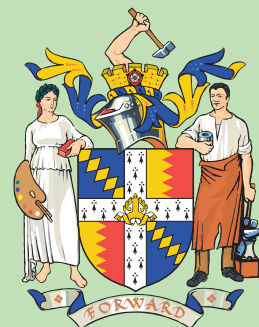




The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2006



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Preface

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



The statutory purposes of Scrutiny are to develop policy and to hold the Executive to account. But we Scrutineers, too, must be accountable, to the City Council and to Birmingham people, for the work we do, its effectiveness, and our use of resources. This annual report provides a basis for that accountability.

Scrutiny in Birmingham is a strong and energetic function. We look forward to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment confirming what we have already been informally advised, that Scrutiny is enhancing the Council's capacity to improve services and is supporting the achievement of Council priorities. For this, I have primarily three groups of people to thank. First come the 85 Members of the City Council who take part in Overview and Scrutiny, and do so with skill and enthusiasm. Secondly, there are my predecessors in the chair of the Co-ordinating O&S Committee – Honorary Alderman Mike Olley, Cllr Len Gregory and Cllr Michael Wilkes. It is thanks to the foundations that they laid that Scrutiny now plays such a fundamental and essential role in the life of the Council. And thirdly there are our supporting officers – John Cade and his team in the Scrutiny Office who provide such an admirable mix of inspiration and perspiration, the Committee Managers and the Link Officers in the various Directorates.

My own approach to Scrutiny is simple. It is to make sure that the City Council does in practice what it says it sets out to do. The work is not always glamorous – the City Council devil is often in the detail, and at times we have to be extremely painstaking in our probing, questioning and investigating. When an inquiry is complete and we have agreed a robust set of recommendations, then those recommendations are worthless unless we can influence the Executive to implement them. All our review reports are brought to full Council, and, so far all have been accepted and implemented regardless of the Party of the Member leading the review.

We then track our recommendations to ensure implementation. This is one aspect of our work I have tried to reinforce this year. We want to ensure that the City Council delivers the improved services and the value for money that it has repeatedly promised and that Birmingham people deserve.



What Is Overview And Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny, often referred to as O&S, provides one of the most important ways in which Councillors can champion the interests of local people and communities in changing public services for the better. By probing and investigating the policies, performance and decisions of the City Council and of the health service in Birmingham, we not only challenge Cabinet Members and top managers to do better but give them firm, well-argued guidance as to how services and the City itself can be improved.

The major policy and service decisions are taken by the Leader of the Council and a nine member team of Cabinet Members, each of which has a portfolio in a similar way to a Government Minister. Overview and Scrutiny forms part of the checks and balances necessary to ensure that the Cabinet is exercising its power responsibly, and that it is accountable to the 120 Members of the City Council as a whole. In O&S we oversee the decisions of the Cabinet to make sure that they are fair, practical and represent the best interests of the public.

Who We Are



Main Overview and Scrutiny Chairpersons May 2006 Onwards



Overview and Scrutiny is carried out by Councillors who do not sit in the Cabinet, and therefore are able to approach the City Council's policies, decisions and actions with an independent mind. Currently 85 elected Members take part in O&S, organised into 9 main Committees with 12 Councillors usually sitting on each Committee. O&S Committees are all-party, generally in proportion to the party's representation on the City Council as a whole. In this way, on each Committee Members will not only bring a range of political views but will also represent the experience of different areas across the City.

Each Committee has a Chairman who is the main point for organising its work. Committees usually meet monthly throughout the year and all are open to the public. At the moment the Chairmen of Committees are:

Co-ordinating	:	Councillor Alistair Dow
Education and Lifelong Learning	:	Councillor Jon Hunt
Health	:	Councillor Deirdre Alden
Housing and Urban Renewal	:	Councillor Sandra O'Brien
Leisure, Sport and Culture	:	Councillor John Alden
Local Services and Community Safety	:	Councillor Timothy Huxtable
Regeneration	:	Councillor Mark Hill
Social Care	:	Councillor Len Clark
Transportation and Street Services	:	Councillor Martin Mullaney

As well as these main Committees, from time to time a special, time-limited Committee can be formed to investigate a particular set of issues. The four of these "Task and Finish" Committees which are currently operating, with their Chairmen, are:

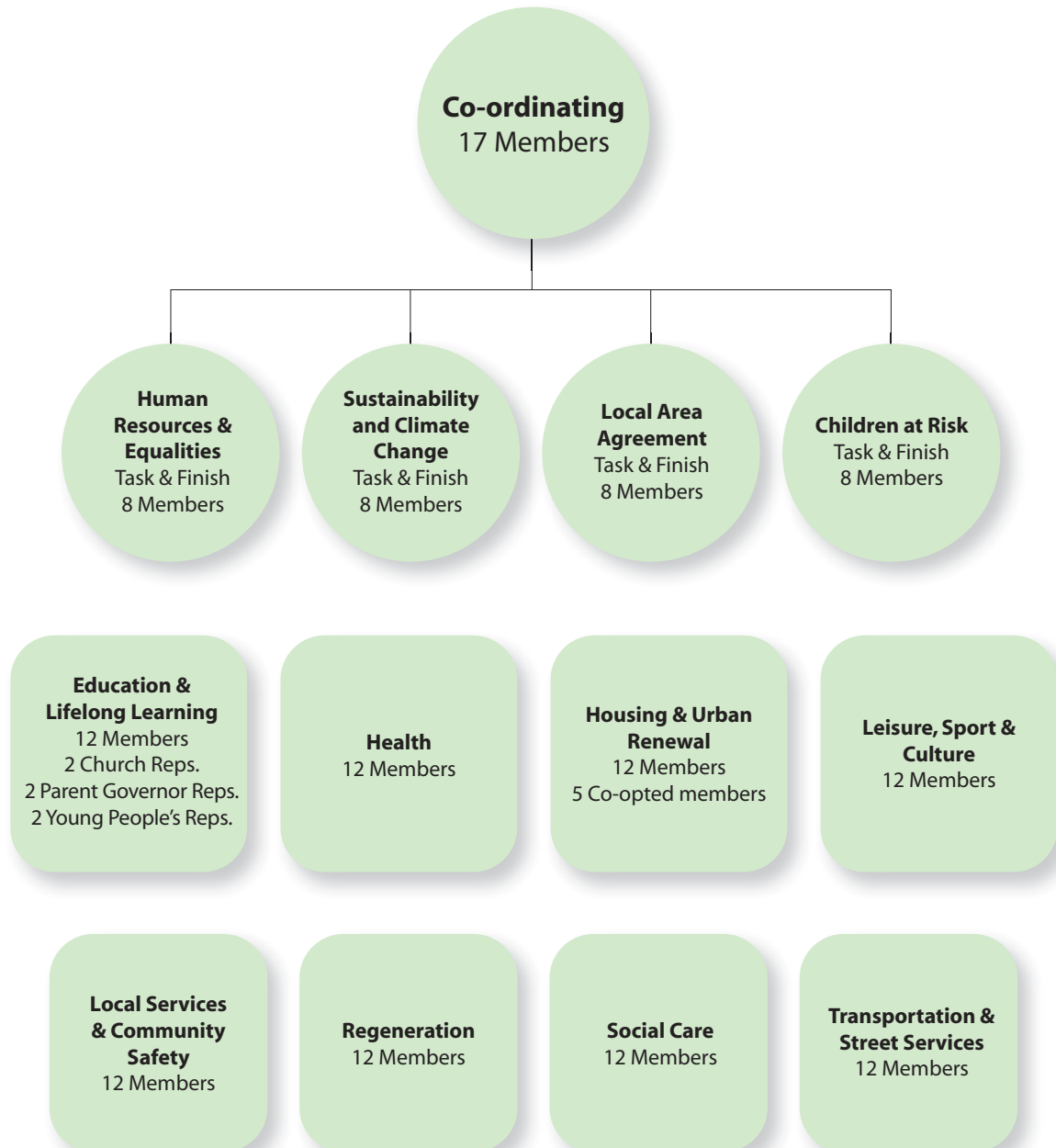
Children at Risk	:	Councillor Keith Barton
Equalities and Human Resources	:	Councillor James Hutchings
Local Area Agreement	:	Councillor Tanveer Choudhry
Sustainability and Climate Change	:	Councillor Steve Bedser

Committee memberships and Committee Chairmen often change following the local elections, and this was the case this year. Until May 2006, some of our Committees were chaired by different Councillors who also made leading contributions to the work we are reporting:

Co-ordinating	:	Councillor Michael Wilkes
Housing and Urban Renewal	:	former Councillor Frank Coyne
Leisure, Sport and Culture	:	Councillor Ray Hassall
Transportation and Street Services	:	Councillor Alistair Dow
Problem Debt Task and Finish	:	Councillor Carl Rice



O&S Committee Structure





How We Do Our Work

O&S Committees now have a variety of work through which they can both develop policy and hold the Executive to account. These include:

- major scrutiny reviews – these are in-depth inquiries into specific subjects, leading to substantial recommendations for how things need to change
- overview exercises – aimed at advising the Executive before a decision is taken
- scrutinising draft policy plans before they are adopted by the City Council
- health consultations – by law we have a responsibility to respond to the NHS when they are proposing changes to health service delivery. We also can assess whether the NHS has carried out its consultation correctly
- monitoring the financial and service performance of the Council
- tracking progress in implementing approved scrutiny recommendations
- call in of individual decisions – challenging Cabinet Members as to why they have taken a particular decision and, if not satisfied, asking them to think again
- the annual formal appearance of Cabinet Members at O&S Committees to answer questions on their performance

The most visible part of our work is the scrutiny review. This is an inquiry into a specific subject. The outcome will be recommendations for how things may need to change. The aim of scrutiny reviews is to evaluate the effectiveness and practice of decisions of the Council with a greater degree of independence, as a critical friend. Reviews will, therefore, often involve not only elected Members and Council officers, but also people outside the Council – service users, experts in specific fields and members of partner organisations. We often sample public opinion by using the Council's People's Panel or by organising our own surveys.

Reviews gather information in a variety of ways – the subject of the inquiry determines which one is used. In some cases, information is gathered in formal meetings. In other cases the Members may work in small, informal groups to look at the subject and will take time to see how things work in practice. All our review reports are available on our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny or by contacting us to ask for a copy.

The whole point of all our investigations – of whichever type – is to lead to clear, well-argued recommendations for improvement. Whilst we cannot give orders to the Cabinet or the local health service, our aim is to influence what they do for the better. We are therefore always looking at improving what we ourselves do and at ways of exerting more influence. Our ideas for doing this are explained later in this report.



What Are We Delivering?

It is very important to us that the work we undertake is seen as adding value to the City Council's priorities. We may not have any decision-making powers but we do believe that by drawing up quality, evidence-based recommendations we can enhance the capacity of the Council to make improvements. It is also important to us that we work across scrutiny as a team complementing one another's work.

This is why in this report we have resisted the natural temptation and normal practice of listing work undertaken Committee by Committee. Rather we want to give you a flavour of some of the work that we have recently been doing by setting it out under more general themes. These are largely drawn from Birmingham's Community Strategy, which means that not only the City Council but a large number of important organisations in the City agree on their importance. Quite often, as you will see, more than one Committee contributes to a particular theme.

First, though, we report on the work we have done to improve the workings of the City Council itself.



Scrutiny's Work Covers all City Council Services



The City Council: Using its Resources Better

A strong theme in our scrutiny work this year has been to help get better value for money from the resources the City Council has at its disposal. In particular this refers to financial effectiveness and efficiency – getting more and better services out of the same amount of money, or indeed at less cost. But our work also covers ways of helping staff do a better job, and also trying to improve joint working between the City Council and partner organisations such as the police and the health service.

The Business Transformation Programme

The City Council has embarked on a ten year programme aimed at radically improving many of its services. Rather than settling for gradual improvements, this is an ambitious approach to securing fundamentally better provision in Birmingham. This “Business Transformation” programme will change the way the Council organises and carries out not only its front-line services but also all the backroom management and administration. The programme aims to increase customers’ satisfaction with our services and also employees’ satisfaction with their jobs. There are nine different transformation programmes:

- efficiency/corporate services
- customer first
- working for the future (property)
- excellence in people management
- adult services
- excellence in information management
- supporting community and environmental management
- children’s and young people’s services
- housing

To support this programme the City Council has formed a Joint Venture Company with Capita, the Business Transformation Strategic Partnership. Ten-year costs and benefits are of the order of hundreds of millions of pounds. This is a massive investment and it is essential that the City Council obtains the maximum value for money possible and the best return on this investment. We are therefore receiving quarterly reports on progress. These will allow us to identify when the programme is slipping and what remedial action is needed; and particularly when change is being resisted or blocked, as inevitably it will be on occasion.



Better Procurement of Goods and Services

The City Council spends £900m every year on buying goods and services from over 20,000 third party suppliers. The *Co-ordinating O&S Committee* has been investigating both the policies governing this spending and the administrative processes involved. Our aim has been to identify areas where value for money could be increased, and to contribute to the business transformation programme in this area.

This has not been an encouraging inquiry. Council policy has not been followed, and very often contracts have not been complied with either. Non-compliance has been tolerated by management. The City Council has therefore missed opportunities to deliver substantial cost reductions; similarly it has not been able to use its purchasing power to achieve other objectives fully, such as equalities, sustainability, or the maximum use of local suppliers.

What we see as essential now is that this part of the business transformation programme is implemented in full at the earliest opportunity. We are looking for this with great impatience. Better procurement practices have been repeatedly promised for too long.

Better People Management

The *Human Resources and Equalities Task & Finish Committee* is concentrating on progress chasing the City Council's efforts here. Five main themes were identified at the beginning of the municipal year to be looked at as a matter of priority. These were:

- a) progress and impact of the Equalities Restructuring;
- b) the Human Resources Information System;
- c) the progress and impact of Single Status;
- d) use of Temporary Agency Staff;
- e) the Excellence in Business Management Business Transformation Programme.

● Progress and Impact of the Equalities Restructuring

The main objective of the restructure was to mainstream the equality agenda. We found that although the Equalities Division had been restructured, other departments had not been restructured to take account of this. In turn, this meant that whilst most areas seemed to have embraced the mainstreaming equalities agenda very readily, others seemed to be struggling. Employees were generally of the opinion that equalities was as yet, not really embedded, and that the agenda was more process driven than outcome driven.

There was also a degree of inconsistency across the Council in the level of resources available and in the degree to which equalities had been integrated into service planning.



● **The Human Resources Information System**

Inadequacies in the HRIS System in not providing information required by managers were highlighted e.g. the system does not enable the workforce profile to be overlaid with grades.

● **Progress and Impact of Single Status**

This is a very important policy for the Council which needs to be introduced in April 2007. We highlighted a number of issues to maintain a corporate sense of priority and urgency at the highest levels of management around the importance of securing the implementation of the Single Status workforce agreement.

Value for Money in Construction and Maintenance

Urban Design is the City Council's in-house provider of professional services relating to construction, design and maintenance. It generates income (around £13m per year) from fees and charges to other City Council departments. It was right, therefore, that the *Regeneration O&S Committee* scrutinised these costs.

We found that Urban Design's costs and value for money generally compared favourably with external options. More could and should be done to clarify those costs and how they arise to clients. We also recommended that the Executive pursue options to increase its flexibility further, possibly including operating on the basis of being a limited company wholly-owned by Birmingham City Council.

Better Customer Service

The *Co-ordinating O&S Committee* will be using the progress reports on the "Customer First" business transformation programme as a starting point to investigating how the City Council is developing customer-focussed services in general.

More immediately, the *Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee* is reviewing the City Council's Neighbourhood Offices. This will focus on understanding how and where Neighbourhood Offices currently operate and the different approaches to Neighbourhood Offices across the City.

It will also mesh with other current review work, including the Customer First element of Business Transformation, with a view to feeding into the final shape, role and distribution of Neighbourhood Offices.



More Efficient and Effective Partnership Working: the Local Area Agreement

The Local Area Agreement matters because it represents a new approach both between partners in the City and between the City and Central Government. The parties to the Agreement will work together to achieve big improvements in Birmingham, focussing on “closing the gap” and improving the quality of life for Birmingham people, making a difference for the people and places with greatest need. Large funding streams are involved, potentially delivering important outcomes, such as:

- helping people to get jobs;
- improving health outcomes;
- providing a cleaner, safer, better housed City;
- strengthening neighbourhoods and
- improving outcomes for children and young people.

This Agreement is therefore another great opportunity to improve services and people’s lives in Birmingham. The *Local Area Agreement Task and Finish Committee* will be investigating how the various partners – the City Council, West Midlands Police, the Health Service and others – are getting on in working together to deliver the Agreement. The Committee will also be discussing how Overview and Scrutiny itself can, in future, work with the partners to ensure that we all get the most out of the Agreement.



Councillor Dow Scoping a Review with Scrutiny Staff



Birmingham: A City of Vibrant Urban Villages

The Council's ambition is that Birmingham becomes a City where all the various neighbourhoods and urban villages have access to good public and private services, and where people are active citizens, helping each other to improve services and the quality of life. We have made some significant contributions here over the last year.

Local Control of Decisions and Services

The City Council has a policy, which has attracted national attention, of devolving some decision-making to local Councillors and of managing some services – such as leisure centres, play facilities and local libraries – from local bases rather than from headquarters in the City centre. Guided by decisions taken by local elected Members, this policy holds out the promise of public services better tailored to local conditions, more effectively co-ordinated and delivered, and coupled with closer partnership working between a variety of agencies operating in each constituency in the City.

The *Co-ordinating O&S Committee* undertook a very thorough and high-profile evaluation of this policy and of what it had achieved in practice. Many people were interviewed during the review: Cabinet Members, senior officers, Constituency Committee Chairmen and Constituency Directors, and Chairs of Constituency Strategic Partnerships. Opinions from front-line staff and from the public at large were gathered through using focus groups.

Our conclusion was that the policy should be maintained but be made to work more effectively. The constituency machinery – both at Councillor and at officer level – provides the City Council with the capacity and the opportunity to do things differently and better. We asked the Executive to draw up an action plan so that everybody could be clear exactly how these improvements would come about.

The Executive did respond to this challenge and the resulting action plan was debated and approved by the full Council meeting in October.

Engaging Communities More Effectively

Part of the City Council's devolution and localisation policy is to develop more effective engagement of local communities in decisions which affect them. The *Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee* took an overview of community engagement, which examined some of the barriers to people getting involved in community organisations. For example: often the same people are relied upon to contribute – these should be supported but also helped by increasing the number of people involved. This also ensures all elements of the community are appropriately represented.

The Committee also looked at the membership of Ward Advisory Boards and the important role community representatives play here, as they do in Housing Liaison Boards – there are examples of tenants having a genuine influence on policy and the local environment, with the backing of the Housing Department.



We also found examples of overlap, if not duplication. Birmingham has a rich variety of ways in which citizens can be active and engaged in local civic life. Neighbourhood Forums cover 70% of the City, and are supported by the Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums (BANF) which in turn receives public money in the form of a grant from the City Council. There are also a number of Community Empowerment Networks – one in each constituency plus others representing particular groups or interests. These are supported by the Birmingham Community Empowerment Network (BCEN), which receives public money through the Birmingham Strategic Partnership, which is chaired by the Deputy Leader of the City Council. We therefore suggested bringing together all the support services provided by BANF and BCEN and consequently supported the new, unified Community Engagement Service.

Cleaner, Greener Neighbourhoods

The *Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee* explored the contribution Environmental Wardens make to creating a safe, clean and green City. We looked in particular at the way they are funded – primarily through using the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund – and the impact this use of short term funding has.

Our review recommended that clear warden plans be drawn up in the Constituencies to coordinate clean and green activities, and that the impact and performance of Environmental Wardens are monitored in a more systematic fashion. This review will be tracked in the coming year, to see how the Executive has implemented the recommendations.



Environmental Wardens Helping to Make Neighbourhoods Cleaner, Greener and Safer



Birmingham: A Fair and Welcoming City

Birmingham is a City whose diversity is a strength. In our work this year we have contributed to Birmingham as a City that provides equal opportunities and excludes no one.

Community Cohesion

The *Human Resources and Equalities Task and Finish Committee* is placing a strong emphasis on how the recently produced community cohesion strategy is being implemented. Building community cohesion must be at the heart of the work of the Council and its partners. Evidence has been taken around recent community disturbances. We want to identify those issues which are causing tension and those which enable better community relationships to develop.

Problem Debt

A small but significant minority of the population continues to be severely affected by problem debt. They can have difficulty in meeting credit commitments or be unable to pay household bills. These problems are strongly associated with social exclusion and unforeseen events such as redundancy, relationship breakdown and ill health. Over-indebtedness has significant costs for individuals, creditors and society as a whole.

The *Problem Debt Task and Finish Committee* investigated what problem debt means for Birmingham as a City and for those who experience it either personally or through its impact on service efficiency. This allowed the group to identify what interventions were within its power to provide or influence, and to achieve an effective impact on alleviating the misery and financial detriment that it causes. The goals were to enable people to either prevent it or manage it better in the future.

One of the most important recommendations was the establishment of a Financial Inclusion Partnership comprising representatives from the City Council, the voluntary and community sector and financial and utility companies in the private sector. Rather than produce a long list of specific recommendations, the Committee felt that the creation of such a partnership would be a catalyst for increased partnership working between the many departments of the City Council and outside agencies. Members felt that this was likely to prove to be the most important achievement of their scrutiny. Their judgment was subsequently vindicated when strong partnership working by the City was officially recognised after the City was short-listed for Beacon Council status for working with voluntary organisations to help people in debt and financial hardship.



Involving Faith Organisations

In its overview of Community Engagement (October 2006), the *Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee* looked at “communities of interest” as well as “communities of place” – in particular, faith and the role faith organisations play in our communities.

The capacity of Local Authority decision-making to be sensitive to issues of faith was broadly welcomed and it was agreed that faith is increasingly seen as a key facet of civil society and is a key aspect of diversity.

However, we found that faith groups often feel distant from City Council processes. But of course, the lack of formal engagement could be said to reflect the composition and nature of the faith groups themselves: disparate and differently organised, many are not “organisations” but a way of life.

This is a strand of investigation that will be followed up during the scrutiny work around community cohesion.



Birmingham: a Diverse and Young City



Birmingham: A Prosperous City

In our work on this theme, we are supporting the development of a strong and diversified economy. The shared aim is for Birmingham to be a place where enterprise and growth are valued and supported and where skills are fostered and rewarded.

Local Centres

In 2005, the *Regeneration O&S Committee* published recommendations of how local centres throughout Birmingham could be improved. Whilst a thriving and lively City centre is critical to economic success, repeating this success on a smaller, local level is important too. Local centres should be easy to get to, safe and pleasant places where people feel secure and which they are happy to visit on a regular basis.

We followed this up during 2006 by examining and enhancing the Council's new Local Centres Strategy prior to its endorsement by Cabinet. This strategy has established priorities for regeneration work and tackling issues of decline in local shopping centres and parades across the City.

Support to Small Businesses

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of small businesses to Birmingham's economy. Accordingly, this year the *Regeneration O&S Committee* investigated how the City Council and partner agencies supported the sector.

While we acknowledge that this is a changing picture because of a shift from local to regional delivery, we were struck by a lack of co-ordination – instead of the agencies working together, any one small firm has to approach each partner separately.

We therefore have asked the City Council to consider how the support it provides should be connected, linked to regional delivery of support and developed in the future. We have also asked Advantage West Midlands to provide assurances regarding the transition of business support to a regional delivery model. And to help small firms understand what help is available and given the enormous complexity of accessing such support, Birmingham Economic Development Partnership have been asked to produce a route map to help with this.

The Local Enterprise Growth Initiative

Through this review, the Committee saw the importance of the City Council winning Government funding to develop enterprise in the City through the second round of the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative. If the Council is successful, this will provide a significant proportion of the funding for enterprise development under the Local Area Agreement.

Involvement of members of the Committee during the development stages of the second round bid has provided feedback to the Cabinet Member. This has strengthened the bid and ensures that it went forward with all-party involvement.



Tackling Unemployment

One of the key issues facing the Regeneration portfolio is that of the differentials across the City in levels of worklessness. Some wards have over a third of their working age population out of work. There are a range of agencies engaged in tackling this issue – including the Learning and Skills Council and Job Centre Plus – with whom the Council must work to achieve reductions in worklessness.

In order to contribute to this work, Members of the *Regeneration O&S Committee* will be meeting with key partners on an on-going basis to participate in round table discussions; put ideas and concerns to partners and to inform service delivery as it happens. The key aim is to maintain an oversight of activity in this area and to ensure effective Member input.

We also know from our work on the Local Area Agreement that the Government did have some concerns around the Council's initial proposals for using neighbourhood renewal fund monies for tackling worklessness. We have already started to look at the robustness of the proposals now coming forward.

Eastside

Eastside has been one of the principal large-scale regeneration and redevelopment projects in the City for the last decade. Although still a work in progress, the physical transformation of the area so far has already been startling, providing the basis for extending the regeneration of the City centre eastwards.

Starting in early 2007, the *Regeneration O&S Committee* will be looking at this microcosm of regeneration in the City as a whole, with members working alongside the Cabinet Member in shaping its future.

We believe that Scrutiny can make a specific contribution here. We want to take a dispassionate, non-partisan view about what is actually happening. Political issues have been writ large recently around Eastside (e.g. the Richard Rogers concept for a new library, subject to an earlier scrutiny review itself; the proposed park and the pace of redevelopment.) Now is the right time to see how the overall proposals are coming together.



Birmingham: A Connected City

Birmingham is the centre of many important transport networks, and strategic transport links are vital to the modern City. But we have concentrated this year on improving travel within our City.

The *Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee* established “tackling congestion” as a theme for its work some time ago. This has continued throughout 2006 and will do so into the future. We have already looked at a number of different facets of the congestion problem that the City and region face, using a flexible approach combining the different ways in which O&S can work.

Improving Traffic Management and Control

The starting point of this review was to understand the statutory role of the Traffic Manager and the new responsibilities placed on the City Council by the Traffic Management Act 2004, which gives us a duty to keep the traffic flowing. We made a number of important recommendations. First was that the consideration of the traffic consequences of major developments needed improving at the planning stage. At the operational level, we made specific recommendations to improve partnership working with the Police on managing traffic incidents, and identified opportunities for sharing expensive infrastructure – particularly CCTV. Where the City Council does need to embark on expensive capital investment in equipment or systems, then a clear focus must be maintained on tackling congestion.

Ongoing Involvement in the Highways Maintenance and Management PFI

The Executive has continued this year its work on exploring the possibility and efficacy of this proposal. Our work has been around raising member understanding and providing opportunities for early involvement, acting very much as an informed but critical commentator.

We have an ongoing interest in the process, with involvement scheduled at key points, so that O&S can provide member oversight of emerging decisions.

Scrutiny Review of Travelling to School

Conventional wisdom has it that the higher levels of traffic experienced during school term times is caused simply by a high proportion of parents driving their children to school. More concretely, there are a number of well-documented cases where roads adjacent to school are congested to a greater or lesser degree at the start and the finish of the school day. This was the starting point for a review which concluded in December 2005.



In our report we recognised that this is not just a matter of road congestion, but also included the possibility of healthier lifestyles for children, safer streets and a more pleasant environment. We highlighted the issue that there is an ongoing programme of travel planning associated with schools, but a fixed term resource from Government to deal with it. Accordingly we asked the Cabinet Member to identify ways to incorporate School Travel Advisors into the core staffing of the City Council.

Scrutiny Review of Building Bus Use

We are just concluding this review, and anticipate that our conclusions will be available for debate at the January 2007 meeting of the City Council.

The problem is simple to state; the Government has set the West Midlands authorities important targets to increase bus journeys – we must meet these but the background is one of a pattern of declining bus patronage.

In our report we will evaluate the effectiveness of existing partnerships in delivering against those targets, and will identify areas for improvement for the key stakeholders – the City Council, Centro and Travel West Midlands.



Walking to School is Healthier and Reduces Traffic



Birmingham: A Learning City

A constant element in the City Council's ambitions for many years has been the intention that Birmingham would be a City where all children and young people are inspired to learn, develop and achieve. Similarly, people should be encouraged, and given the opportunities, to go on learning throughout their lives. Our work on this theme has been led by the *Education and Lifelong Learning O&S Committee*. Recently the Social Care O&S Committee has taken up the responsibility for scrutinising adult education in the City.

Involving Young People

The *Education and Lifelong Learning O&S Committee* has made a number of successful efforts to increase the involvement of young people both in the work of the Committee directly (we have two young people as co-opted members) and through the major review work it has undertaken. For example the 'Involving Young People' scrutiny review was directly led by a group of young people and has resulted in the Council adopting the 'Hear by Rights' standard.

In addition the Committee has recently completed a review on the Youth Service which has been undertaken jointly by Members and young people. This involved Members visiting a range of youth projects across the City to get a real flavour of the different levels of service that are currently available to young people. We found that despite the goodwill and effort of very committed youth workers, the service provided as a whole is very patchy. The service has been historically under resourced and in many parts of the City struggles to provide adequate provision in constricted premises and with part time staffing. This resourcing gap must be plugged and the City Council and its partners must put in place a service which is fit for purpose and provides the young people of Birmingham with the full range of positive and creative activities that they deserve.

In a lively and "no holds barred" debate at the November City Council meeting – with a full public gallery – Members unanimously agreed to pick up the challenge made by the young people to ensure that youth provision ceases to be a Cinderella service.

Year 11 Pupils Taken off the School Roll

As a result of this piece of overview work there will now be a system of annual monitoring set in place to look at the destinations and qualifications of year 11 pupils who are taken off the school roll. This also looked at the core service offered and how equitably existing resources are distributed across the City.



Education and Training in Regeneration

The *Education O&S Committee* has been actively following up on some of this review's main recommendations. In particular, tracking the research carried out to look at the quantifiable difference made to education standards for children and young people living in the regeneration areas, looking at initiatives undertaken to address the achievement levels and language skills development of African Caribbean pupils and lobbying for the development of a Skills Centre for the North West of the City. Members found that all of these recommendations had been successfully achieved.

Language Teaching in Schools

The Committee has also taken a keen interest in the development of the Languages Strategy for Birmingham which aims to promote language learning and value the diversity of the languages spoken in the City. Their involvement is in response to trends in recent years which have seen students abandoning foreign languages at Key Stage 4. Ultimately the number of Birmingham pupils achieving a language qualification at GCSE level across the City has fallen drastically with take-up currently standing at just 51%. Members of the Committee are now keen to put language learning back on the school agenda, and to increase its popularity, by targeting every primary and secondary school in the City so that every pupil can have an opportunity to learn a new language.

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

The Committee completed this review in October. It explored whether there are any issues adversely affecting the recruitment and retention of teachers in Birmingham and it made a series of recommendations to address these issues which were fully endorsed by the City Council including actions to promote the recruitment of more men into primary teaching and more teachers from minority ethnic communities.

School Admission Procedures

The Committee is currently completing this review, exploring to what extent the school admission procedures provide optimum placements for Birmingham children taking into consideration the availability of school places.



Challenges for the Future

For many years, the City Council has operated with education services being provided by one Directorate, and social services (for both vulnerable children and adults) provided by another. Now, in line with legislation, this has changed. Now one Cabinet Member is responsible for all services to Children, Young People and Families, which are provided by a Directorate of the same name. Another Cabinet Member steers services for vulnerable adults, those services being provided by the Adults and Communities Directorate.

The largest challenge currently facing the *Education and Lifelong Learning O&S Committee* is how to address the breadth of the agenda for Children, Young People and Families. A Task and Finish Committee focussing immediately on Children at Risk is also tasked with coming forward with proposals on how best to ensure robust scrutiny structures are in place for the future. Specific proposals are now in the course of being discussed.

Similarly, the *Social Care O&S Committee* has started to get to grips with its new responsibilities for adult education. It has investigated the finances of the City Council's adult education service, and has started to consider the Adult Education Action Plan.



Scrutiny Wants to See More Men in Primary Teaching



Birmingham: A Healthy City

This theme sees Birmingham as a City where people live longer and enjoy healthy, active and fulfilling lives. Those who depend on particular care services to achieve this should have a choice and receive appropriate and up-to-date care. Two of our Committees contribute substantially to this theme: the *Health O&S Committee* and the *Social Care O&S Committee*.

Improving Health for All Our People

The remit of the *Health O&S Committee* is to aid the reduction of health inequalities across the City. This is done through assessing the plans of both Health Bodies and the Local Authority for both consistency and evidence of outcomes. In this municipal year this has been done through matching the priorities of the Committee with those set in the Local Area Agreement. This year we have been focussing on:

- Male life expectancy
- Infant mortality
- Teenage pregnancy

We have had extensive presentations setting out the floor target action plans in each case and highlighting the parts of the City where each of these issues is a particular problem. The Committee was interested to hear that extra funding was being invested in the recruitment of midwives and emphasised that particular attention should be paid to recruiting midwives that spoke a wider range of community languages. We have invited the health representatives to attend every three months to set out their success against the action plans. We have also made a commitment to help address any obstacles that the Local Area Agreement team might experience in reducing these significant health inequalities.

Giving Citizens a Voice – Responding to Proposed Changes in Birmingham’s Health Services

In addition the Committee has carried out its statutory role to ensure that Health Bodies consult with both patients and the public around substantial service changes. In the past year we have considered such diverse consultations as:

- Healthcare developments at Eastside
- The 3rd Forensic Medium Secure Unit in Yardley
- The reconfiguration of Primary Care Trusts
- The reconfiguration of West Midlands wide Strategic Health Authorities
- The reconfiguration of the West Midlands Ambulance Service
- Royal Orthopaedic Hospital Consultation on Foundation Trust Status
- Birmingham Children's Hospital Consultation on Foundation Trust Status
- Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Trust Consultation on Foundation Trust Status
- Birmingham Women's Hospital Consultation on Foundation Trust Status
- The proposals to reconfigure some Child And Adolescent Medical Health Services



The process to assess consultations has involved taking evidence from Public and Patients, Stakeholders and the wider City Council as well as incorporating the views of the Committee members on the proposed service change. We have also taken an active role in monitoring public meetings held by Health Bodies as well as any documentation produced.

The proposal to develop a 3rd Medium Secure Unit in Yardley was an issue that created an understandable concern for many of the local residents. The Committee worked with the Mental Health Trust to ensure that an extensive and robust consultation process took place. This involved careful consideration of the written documentation and monitoring of a number of the public meetings. The Committee also took evidence from all Council members and Departments and used this to strike a balance between some extremely polarised views. After careful consideration we supported the proposal but required the Trust to create a Community Liaison Group that will ensure that members of the public are involved in shaping the way the new service will be both designed and provided.

The nationwide consultation on reconfiguring ambulance services proved to be one of the most controversial that we considered. Members of the Committee expressed a great deal of concern that the proposed reconfiguration was driven purely by financial considerations rather than patient safety. The Committee considered evidence from a number of patient groups and partner organisations and eventually set out a response that opposed the reconfiguration of services. This view was shared by a number of Local Authorities across the West Midlands and resulted in the first piece of work that brought together a region wide consideration of an issue. Although there was considerable opposition to the proposals this view was not shared by the Secretary of State.

The proposed reconfiguration of inpatient Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has been an issue that has been before the *Health O&S Committee* a number of times. The proposal to close one of the wards that provides the service has met with a great deal of opposition from both carers and clinicians. The actual proposals were raised with the Committee by concerned clinicians which resulted in a close examination of the consultation of the process by the Committee. We reached the conclusion that the scope of such a proposal was substantial in nature and as such needed much wider consultation. As a result of this the Trust was instructed to work with the Strategic Health Authority to create a process that fully engaged with patients and carers and would develop a service that met their needs and was clinically safe.

Working in Partnership to improve Mental Health Services

The *Social Care O&S Committee* reviewed the way the City Council and the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust were working together. This is a formal partnership underpinned by what is known as a Section 31 Partnership Agreement. We found that working in partnership with the Health Service, offered our staff opportunities to work more closely with partners in the Health Service to provide service users with a more responsive service. It also enabled us to make more efficient use of resources as we recommended aligning resources more effectively toward better management.

We were, however, disappointed when we began tracking the recommendations to learn that the Trust were unable to meet some crucial deadlines assigned to each of the recommendations, for a number of



reasons, and that progress had somewhat stumbled. A key reason was that their priority had been to apply for Foundation Trust status. Since then, we have met with the Chief Executive of the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust and have been assured that a fresh impetus will be applied toward achieving the recommendations set out in our report. The Committee will receive a report from the Chief Executive at its meeting in December.

The same Committee also undertook a review of Mental Health Day Services this year. This review sought to promote more social inclusion and the mainstreaming of services for people with Mental Health difficulties. The review group engaged with a wide variety of groups to consider alternative approaches to delivering services to this vulnerable group. This included discussions with groups in the third sector, the National Institute for Mental Health in England, and visits to various innovative projects including one based on the American Clubhouse model. The recommendations focused on engaging with a range of external partners in providing services for people with Mental Health difficulties to ensure they are supported within their communities as fully participating citizens.

Improving Day Services for Adults

The *Social Care O&S Committee* also investigated the City Council's day services for adults. As part of this review Members visited more than 20 centres where older people and people with physical and learning disabilities make use of day services. Visits were also paid to the small number of enterprise schemes in the City, run by a range of different organisations, and considered the position of carers. Members found that day services, which are a vital life-line for many users and their carers, were under resourced and in most cases failing to meet the needs of many users. As a result of the extensive programme of visits, the review group were able to expose a few pockets of good practice that exist in the City and make recommendations to re-focus the provision of day services more in line with up to date requirements. This hard-hitting review was accepted in its entirety by the Cabinet Member and the Adults and Communities Directorate has since developed an exciting action plan, prompted by the recommendations in the review. We are set to begin tracking these early in the new year.

Home Care Services

This review – expected to be complete in the summer of 2007 – is looking at the provision of services to older people and people with learning and physical disabilities in their homes. This continues the programme of looking at the core services provided by the Adults and Communities Directorate, which began with the close scrutiny of the commissioning strategies and then moved on to day services. Now, to investigate the services which people receive in their own homes, this review will draw on the views of users, carers, providers of the service, key partners from the Health and voluntary sector and, examples of good practice, to recommend how we can shape the future of home care in Birmingham. Effective, high quality home care services are essential if the Directorate is to improve the quality of its services and promote independence, and choice to people who require support.

Wellbeing Services

This review – due to be completed in April 2007 – will help shape the Adults and Communities Directorates' strategy for the development and delivery of Wellbeing Services, initially for older people. The review intends to learn from best practice in the core cities, as well as drawing from results of the



national 'Partnerships for Older People Projects' (POPP) toward developing innovative ways of providing low-level preventative care services for older people in their communities. We will seek to engage a wide variety of views, such as those of the Primary Care Trusts, Housing, Education and Leisure services, community and voluntary groups, as well as hearing about developments on the Health and Wellbeing block of the Local Area Agreement.

Services to Children at Risk

During the first half of 2006, the *Social Care O&S Committee* took the lead in this area. Its work included:

- Monitoring the performance of the new Children, Young People and Families Directorate
- Monitoring the action plan arising from the Laming Audit which was issued after the tragic death of Victoria Climbié
- Scrutinising key areas of performance including social work assessments, this has been closely monitored alongside related challenges such as recruiting and retaining social work staff
- Plans to develop the children's residential estate

More recently, as explained in the section "Birmingham – A Learning City", this responsibility has moved to the *Children at Risk Task and Finish Committee*. This Committee has continued to actively scrutinise the work of the new Directorate, with a particular focus on children at risk, such as those subject to child protection or those in the care of the Local Authority. Although the Committee is relatively new, it has scrutinised a variety of issues and topics such as the Joint Area Review self-assessment, the leaving care service, the Children's Rights and Engagement Service, children's establishments and the Looked after Children Education Service. The Committee has sought to challenge the evidence brought before it to help bring about change in the support provided to vulnerable children.

A key area of work has been to look at the accommodation provided for children and young people in the care of the Local Authority. Members have undertaken visits to children's homes run by the Local Authority and the private sector. The aim of the visits was to identify areas of good practice but also to raise issues of concern that will inform the future planning and delivery of children's residential services.

Children and young people who are "looked after" have also been invited to come and talk to the Committee about their experiences of being in care. This was the first time that scrutiny has heard directly from looked after children and young people and proved a very useful experience for both the Members and young people. We were able to hear first hand from those whose lives are affected by the services and support that the City Council provides.

Members have been keen to explore the social work support available to vulnerable children. A national shortage of social workers for children has been widely reported; we have investigated the impact of the difficulties associated with recruitment and retention on the ability of the Directorate to provide timely, appropriate support to children, young people and their families.

The final part of the Committee's task is to recommend more appropriate long term arrangements for scrutinising children's services.



Birmingham: A Well-Housed City

Councillors from all political parties strongly agree that Birmingham's housing, and the City Council's housing services, need to be improved. A significant amount of effort has been focussed by the *Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee* on improving service performance.

Better Homes for All

The Decent Homes Programme aims to ensure that all housing in the City meets a certain, minimum standard by 2010. The Decent Homes Floor Target Action Plan brings together the arrangements to monitor performance and delivery of the Programme for Council housing, privately-owned and rented housing, and that owned by Housing Associations. The Committee has given this rigorous monitoring on a quarterly basis.

The Committee also receives regular updates on the Houseproud Service and ensures that it assists those homeowners aged 60+ in undertaking necessary improvements and repairs to bring properties up to the decent homes standard.

The Independent Living Service – the provision of aids and adaptations to people who need that sort of help if they are to continue living in their own homes – was sharply criticised by the Audit Commission in May 2005. The Committee has been fully involved in evaluating progress on work to reshape and improve the Independent Living Service and has worked closely with the *Social Care O&S Committee* to ensure that the new assessment process is timely, fair and robust.

Better Services for the City Council's Tenants

A better repairs service has long been agreed as essential. The Committee receives detailed monthly performance monitoring information on the repairs contractors and scrutinises the Repairs and Maintenance Key Performance Indicators Progress Report. It has also invited the contractors in to directly question their performance on a face to face basis and it plays a role in the re-tendering exercises.

The Committee has led the response to concerns regarding the high costs incurred by the Housing Department as a result of disrepair litigation from tenants living in Council owned properties. We instituted regular monitoring of the disrepair litigation function. As a result of this and the improvements made in carrying out repairs more quickly the number of legal actions being taken against the City Council has significantly reduced and the Council is also now much more able to defend itself against unfounded claims.

All of the above and other regular ongoing monitoring the Committee has undertaken has contributed towards the success that the City Council achieved during the Audit Commission Repairs and Maintenance Re-inspection whereby the Housing Service was awarded one star – fair service with promising prospects for improvement.



Involving Birmingham People

The Committee are currently involved in the consultation on the New Tenant Involvement Compact intended to ensure that Birmingham tenants' voices are heard and can help to shape the housing service which they receive. The Committee was also able to consider at a recent "call in" meeting the decision made by the Cabinet Member to serve notice to end the management agreement with Druids Heath Tenant Management Co-operative.

Need a place to live?

Landlord throwing you out?

Can't get on with your parents?

Relationship ended?

Home Options
partnership delivering a quality housing options and advice service

Are you at risk of losing your home? Home Options can help.
Call into your nearest neighbourhood office and let Home Options find the right solution for you.
Birmingham City Council

Tackling Homelessness by Providing Improved Home Options

The Committee itself has broadened its membership beyond Councillors to include two council tenants, one owner occupier, one tenant of a Registered Social Landlord (that is, a Housing Association) and one privately rented sector tenant. Unfortunately although three members were appointed there are currently still two vacancies to be filled (a Registered Social Landlord tenant and a representative from the private rented sector). We are currently recruiting to these vacancies through advertisements in relevant publications.

Improving the Service to Homeless People

Improving homelessness services is one of the City Council's top priorities. The *Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee* has now completed its review which aims to evaluate the current performance on homelessness, assessing the effectiveness of plans and actions to improve performance, within an environment of changing demand. Its report is going to the December Council meeting.



Birmingham: A City for Leisure, Sport and Culture

With this theme, we are helping to promote Birmingham as a City that is known nationally and internationally for the quality of its arts, sport and leisure. Birmingham people should have access to leisure, sport and culture wherever they live, and the opportunity for these activities to enrich their lives.

City Council Funding for Arts Organisations

The City is the home of internationally recognised companies of cultural excellence such as the CBSO and Birmingham Royal Ballet. Many arts organisations receive financial support from the Council, and indeed during 2006 Scrutiny Members made clear to the Executive that the City Council's search for efficiency savings, essential as that is, could not lead to reductions in the support to Birmingham's world-class arts organisations. Scrutiny's intervention resulted in a change of decision by the Cabinet to the budget of these organisations.

Over a period of months, the *Leisure, Sports and Culture O&S Committee* received a series of presentations from the arts organisations. Members were able to establish how Council funding was being used and what benefits were being generated for the City, both in terms of opportunities for residents, including young people and the enhancement of the national and international profile of Birmingham. From November 2006, the Committee will be engaging with the Cabinet Member on an Overview of the funding for the arts for 2007/08.

Review of Sports Development

Birmingham has the reputation of being the most advanced sporting City in Europe. It is essential that we maintain our ability to attract major sporting events and promote sport within the City. The *Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee* is currently evaluating the City's Sports Development Programme. It is looking at the current policies and programmes, the resources available, how we measure the success of the service, how sports development operates at the local level and how the City produces excellence in sports performance.

In this investigation the Committee will be treating sports development as a partnership activity – other organisations, not just the City Council are involved. National and regional sports governing bodies provide policy, advice and expertise. There are also national and regional sources of funding. Above all, as with the arts, there is a network of voluntary organisations which provide sporting opportunities, and we will want to see if these organisations are properly supported and are contributing to the maximum effect. All this is in addition to the performance of the City Council in delivering sports development through its constituency machinery.



In particular the Committee will be looking at ways to improve the service received by particular user groups. There is an important need to increase levels of activity and participation in sport by children, especially in the light of current concerns about obesity. There are also the special needs of the over fifties to maintain fitness and health. We intend to examine how sport can also be made more attractive to other groups with low participation, while at the same time investigating how best to contribute to the preparation of elite performers for events such as the Olympic Games.



Increasing Sporting Opportunities for Children

Preparations for the Olympics 2012

The Committee has received presentations on the measures being put in place to ensure that Birmingham benefits from the international and sporting opportunities being brought to London by the Olympics. It is keeping a watchful eye on the plans for a 50m pool in the City which is considered essential to attract athletes in training.



Birmingham: A Safe City

The whole City Council wants to see Birmingham as a City where people feel safe, whoever they are, wherever they are, and whatever their age. Here we report on our contribution to tackling anti-social behaviour. This theme is also touched on in other sections of this report. For example, our work on the Local Area Agreement will encompass work with the Police and the Community Safety Partnership. Our work with young people (for example, the report on Youth Services) will also help to challenge the perception that young people are always the main perpetrators of disorder.

Promoting Safety

More directly, the *Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee* regularly considers the progress partners are making meeting the City's safety targets. These cover reducing the occurrence of incidents such as burglary and theft, vehicle crime, fire and wounding. During the year, the same Committee has also tracked the implementation of its previous review of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), which led to the appointment for the first time of a CCTV Co-ordinator for Birmingham. The only outstanding matter from the review is the agreement of CCTV technical standards and strategy, where the delay was due to awaiting national guidance from the Home Office.

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour and Bullying in Schools

This review was carried out by the *Education and Lifelong Learning O&S Committee*. We supported the development of overarching behaviour policies to cover such issues as restrictive physical intervention, bullying and truancy.

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour in the Community

In this inquiry, the *Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee* focused on the partnerships that shape not only the City Council's responses to anti-social behaviour, but the Police's, Fire Service's and others. We found some examples of excellent partnership working in the City which is having a real impact on anti-social behaviour, with successful community engagement. We are also grateful to our partners for their contribution to this work, particularly the Police.

However, success is being hindered by the lack of a clear vision that everyone has signed up to, no standard definition of what anti-social behaviour actually is and problems with information sharing.

We hope that the outcomes from this review help improve our response to anti-social behaviour by building upon the good work that is already being carried out, strengthening partnership working across the City and increasing public confidence in the process.



Birmingham: A Green and Sustainable City

This theme is about Birmingham as a City where people can enjoy a clean and green environment, and where natural resources are managed wisely. As the accepted definition of sustainability has it, Birmingham should be a City where meeting the needs of the present does not compromise our ability to meet needs in the future. The impact of climate change and how this can be mitigated or managed forms a serious agenda for politicians and the public alike. Several of our Committees have contributed to improving this aspect of life in Birmingham.

Recycling

The City Council, like other Local Authorities, must tackle the problem of dealing with the increasing amounts of waste and goods which are no longer wanted. Encouraging more recycling is an important element in this, and we are keen that Birmingham increases the percentage of waste recycled.

In January 2006, the *Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee* presented its Scrutiny Review of Recycling: Looking to the Future which:

- Examined the decisions that the Council needs to take to improve its performance on recycling
- Established the perspective that this was not just about 'meeting targets' but was about 'this is the right thing to do'
- Focused attention on the Council's performance in this area and has led to action by the Cabinet Member

More recently, Scrutiny Members have had the opportunity of considering the City Council's emerging Municipal Strategy for Waste. It is fair to say that while many were pleased with the recent innovations in collecting and recycling garden waste, plastics and metal – things have moved on considerably in the last couple of years – longer-term targets were still not seen as being sufficiently ambitious. We will return to this point later in this section.

The same Committee's work on tackling congestion and increasing the use of public transport can also be expected to contribute substantially to reducing air pollution.

Trees in the Public Highway

The City owns 100,000 trees on the highway and the implementation of the first major Private Finance Initiative for Highways Maintenance and Management will dramatically affect the ways that the City's street trees are managed. The *Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee's* review on street trees responded to many people's concerns about tree loss at a time when climate change issues remind us how important trees are.



As a result of the scrutiny review, interdepartmental working has improved and a new organisation called 'Birmingham Trees for Life' has been set up to promote the importance of trees and secure donations from business to plant more of them. It also helped secure an increased budget provision for tree husbandry.



Protecting Our Heritage of Trees is Now a Priority for the City Council

Parks and Open Spaces

The same Committee is now evaluating the City's current arrangements for grass cutting and weed control. It is looking at how the existing service is provided through three Service Provider Partners and the arrangements for the provision of new contracts which expire in 2008. It concentrates on the Grass Cutting and Weed Control services and will examine the Service Delivery Core Standards.

It also looks at how these two services are delivered for parks and open spaces to the Constituencies through Service Level Agreements and how they are delivered to the City's highways, housing, schools, cemeteries and other Council-owned areas. Measures currently in place to monitor the effectiveness of the service are also being evaluated.

Tackling Climate Change and Increasing Sustainability

Over the course of the year there has been growing public knowledge and debate about the problems posed by climate change and the need to tackle the dangers. In Birmingham, the Cabinet has approved a Statement on Sustainability and the Birmingham Strategic Partnership is about to consult on a draft Climate Change Strategy.



Overview and Scrutiny Members are also contributing to this work. A group of interested Members has been meeting as a *Sustainability and Climate Change Task and Finish Committee*. They have discussed with a variety of officers some of the work going on in the Council, and have also heard the views of active citizens through the Sustainability Forum. Over the next few months they will be investigating ways in which the City Council can:

- as a corporate entity (rather than through a single figurehead), provide the leadership on this issue;
- manage its resources more sustainably, in particular encouraging staff to act more sustainably; to improve management of its property and to reduce energy consumption; and to use its £900M annual purchasing power to buy more sustainable goods and services;
- be much more ambitious in changing Birmingham from not just a national and international example of good economic development to a City which also exemplifies sustainable development in all its facets.

The intention is to bring an interim report to the City Council meeting in February 2007 so that all Members have an opportunity to debate and give guidance on the emerging issues. This will set a framework for detailed work by both the Executive and Scrutiny.



An Electric Car in Victoria Square During Environment Week



Improving Our Own Service

Mindful of the old adage “people who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones” it is particularly important for us in the scrutiny team to demonstrate the same professional and ethical standards we expect of those we are reviewing.

So in the spring of 2005/06 the Scrutiny Office undertook surveys to assess opinion of the scrutiny process and scrutiny’s contribution to the Council’s corporate priorities. Specifically, Elected Members, officers and external organisations who had been involved in scrutiny and co-opted members were contacted.

The Member survey was independently carried out by MORI who conducted a telephone survey and gained a response rate of 83% (101 members). This is the highest response rate achieved in recent Council surveys and gives us confidence that these are a genuine reflection of Members’ views. Three-quarters (77%) of Members were positive about their experience in Scrutiny with:

- 86% satisfied or very satisfied with support given by the Scrutiny Office staff
- 82% satisfied or very satisfied with the *opportunity to suggest topics for review*
- 78% satisfied or very satisfied with the *range of issues scrutinised*

In addition, 57% of Members said that they felt satisfied that they could *influence the policies and programmes of the City Council* – the key Scrutiny Performance Plan Indicator.

Officers and representatives of external organisations were asked to complete a paper questionnaire, and 29% and 40% respectively did so. Again, opinion of Scrutiny was positive:

- 80% of Officers were positive about their experience at scrutiny meetings, and in particular were satisfied with the *opportunity to put their point of view and the manner in which the proceedings were conducted*
- 88% of external organisation representatives were positive about their experience at scrutiny meetings, with high satisfaction recorded with the *manner in which the proceedings were conducted* and that *the information provided received full and fair attention by Members of the Committee*

We are now picking up on those areas where we can improve. For example, some officers and external organisation representatives asked for fuller feedback after meetings, greater information about how scrutiny fits in with decision-making and making it easier to identify Members and officers at meetings. Our main emphasis, though, tied in to the point made earlier in this report in the section on “How We Do Our Work” that scrutiny works by influencing the decision-makers, is to develop more ways in which this influence can be brought to bear.



The Scrutiny Route Map

What the Route Map Is

This a concept to explain the breadth of involvement that Overview & Scrutiny can have. Whilst much of our attention in the past has focussed upon Scrutiny Reviews, these are not the only way in which we can get involved and add value. This is not to say that we will cease conducting reviews, simply that there are other kinds of work that Overview & Scrutiny might become involved in. The Route Map helps us in:

- Considering properly how O&S involvement can be positive and add value
- Identifying the best way to get involved in different cases
- Explaining to others what we do

You can see the Route Map on the next page. At the top it shows some of the things that might cause O&S Members to become interested in an issue, such as specific information about problems (e.g. public views, poor performance, financial concerns), or maybe a developing agenda at national level.

Should We Take Up an Issue?

We cannot investigate every issue that comes our way. The nub of the Route Map is to help decide where to focus our efforts through three key questions:

- "Can O&S add value?"
- "Is action needed?"
- "How long have we to respond?"

If the answer to these questions is positive, then the step is to clarify the outcomes and impacts we want. This is about the extent of impact that we are seeking from our involvement. It ranges from highlighting an issue and becoming progressively broader and more significant.

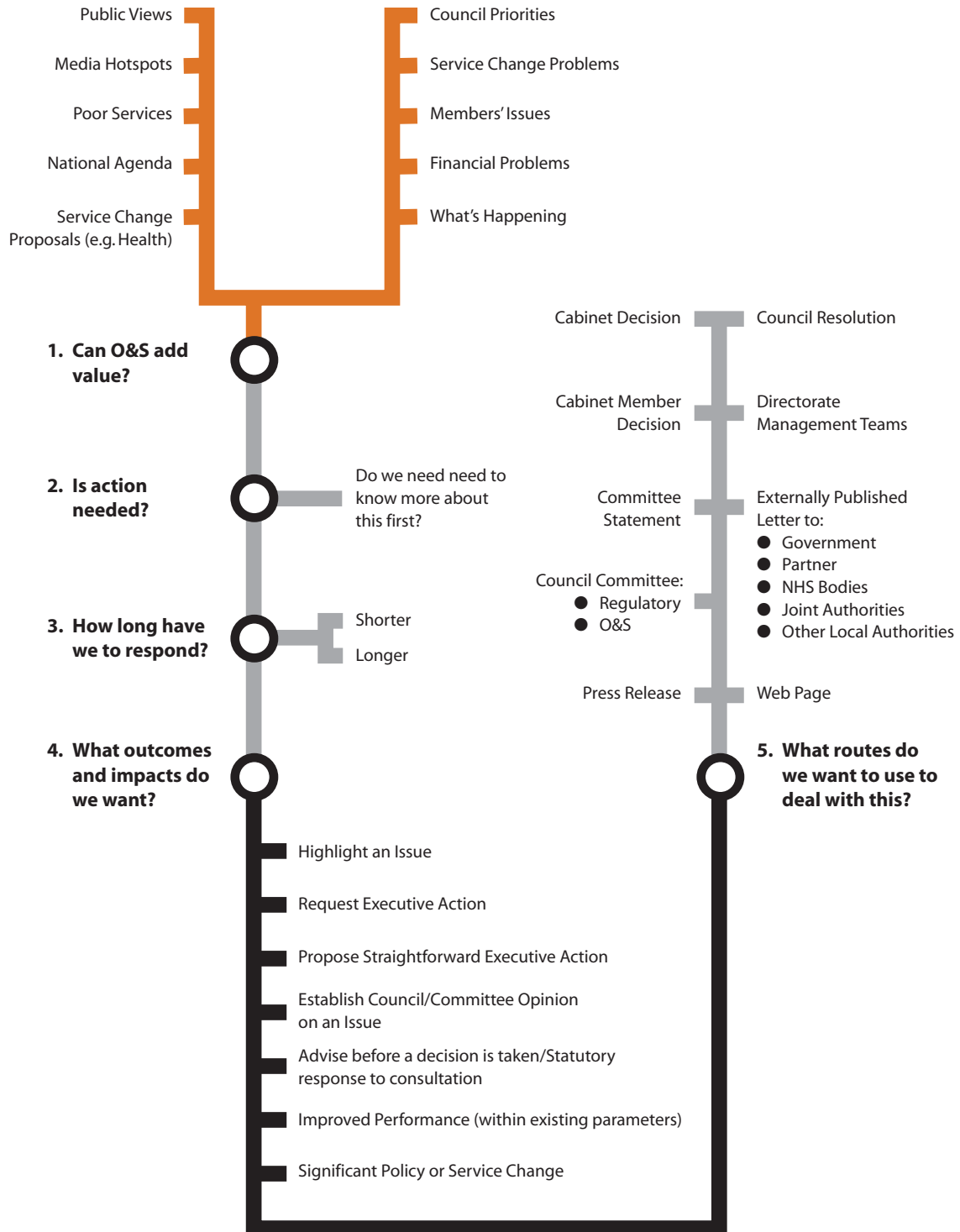
What's the Best Way to Proceed?

Depending on the outcome we want, there can be different routes to take. For example the traditional Scrutiny Review is the route to take when a Committee wishes to investigate a policy or performance topic in depth with a view to suggesting substantial improvements in which the Full Council could be expected to want a say. Other routes would be more appropriate when the issue is simpler and can be tackled more quickly. Outputs are not mutually exclusive; indeed, some of the more significant outcomes might involve the use of several routes to ensure a high profile is obtained.

We will be testing out the Route Map in the coming months and if it succeeds we expect to carry out a greater variety of work over the next twelve months.



Diagram of Route Map





Staff Support

Overview and Scrutiny work is supported by a “mixed–economy” of officers across the Council.

The core of the support comes from the Scrutiny Office – a comparatively well-resourced team of officers who, to underpin their independence, are not part of any Directorate but are organisationally located in the Chief Executive’s immediate area of responsibility. The Scrutiny Office’s work programme is determined by the Chairmen of O&S Committees, with the Chair of the Co-ordinating O&S Committee holding the “conductor’s baton”. These arrangements have worked very well.

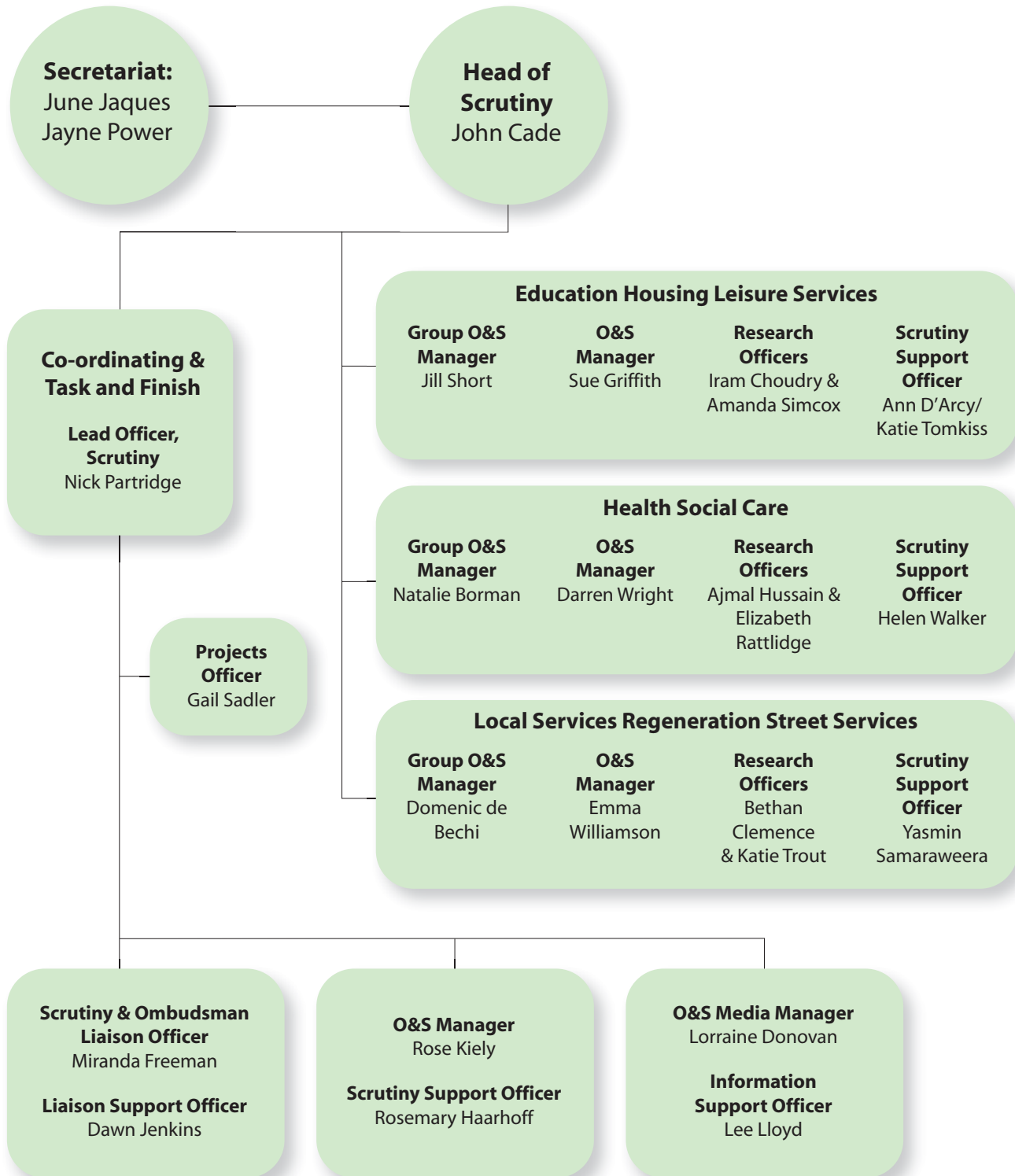
Support also comes from senior officers in the different Directorates (the “Link Officers”). Without their positive help and guidance on the issues under examination, the scrutiny process would be weaker. Finally, each Committee calls on the services of a Committee Manager. Their important roles are to organise and publish the Committee’s agendas and to keep the record of the Committee’s deliberations. A clear record is vital to our work, but equally it must be seen to be accurate. Therefore the Committee Managers are managed independently of either the Scrutiny Office or the Link Officers.



Staff from the Scrutiny Office



Scrutiny Office Structure Chart





A Final Word

John Cade, Head of Scrutiny

I hope you have found our Annual Report of some interest and possibly even, in parts, thought provoking.

For a function such as Overview & Scrutiny, where potentially there is so much that might be examined, we place particular importance on how review topics are identified. The prime intention is either to “add value” to the improvement agenda of the City Council, or to enhance our work with partners. On previous pages you will have seen the route map we have developed to try to show this graphically (like an underground or train map).

Sticking with the transport theme, I personally like to use a variation of the old adage “What will the man on the Clapham omnibus think?” Given the all-City coverage of Travel West Midlands’ number 11 bus, the question I like to ask about potential reviews and investigations is “What will the passenger on the number 11 bus make of it?”

As you can see from the photograph below, Councillor Dow and I take this seriously!!

And finally, we really do welcome your views and opinions. You can contact us:

by post:

The Scrutiny Office
Council House
Victoria Square
Birmingham
B1 1BB

by phone: 0121 675 4010

by email: scrutiny@birmingham.gov.uk

website: www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny



Councillor Alistair Dow and John Cade on the Top of a Number 11 Bus



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Birmingham City Council
on Environmentally
Friendly Paper

