estates and children's homes** in Section 3 of the report. This piece of work arose as a result of our discussions around a report which



highlighted that £10 million had been made available for the expansion and refurbishment of children's homes. We wanted to ensure that this money was effectively spent and went about questioning whether it was more appropriate to expand the current internal residential estates or to procure residential placements from the independent sector. One of the fundamental issues we identified was that there had been no needs analysis undertaken nor had any detailed revenue costs been produced. We had real concerns about this and as a result of our involvement, an in-depth review was carried out. This included a needs analysis of the residential population; the cost of building and running children's homes; the potential for contracting services with the independent sector and a comparison of children's views of the service in the independent and internal sectors.

This piece of work also prompted us into carrying out a series of visits to internal and independent children's homes where we were able to identify concerns about some of the practices in place. For example, we were not happy that young people in the homes were not allowed to use any kitchen facilities or make themselves drinks or snacks. As a result of our intervention, the Directorate and Regulatory Services have worked together to produce a protocol to be used in every children's home to assist staff in supporting and encouraging young people to prepare drinks and snacks. This is an incredibly important protocol as we need to ensure that young people are adequately prepared for independent living.

Whilst undertaking these visits we were also able to review our obligations as a City Council. Visiting children's homes is a statutory requirement for Elected Members in their capacity as Corporate Parents. In 2004, recommendation 41 of the Lord Laming Report into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, stated that Councillors should regularly visit their children's services and report their findings accordingly.

We have therefore been monitoring the number of **Elected Member visits to children's homes and duty and assessment teams**. Members are unable to undertake these visits without first having a successful Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. If they are not CRB checked they are unable to undertake these visits and this impacts on the Council's ability to carry out the required number of visits. We have been able to assist the process by looking at ways of reducing delays. We have also been pro-active in raising performance by undertaking additional visits to children's homes and duty and assessment teams.

During these visits we noticed that there was a significant number of **unaccompanied asylum seeking children** in children's homes and were just as surprised to find that they formed around 6% of all Looked After Children in the city. These findings prompted us to consider their legal position, the financial cost to the City Council, the legislation that applies to them and the support services available to this vulnerable group.

We will continue to monitor the situation throughout the year and have already started to receive regular updates, where we will shortly be considering the work in place between various Local Authorities to address some of the concerns about meeting their needs. We will also keep an eye on the cost implications to the City Council by monitoring quarterly financial reports as this is an area where there is considerable budget pressure.

**Foster care** touched many areas of our work programme during the year, especially when considering the number of Looked After Children in the city and how this should be addressed. Foster care will



therefore be the focus of a forthcoming piece of work for us. Additionally, foster care has recently undergone two inspections and we are keen to scrutinise any areas of concern that have been highlighted in the final inspection reports. Our work around this will also enable us to explore in more detail our longstanding interest in kinship care i.e. care provided by family and friends.

We also plan to do some work around the **Adoption Service**. This service has also recently been inspected and we will be considering the outcome of this Inspection in January 2008 when we will be able to consider any areas of concern that may warrant our involvement.

We have identified that the current looked after population is growing and there is increasing pressure in respect of budgets and the ability to respond to demand. We therefore plan to consider how preventative services, including **targeted family support**, impact on the work of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate.

What children eat affects their health and well-being well into adulthood. A majority of what they eat during the week is consumed during the school day and it is therefore important that pupils have a choice of healthy, nutritious meals available to them.

We were involved in healthy **school meals** well before celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver! We carried out a review of Childhood Obesity in 2005. Since this time we have been carefully monitoring progress towards our recommendations and in particular took a keen interest in monitoring the level of school meal take up across the city, especially following the introduction of new school menus. We want to see an increase in the number of children having school meals and agree that more needs to be undertaken to educate children into making healthy food choices.

## Adults

We have been working jointly with the Adults and Communities Directorate on a variety of service improvements. This has resulted in us overseeing the development and implementation of their Business Plan. We have paid a particular focus on the services affecting vulnerable adults such as those with learning and physical disabilities and older people.

We completed two reviews on **day services** in 2006. The first looked at the provision of services for adults, whilst the other looked specifically at mental health services. During these pieces of work we were able to assess the current level of provision and come up with challenging recommendations where we felt change was urgently required. Our involvement led to some challenging recommendations on how things could be run better which prompted the Directorate into taking the necessary steps towards service improvements, such as the need for them to modernise their day services and develop their community services across the city. This in turn has presented more creative







thinking about the ways in which community and voluntary organisations are engaged in the provision of alternatives to traditional day services. We are carefully tracking progress.

We have also been involved in discussions about the implications of **decommissioning older peoples' homes** that have day services attached to them. This is a very challenging agenda as we recognise that any changes could result in challenges from users and carers and have therefore kept a close eye on the consultation process. It also involved us undertaking visits to new Care Centres at various stages in their development. Care Centres provide important alternatives to residential care, day services and respite services.

Information submitted to the Department of Health in 2006 identified a deterioration in performance in enabling older people to live at home. **Home care** services are a vital service for maintaining people's ability to live independently. Scrutinising home care services was therefore a natural progression for us as we had already spent a considerable length of time considering the re-provision of residential homes and the modernisation of day services. During the past year this piece of work has involved us carrying out interviews with external/independent providers of home care; receiving evidence from Leeds City Council who are an exemplar of good practice in relation to Social Enterprises and talking to focus groups of service users, carers and voluntary organisations. Our concluding report will go to Full Council in 2008.

*"One of our main priorities this year is to ensure that vulnerable people are supported in having a quality life in their own homes.*

*This can only be achieved by having a flexible service that meets the needs of users and carers."*

**Councillor Len Clark, Chairman of the Children, Young People and Families O&S Committee**



### Promoting Independence



We have been scrutinising the provision of **equipment and adaptations** over a number of years as this service assists people to live more independently at home and we, as a result, have been able to contribute to the development of the **Independent Living Service Improvement Plan**.

We had initially raised concerns about performance, particularly in the area of major adaptations. One of the key concerns was the length of time that some people had to remain on the waiting list before work was carried out.





In June 2007 we received evidence that sustained levels of demand had created a backlog of over 2,900 cases. We were able to monitor the impact of changes introduced to tackle this backlog by considering the outcome of a new assessment process for service users; receiving information on a strategy for handling requests from individuals and considering how referrals under the new Priority Needs Assessment for Housing Assistance would be dealt with. We will continue to monitor performance throughout the year with a further report on progress planned in March 2008.

We also carried out a review of a **Partnership Agreement** which was set up to ensure there are effective arrangements in place between the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust and the City Council. We were able to assess how well these arrangements were working. The Partnership Agreement was originally signed in October 2003 in order to establish integrated management arrangements and affects many essential



services such as day services, residential accommodation and home support. We found that the agreement was no longer fit for purpose and our involvement meant that we were able to identify areas which needed to be addressed in a new partnership agreement which will be introduced in March 2008. We will continue to monitor the new agreement as part of our ongoing work programme to ensure that sufficient levels of services are maintained.

Sport and physical activities are seen as major contributors towards achieving healthy lifestyles. We have been considering the impact of Localisation and Devolution on **sports development** in the city.

We are currently examining the new management and financial structures in place in Constituencies to make sure that they promote increased participation rates. We also want to encourage the strategic umbrella for sports development, provided by the emerging Birmingham Sports and Physical Activity Partnership, in order to promote effective working with key partners in the city.

This review involves close working with the Sports Council, who want to bring together the major partners in the city concerned with sports development, such as schools, higher education facilities, sports clubs and the sporting governing bodies. Our concluding report will go to Full Council next year.



## Health

We have a statutory obligation each year to respond to the **Health Care Commission** on a range of health care matters affecting Birmingham citizens and last year made a submission on behalf of the City Council stating how each Trust had performed against the set national standards.



Additionally, we considered presentations from each Primary Care Trust (PCT) regarding the implementation of the new **dental contract**. This provided an opportunity for us to contrast the different approaches in implementing the contract and gave us a chance to comment based on our experiences in individual wards.

We also considered proposals for the re-provision of out of hours **GP services** in South Birmingham. As a result of our concerns we requested that the PCT alter their plans. Our intervention meant that the PCT agreed to maintain an out of hours presence in Selly Oak, as well as providing additional services at the Badger Centre in Steelhouse Lane.

Over the coming year we will be carrying out a review into the **health needs of newly migrant communities** i.e. asylum seekers/refugees, economic migrant groups and people with no recourse to public funds. This review will look at how health bodies address the specific health needs of these new communities and will also consider the wider determinants of health relating to Council provision and the services provided by the voluntary and community sectors. As part of this review we will be holding focus groups with newly migrant communities to consider their views.

The review arose from a process of stakeholder engagement in order to identify key themes resulting in a stakeholder conference in July 2007. This process involved representatives from the NHS, patient groups, the voluntary sector and Council Officers, where a number of other possible review topics were considered. These included sexual health, dementia, palliative care and the alcohol strategy.

*"The United Kingdom is a country with a rich heritage of welcoming people from abroad. It is important that those who fall between the gaps of normal service provision do not become destitute.*

*Clearly the Council and NHS need to work within the same definition of what is regarded a pressing medical emergency and create a more flexible service that meets the needs of Birmingham's entire population."*

**Councillor Deirdre Alden, Chairman of the Health O&S Committee**





## Health Consultations

Last year, we responded to 12 major health consultations by National Health Service (NHS) organisations. These have included consultations which have varied in topic and required different methods of engagement with users and health partners. For example, when we considered a proposal for the **Heart of England Foundation Trust to Absorb Good Hope Hospital**, we held an evidence gathering session with members of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Health O&S Committee. The session itself took place at Sutton Coldfield Town Hall and provided an opportunity for the public to express their views to us on the proposals. In light of the issues raised by both patients and public, we gave cautious support for the proposals, dependent on the reassurance that services at Good Hope Hospital would be retained.

We also looked at the proposal to reorganise the services provided to children with severe psychological illnesses at Birmingham Children's Hospital, known as the **Tier 4 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHs) Consultation**. After considering the proposals we unanimously opposed the plans and prompted an independent review of both the service provision and the way that the service is commissioned. The results of this review have been used to create a long term plan for the service which we will continue to monitor in the future

Another area of work focussed on was the **Towards 2010 and Interim Reconfigurations Consultations**. Towards 2010 is a long term partnership project between the City Council and the health service to







develop a new hospital for Birmingham and Sandwell and to provide more community based medical services. However because a new hospital would not be built for some time both hospitals had to look at new ways of changing the way it delivers its services in preparation for the future. This led to us looking at the Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals Interim Reconfiguration proposals, called **Shaping Hospital Services for the Future**. This was a very important area of work for us as we recognise that these proposals contain long term plans aimed at improving services in hospitals and within communities that enhance the health of all citizens.

We considered evidence at a Joint meeting between Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Council and gave our response ensuring that the views of the public were taken into account. As a result, we then referred to the then Secretary of State, the Rt. Hon.

Patricia Hewitt, the proposals to move the emergency surgery provision from City Hospital on Dudley Road to Sandwell Hospital. We felt that this decision was not in the interests of patients and would have a detrimental effect on one of the most deprived communities in our city. Our involvement has prompted the Secretary of State to call for an independent review to be undertaken. At the present time the review is still in progress with a decision anticipated in January 2008.

We will continue to prioritise the health care provided to the citizens of Birmingham and to do this will respond to a series of health consultations programmed for the current year. These include:

- Birmingham East and North PCT proposed changes to end of life care;
- Birmingham East and North PCT proposed changes to intermediate care;
- South Birmingham PCTs changes to ophthalmology;
- Birmingham City Council's proposed changes to Mental Health Day Services;
- The Department of Health Consultation on the proposed regulations for Local Involvement Networks called LINKS. LINKS is a new public engagement process to engage the views of the public and patients in health and social care service.



## 6. Enjoying a Quality of Life: benefiting from good housing and renowned culture and leisure opportunities

### Decent Homes

The City Council together with its partners on the City Housing Partnership has developed a **Decent Homes Floor Target Action Plan** aimed at ensuring that its citizens are able to live in good quality, affordable housing. We have kept a close eye on progress to ensure that the Government's targets for decent homes will be met by 2010. The plan involves us looking at housing across all sectors, where we have been rigorously monitoring performance.

In addition we have been actively involved in working with the Housing and Constituencies Directorate to assist in shaping some early thinking on **policy developments** in a number of key areas. These have included the Allocations Policy, Empty Properties Strategy, Independent Living Service Improvement Plan and Business Transformation.

This year our work has had a strong focus on all aspects of service performance and we have closely monitored progress with the **Housing Services 3 Star Action Plan**. The aim of this is to assist and support the service in achieving its ambition to become a three star housing service and a recognised national centre of excellence. Each division has conducted an assessment of performance and identified service and performance gaps which need to be addressed in order to achieve a 3 star service. Each has developed a plan along with key actions which are regularly monitored by a monthly management team called the Three Star Chamber. We have sought to play a key role in overseeing the process and have been monitoring progress on a regular basis thereby ensuring that plans are kept on track. We have also considered detailed monthly monitoring information on the repairs contractors in order to keep track of performance.

We completed a review into **homelessness** in 2006. During the tracking process this year, we welcomed the progress being made to improve services via the roll out across the city of the Home Options Scheme. Recommendations made to support further improvements included:

- The need to continuously improve cross departmental communications and dialogue and strengthen partnership working;
- Updating the Homelessness strategy and linking this with the review of the allocations bandings system to ensure that the appropriate risk assessments of the impact of any changes on homelessness and social exclusion are undertaken;
- That more staff training is undertaken, more user friendly information is made available to customers and all efforts are made to learn more from service users.

*"Housing provision is one of the most important services that the Council delivers. It really is the linchpin of society. Without good standards of housing your health can suffer, children can find it difficult to access education and families can be broken. In short, it can lead to a spiral of deprivation affecting all areas of life."*

**Councillor Emily Cox, Chair of the Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee**



Our strand of work around **promoting partnerships** has included:

- Work to monitor and scrutinise the activities of the City Housing Partnership (CHP). The CHP is a consultative group of housing and other stakeholders.
- Considering regular reports on progress on the Urban Living Pathfinder. This is a Housing Market Renewal Partnership between Birmingham and Sandwell aimed at addressing weakened housing market conditions in North West Birmingham and Smethwick/West Bromwich.
- Learning more directly from the voluntary sector and other housing providers. This has involved us meeting with specific voluntary organisations such as Fireside and St Basils to gain a greater understanding of their work.

We have almost completed some work reviewing our **leaseholder services**. The City Council currently provides services to 4300 leaseholders who acquired their properties under the right to buy scheme. As a result of the improvements carried out under the Decent Homes Strategy many leaseholders have recently been faced with significant service charge bills and concerns about these have been raised with Members.

This review has enabled us to look in detail at the calculation and collection processes for service charges, the management costs, our policies around window replacements and the wider services available from the City Council for its leaseholders. This work will enable us to identify both areas of good practice and areas for improvement to ensure that our leaseholders have a level of service with which they are satisfied. Our findings will be presented to Full Council in January 2008.

We are keen to have some work carried out next year focussing on our stock of Council owned **garages** and how they are currently being managed and utilised. We plan to contribute to discussions about what actions are needed for their future, particularly in areas where there is low levels of demand and where they are falling into disrepair or attracting anti-social behaviour.

We also plan to do a joint review with the Adults and Communities Directorate and the Housing and Constituencies Directorate to look into the **housing provision for older people**. This review will involve us exploring how effectively the two Directorates are working in partnership to develop and deliver a range of housing options and support services for older people. This is a crucial area of work given the need to develop alternatives to residential care. Developing appropriate housing related support is essential if older people are to be encouraged and supported to be independent.







## Leisure and Culture

We want to better understand how **community arts** are managed in the Constituencies following Devolution and Localisation. The intention is to share with them the results of a questionnaire survey and prepare an issues paper in order to develop suggested actions for the Cabinet Member. The survey focuses on the activities currently in place and considers what action the City Council should take to develop arts activities in the future.

We know the importance of getting our tendering processes right as this ensures that we get value for money. For this reason we

evaluated the City Council's arrangements for the **grounds maintenance contract** for grass cutting and weed control. When reviewing our existing processes one of our prime concerns was to seek assurances that consultations with local people would take place in respect of any new contracts.

Our involvement has led to a series of suggested actions relating to managing the contract renewal process including listening to customers, responding to climate change and promoting a local workforce. An update on progress is expected in January 2008.

We also certainly get involved in some interesting topics. Local residents brought to our attention the problem of **Japanese Knotweed**. Whilst this may not be an item you see very often on a Committee agenda it was a matter of serious concern for us. Officers undertook trials to control this weed, as a result of complaints that it was causing an increasing nuisance in open spaces across the city. The trials involved the use of different types of weed killer. We considered the results of the trials in September 2007 following national concerns over the spread of this invasive weed and received the views of a member of

*"Birmingham is a culturally diverse city and it is an important function of Scrutiny to ensure that this is reflected in our provision."*

**Councillor John Alden, Chairman of the Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee**

the public, who presented her case requesting that the City Council intervene in her local area. As a result, the Cabinet Member has been updated on our findings and it has been suggested that the impact of the resource implication needs to be taken into account when the City Council prepares and awards the new grounds maintenance contracts in the future.





As part of our long term interest in the **resources available for leisure in the Constituencies**, we have looked at the levels of local involvement in Section 106 Agreements, which are planning gains arising from developments. These can provide important sources of funding for local initiatives.

We initially had concerns about the apparent lack of Section 106 consultation processes in our wards and constituencies. Although our previous work on this had resulted in the introduction of six monthly reports from Planning to Constituency Directors, we were still concerned about local variations in the Member consultation process and wanted to make sure that Section 106's were used to enhance local priorities and to find out what discretion was available to Elected Members.



This involved us undertaking research into neighbouring and Core Cities arrangements to compare processes and resulted in a report to Committee in December 2006 suggesting improvements to the consultation process, that Constituency Investment Plans be prepared and that information be circulated to Members in the form of a briefing pack.

The future direction of our **community library service** including strategy, performance and resources, will shortly be reviewed by us. The aim of this Overview is to come up with suggestions on how to improve this service within Constituencies. To do this we will shortly be receiving a

series of presentations on the current issues facing the service. The topics for discussion will initially look at the strategic direction, the performance framework and resources including buildings, books, computers, staffing and opening hours.

Another area on our future work programme is a series of reports from Elected Members who are also representatives on the boards of various arts organisations in the city, such as the CBSO. Councillors are appointed onto these **arts boards** and whilst their primary role is to act in the interests of the Board, from time to time it is useful for Members to report back on the progress of the organisation concerned and the way in which the funding from the City Council is being invested.



## 7. Making a Contribution: valuing one another and playing an active part in the community

### Community Call for Action

The Government has legislated to introduce a “**community call for action**,” the basic idea of which is to strengthen the ability of local Councillors to improve services and living conditions in their wards. It means that if a Councillor is meeting obstacles in improving matters on behalf of his/her constituent, under this new legislation they will be able to refer the matter to the relevant O&S Committee who would then decide whether or not to investigate the matter further.

If the Committee carries out an investigation and produces a report or recommendations, the Executive and any partners involved would be obliged to “have regard” to these recommendations.

We are leading on some exploratory work on this to establish what information and processes are needed to introduce this mechanism successfully in Birmingham. This involves working with our partners to ensure a common understanding of the new powers. Discussions so far have focused on:

- Designing a “gateway” or process which would act as a “filter” before matters are escalated to us;
- Whether it would be sensible to pilot the process before the Community Call for Action is brought in by law.

Through this work we have already improved both our own and our partners’ understanding of how the Community Call for Action could work. Although the Government has decided to delay its implementation, pending a review, we are continuing our discussions to see if a workable system could be introduced voluntarily in Birmingham.

### Community Use of City Council Property

The City Council has been approached by the Government to take part in a set of demonstration projects to test proposals for the innovative use of public assets by voluntary and community organisations, including possible transfer of ownership. This chimed with our own interest in taking a fresh look at the protocol, initially drawn up in 1986, through which the City Council governs its own sales or lettings of property to such third sector bodies.

We are overseeing the three demonstration projects, with the aim of testing whether, and in what circumstances, a different approach to the third sector could significantly improve public services and provide increased value for money. This work should conclude in the recommendation of a new protocol to the Executive in April 2008.

### Devolution and Localisation

In last year’s annual report we described the work involved in evaluating the City Council’s policy of devolving some decision-making to local Councillors and of managing some services from a local level rather than from headquarters in the city centre. The Executive responded to this review by producing an action plan for improvement.





During the past year our role has switched to one of tracking the implementation of the various recommendations. Progress has been made, and there continues to be a variety of good practice across the different constituencies. On the other hand, the management arrangements have been under review since the departure of the Strategic Director of Local Services at the end of March 2007. Our current assessment is that the devolution and localisation policy is still not living up to its promise. We remain



anxious to see hard evidence of real and appropriate differences in priorities and planned service variations in Birmingham's different localities.

### **Involving Young People**

Building up on the precedent we have already set, we have continued to try and enhance the role of young

people on the Committee. This year we have had two new co-opted members from the UK Youth Parliament joining the Committee. We have also introduced a standing agenda item on "youth issues" at each Committee meeting to enable the young people present to raise any issues and concerns they may have. This has led to many lively debates with both the members and young people sharing their views on a range of interesting topics.

These young people have also been encouraged to suggest ideas for future pieces of work. As a direct result of these discussions the Committee will be carrying out a review on the **education on relationships and sexual health** and the Governor Support Unit will be reporting back on issues around young people and school governing bodies. This will be a particularly innovative piece of work with a young person serving as the joint chair of the review.



## 8. Raising Our Game: Improving what we do and how we do it

### Value for Money and Business Transformation

One of our main priorities for several years now has been to strengthen the City Council's search for improving Value for Money. We do this both by working on a broad canvas, across the whole Council, and by looking at individual services.

Last year we carried out a review of **Urban Design**, the City Council's in-house provider of professional services relating to design, construction and maintenance. When we tracked the outcomes from this review in 2007 we were pleased that many improvements had been made. Urban Design has now been restructured to focus on project management rather than professional disciplines. This means that there are now multi-disciplinary project teams leading to improved arrangements, able to manage projects as a single entity. Additionally, the fees charged by Urban Design are now much clearer.

Initial steps have been taken to consider both the legal principles of how Urban Design might either operate more independently of the City Council and how it can be given greater flexibility within the control of the City Council.

On a broader front, in 2007 we have continued our overview of the City Council's **Business Transformation** programme. Over ten years this programme aims to:

- Improve services;
- Give staff more fulfilling jobs;
- Increase efficiency.

These changes will affect, directly or indirectly, every member of staff. Whilst the programme costs are substantial, these are expected to be outweighed by savings, which are currently expected to total over £820m over ten years.

The programme consists of 9 work streams which are:

- Corporate Services (such as financial administration and business planning);
- Customer First (improving customer services right across the City Council);
- Working for the Future (dealing with City Council property);
- Excellence in People Management;
- Excellence in Information Management;
- Adult Services;
- Environment;
- Children's and Young People's Services;
- Housing.

Our work involves detailed questioning around costs as they arise and keeping up the pressure to deliver the right benefits. Recently senior Scrutiny Members have joined the Programme Boards for each of the nine work streams to enable Members' concerns and suggestions to be taken up early on in the process.



It is difficult to overstate the importance of Business Transformation on the future of Council services. It is indeed a programme at the cornerstone of a campaign to improve the quality of services, which all Elected Members and members of the public want to see.

When we started our overview work in 2006, we were specifically asked to consider whether the pace of change was quick enough. The first real changes are only now becoming apparent, with the recent introduction of new back-office financial systems under Corporate Services Transformation. Aspects of the Customer First and Working for the Future work streams are also fairly well advanced. Recently business cases for several other elements have started to come forward although we must record our disappointment that the Environment programme has made such little headway.

We have discovered that the day to day and month by month project management of Business Transformation is extremely detailed and precise. We were concerned that by concentrating on just the bigger picture, the smaller, detail would be ignored. It has been extremely difficult to obtain a consistent up to date account of expected savings across the programme as a whole. Similarly, we felt that the service and process changes which people will actually experience have to date been insufficiently communicated. However, we will continue to oversee the process and will play our part in putting this right as we continue our work in the year ahead.

With our work around the **Customer First Business Transformation Programme**, looking to improve the experiences of our customers by improving services across the Council over the next few years, we took the opportunity to investigate **Neighbourhood Offices** in more detail.

We took evidence about what other big cities offer in terms of face to face contact with customers. We found that a crucial difference between the Neighbourhood Office service in Birmingham and that provided by most other Local Authorities is that Birmingham's Neighbourhood Offices are not simply a referral service. Officers are able to deal with a range of queries as well as process benefit claims and deal with homelessness issues.

As part of the review, we visited a number of Neighbourhood Offices and both customers and staff were consulted. We asked for feedback from customers to supplement views from the annual survey, which confirmed that Neighbourhood Offices are positively viewed by customers.



We put forward a number of recommendations to feed into the design stage of Customer First, to ensure that the good work done by Neighbourhood Offices is not lost whilst improvements are made. Those improvements need to focus on accessibility of services and ensuring that Neighbourhood Offices have a clear role within the overall framework of customer services across the Council. It was clear to us that they do a lot of good work, but that the City Council needs to understand their role in a changing world better. In the shorter term, Business Transformation forms one part of the City Council's overall **efficiency**





**programme** – the process whereby the City Council bears down on its costs so that money can be used more productively. In the current year, the City Council is aiming to find some £66m of savings, £28m through Business transformation, and £38m from savings within Directorates. We are progress chasing these savings, and supporting the Council in unblocking obstacles to progress where necessary. Some savings, previously agreed, have been slow to materialise. Through discussions with Cabinet Members we hope to identify the obstacles and come up with solutions to remove them.

For sometime now the City Council has been undertaking a **pay and grading review** covering its entire staff. This has a number of objectives:

- to ensure that the system embodies the principles of equal pay for men and women
- to encourage staff development and learning
- to help staff move job more easily around the City Council, as their jobs change

This is a major challenge facing the City Council. We can certainly concur with the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Human Resources that there are contradictory and conflicting legal requirements in the current arrangements. The way forward needs to balance legal risk, the City Council's organisational requirements and a good dose of pragmatism to be successful.

We have been actively monitoring developments, receiving regular progress reports and have also used the Call-In process to examine the Cabinet decisions made. In doing so, we have focussed on assessing the risks of taking particular courses of action and whether more could be done to communicate and support the process prior to reaching a final agreement in this difficult area.

Recently we have started looking at the practice of using **consultants** and the costs to the City Council. We are seeking to obtain a good understanding of current practice in relation to their use to ensure that proper controls and processes are in place. This will also ensure that the City Council is getting value for money and suggest ways of improving the current process.

### **Improving Partnership Working**

This year we undertook a major review of the Birmingham Local Area Agreement (LAA). This is an agreement between public services in Birmingham and the Government to improve living conditions in the city, through measures such as reducing unemployment, tackling crime and improving housing. Our review was undertaken to make better use of funding and develop innovative delivery of services through strengthened partnership working. This piece of work further sought to answer key questions around whether the arrangements for implementing, managing and scrutinising the LAA were efficient, effective and properly provided democratic accountability.

*"We are an extremely diverse city with people of all races, religions, beliefs, cultures and backgrounds. Community Cohesion is an important way of recognising the value, quality and wealth of benefits that this brings to our city. Whether living, working or studying in Birmingham, it is important that we create an environment where we can all be in harmony with one another where respect, good manners and unity can all play an important part."*

**Councillor James Hutchings, Chairman of the Human Resources and Equalities O&S Sub-Committee**



Strengthening partnership working and the relationship with stakeholders was the main focus of this review but other issues emerged during the course of evidence gathering. These included a lack of Member engagement in some constituency pilot areas; the need to improve the relationship between the Birmingham Strategic Partnership and the Constituency Strategic Partnerships; patchy communication; evidence of a fixation on Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF); the need for better management information and a requirement to strengthen commissioning arrangements.

We took evidence from a range of individuals and organisations. This included Directors and Chairs of Constituency Strategic Partnerships, West Midlands Police, Birmingham East and North Primary Care Trust, Birmingham Community Empowerment Network, BVSC the Centre for Voluntary Action, Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership, The Chamber of Commerce, the West Midlands Fire Service, and the Government Office for the West Midlands. A briefing note on the experience of other Local Authorities and written evidence from Sheffield City Council was also presented in order to learn from work undertaken in other Local Authorities.

The current Local Area Agreement is about to come to an end, and a new one must be in place by April 2008. At the same time the Government is changing some funding rules. We will be keeping a close eye on these developments, to make sure that the lessons of our review are carried forward into the new arrangements.

We are concerned at the lack of progress with our recommendations and we have now set up a small review group to ensure more proactivity in this very important area.

**Sustainability and climate change** is one of the cross-cutting themes in the Local Area Agreement, and requires concerted action by a wide range of partner organisations if Birmingham is to become a sustainable city.

We undertook a review of the City Council's priorities for sustainability, what it currently does and how it does it. Since this topic is all about changing activities and lifestyles now to ward off potentially catastrophic changes in the future, it was very important to us to obtain the opinions of young people. To do this, we participated in an event which attracted around 100 students from schools across Birmingham to enable students and Councillors to engage in discussions around the implications of climate change for Birmingham and the city's draft strategy on climate change. The most important outcome from our involvement with this event was that it illustrated the real value of engaging with young people within the city. Similarly we actively engaged with members of the public through the Birmingham Sustainability Forum.

Achieving a sustainable Birmingham requires partnership working and commitment from local organisations and businesses so we made sure we heard from key partners and local stakeholders as well as took evidence on an extensive range of issues from a number of Council departments. We were also able to look at examples of best practice in place in other Local Authorities.

One of the key outcomes was a general consensus that the City Council should address its behaviour as a corporate entity and demonstrate the ability to embed sustainability and climate change into everything it does. Simultaneously with our review, the Cabinet set up a new officer team to work on these issues, and we look forward to finding out what has been achieved when we start tracking progress in this area.



## Getting in Touch

We would welcome your feedback on this report and any contribution you feel able to make on either our existing work programme or in helping to shape future reviews.

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