



# Council-owned Assets



A report from Overview & Scrutiny







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Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from [www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny).



# Preface

By Councillor Saima Suleman

**Chair, Economy & Skills Overview & Scrutiny Committee**



Let me start by first paying tribute to former Councillor Lou Robson who, as Chair of this committee, initiated this inquiry and led the evidence-gathering sessions before she left the Council last year. It seems fitting that, having stepped into her shoes as the new councillor in her ward of Hall Green North I am also following in her footsteps as chair of the Economy & Skills Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

I came into Chairing this committee following completion of evidence gathering but it was clear that Lou's passion for the community champions who are often operating against the odds was partly behind her drive to pursue this inquiry and ensure social value was uppermost in everyone's minds, above profit as the sole objective.

I would like to place on record my thanks to the committee members and specifically the cross-party working group who strived to get this report to where we are now because they wanted to improve the service together. My thanks on behalf of the committee also to everyone who gave their time and input – individuals, community groups and supporting organisations. Thank you for your contributions – it was your lived experiences and views that helped the committee understand the issues of those that let, buy or enquire about the Council's estate.

I hope it is not an isolated piece of work but one on which we can collectively build and continue to improve the service for all who use it. There are a number of issues raised as suggestions for further work which were not part of the final recommendations, but which would merit a closer look, such as procurement restrictions and community capacity-building. I would welcome an opportunity to explore these and other ways of working with local members and their communities with the Executive and fellow Scrutiny Chairs for optimal collaboration.

The pandemic has really demonstrated the value of smaller businesses and community organisations – from those little corner shops in communities that kept people going when the supermarket shelves were empty to the community centres adapting and opening their premises for food delivery hubs and pop up vaccination centres. We need to show them that we recognise them and their value to society.

Councillor Saima Suleman

**Chair, Economy & Skills Overview & Scrutiny Committee**



# Summary of Recommendations

Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	As part of a health check on the Property Strategy, the Leader is asked to review the progress made on the analysis and development of the community portfolio.	Leader of the Council	September 2022
R02	Recognising the key role many community organisations played in response to the Covid-19 crisis, and the impact the pandemic had on so many local centres and high streets, the Leader is asked to ensure that the Chief Executive and Director of Strategy, Equalities and Partnerships develop a clear strategic framework for community wealth building and inclusive growth, based on the Levelling Up strategy.	Leader of the Council	September 2022
R03	The Leader is asked to explore and implement transparent, open and consultative ways in which communities and ward councillors can be better involved in decisions around assets in the community portfolio. The Executive is also asked to think about how it can actively support communities to have a say in the future of their neighbourhood and report back to Committee in September 2022.	Leader of the Council  Cabinet Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods	September 2022
R04	The Leader to ensure Birmingham Property Services (BPS) improve the channels of communication and engagement with existing tenants and prospective buyers, by creating a portal on their website with access to information and deadlines, signposting to "how to" guides and help with navigating the process from start to finish.	Leader of the Council	June 2022
R05	The Leader to ask BPS to streamline the process for bidding and improve communications with those involved in the bidding process, providing clear timelines for response and full disclosure of appropriate information required by tenants and buyers to submit a bid, and provide feedback on unsuccessful bids.	Leader of the Council	June 2022
R06	That an assessment of progress against the recommendations in this report be presented to the appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee by no later than 30 September 2022.	Leader of the Council	September 2022



# 1 Introduction and Purpose of Inquiry

- 1.1.1 The City Council owns 26,000 acres, including 40% of all land within the municipal boundary, and around 6,500 property assets (excluding housing, infrastructure and schools). The property portfolio has an asset value of over £2.4 billion and generates £32 million in revenue and £30 million in capital receipts. Of those 6,500 property assets, 330 have historic interest and value.
- 1.1.2 In the foreword to the Property Strategy taken to Cabinet on 13 November 2018, the Leader and then Assistant Director for Inclusive Growth stated
- “By launching this Property Strategy we are taking a long-term strategic approach to how we utilise our unique asset base ensuring we maximise commercial and social returns by re-aligning the City Council’s property to act as a catalyst for development and underpin the social fabric of communities across the city.”
- 1.1.3 This inquiry came about following cases raised amongst members of the Committee and their colleagues about the experiences of people or organisations seeking to buy or rent from the Council. The Committee considered what strategies form the basis of decisions taken by Birmingham Property Services (BPS) in managing the Council’s assets and asked what improvements could be made to the service for the benefit of the Council, its tenants and prospective buyers.
- 1.1.4 Furthermore, the inquiry sought to ask what more could the Council do, through the use and management of its property estate, to ensure small and medium-sized businesses, community organisations and enterprises can play a full part in the city’s economic development and regeneration.
- 1.1.5 In particular it sought to explore the weighting of social value as against financial gain applied by the Council in decisions taken regarding the Council’s assets and estate management, both historically and in a post-Covid-19 economy.
- 1.1.6 Two years on from the launch of the Property Strategy, this inquiry additionally sought to scrutinise progress made against the objectives set out for its delivery.
- 1.1.7 The Terms of Reference of the Inquiry set out to:
- Establish the extent and status of BCC-owned assets as a baseline;
  - Compare progress made on 2018-22 Property Strategy against the aims set out in 2019, to include rationalisation of stock; and the work of the Property & Assets Board and sub-boards;
  - Explore experiences of tenants and prospective purchasers (including SMEs and community organisations) around the entire estate management process to include negotiating and maintaining tenancies, the sale process, and Assets of Community Value listing;



- Explore, by comparison with other local authorities and reviewing research including into community wealth-building, how the Council, the city's businesses and community organisations can get the most out of its property assets, with particular reference to economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and inclusion in local regeneration programmes;
- Explore how Council management of property assets could contribute to wider economic strategies, such as the East Birmingham Inclusive Growth; job retention schemes; job creation; skills and training, looking explicitly at how property contributes to supporting communities and local economies; and
- Explore any equalities considerations.

## 1.2 Our Approach

- 1.2.1 Before the evidence gathering sessions in November and December 2020, the Committee put out a call for evidence that included an e-mail to all elected members, information on social media and the Council's website. As a result, there were three online livestreamed evidence sessions featuring presentations from the Leader of the Council, the interim Chief Executive, the Assistant Director of Birmingham Property Services and representatives of national, regional and local organisations, as well as individuals and businesses. In addition, 20 pieces of written evidence were submitted to the Committee for consideration.
- 1.2.2 At the Committee's meeting on 27th January 2021, members heard again from the Leader of the Council and had the opportunity to pose questions to him following the previous evidence gathering sessions. A thought-provoking presentation from the Interim Chief Executive, Chris Naylor, on a new approach to property, assets and investment and Jamie Ounan from Innercircle Consulting, exploring national examples of good practice in property development and asset management coupled with social value objectives was also given.
- 1.2.3 Members would like to thank those who provided evidence to the Committee both in writing and in person at an evidence gathering session.

## 1.3 Key Question

- 1.3.1 Through the call for evidence the inquiry sought to answer the key question "What more could the Council do, through the use and management of its property estate, to ensure small and medium-sized businesses and community organisations and enterprises can play a full part in the city's economic development and regeneration?"
- 1.3.2 Members acknowledged that a balance was needed between generating income for the Council and the need to invest in local communities and build on social value in particular by many of the smaller community organisations and others carrying out vital work in supporting local people. The latter





has been critically apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic where community organisations have proved to be the vital link between local residents and the Council.

- 1.3.3 Furthermore, the Council needs to think about how it can actively support communities to have a say in the future of their neighbourhoods and for smaller enterprises to have a fair chance to engage in property development opportunities.
- 1.3.4 The Property Strategy is structured around four key themes: Investment; Growth and Development; Community; and Operational which set out an approach to guide how assets will be utilised efficiently and effectively to achieve the identified objectives and outputs. The examples cited in Appendix 1 cross multiple categories, which has been acknowledged by Cabinet.



## 2 Contributions to the Inquiry

### 2.1 Birmingham Property Services (BPS)

2.1.1 Members heard from the Leader of the Council and from the Assistant Director of Birmingham Property Services twice during the evidence gathering sessions and received a substantial amount of supporting information detailing assets contained within the community portfolio, sales figures and Cabinet reports pertaining to the inquiry. An analysis of the evidence and commentary from BPS can be found in more detail in Appendix 2.

2.1.2 Members appreciated that the experiences of organisations, businesses and individuals vary greatly and acknowledged that responses to a public call for evidence will invariably highlight more negative than positive experiences. BPS deal with thousands of properties, assets, tenants and developers on a daily basis, and the Committee recognised the excellent work being done to protect and gain best value for the city from its assets. Members wanted to identify what is good practice, as a landlord and a property manager, and where improvements might be made to maximise economic and social value, where appropriate, whilst acknowledging the good practice in existence already within the Council.

### 2.2 A National Perspective on Good Practice

2.2.1 The inquiry was fortunate to also receive written submissions from several national and regional specialist organisations focusing on communities and asset management, ranging from the National Trust and Locality through to Localise West Midlands and West Midlands Urban Community Homes.

2.2.2 Interim Chief Executive, Chris Naylor, was joined by Jamie Ounan from Innercircle Consulting for a thought-provoking presentation and subsequent discussion on how the Council might “invest in our future” for the purpose of economic growth. Mr Naylor said:

“To raise the living standards of all citizens: So, we are talking about an impactful approach to understanding and accelerating practical ways to make the city more economically prosperous, particularly for those at the bottom of the income distribution.

A just city must also be a liveable city. Hence, we are also talking about decarbonising, halting and reversing ecological impacts for the good of people, the place and the planet.”



- 2.2.3 They reflected on the current position of the Council and the city in terms of the impact of austerity and how local government has had to react to that over the past decade, set against the backdrop of huge city growth that has not translated into wealth which has been retained by the city. They highlighted the opportunities afforded by HS2 and the 2022 Commonwealth Games, and how important it will be to make sure that the prosperity generated by such opportunities is shared equally across the city, geographically and socially.
- 2.2.4 Members were encouraged by the approach proposed to use Council-owned land and assets to achieve goals ranging from home building, tackling carbon emissions, social reinvestment and income generation whilst also reconsidering what we mean by “value for money” and “return on investment”. This is a theme we will return to in section 1.5 of Appendix 1.

## 2.3 Evidential experience of tenants and prospective buyers

- 2.3.1 Evidence was received in writing from individuals acting in a personal capacity, from community groups interested in local assets for community use, from developers, heritage groups, local members, national charities and organisations as well as existing Council tenants. A list of those who submitted evidence can be found on page 14.
- 2.3.2 Oral evidence was presented through virtual evidence gathering sessions utilising the Microsoft Teams platform and livestreamed via the Council’s web-streaming service on 11th November and 9th December 2020 and 27th January 2021.

## 2.4 Key Findings

- 2.4.1 Evidence received in advance and in person at the sessions largely reflected negative or frustrated experiences, which is perhaps not unexpected in terms of the motivation behind people contributing to an inquiry of this nature.
- 2.4.2 The issues highlighted have been grouped into the following themes as there was distinct crossover among the evidence collected from contributors:
- Communications from BPS
  - Partnership working with wards and councillors
  - Maintenance of assets and procurement
  - Joined up approach with other Council services and treatment of community buyers
  - Value and how it is defined
  - Role of community organisations in economic recovery
- 2.4.3 These are set out in detail in Appendix 1 and contributed to the recommendations identified.



## 3 Conclusion and Next Steps

- 3.1.1 The Committee will add the recommendations as set out at the beginning of this report and below to its work programme and commit to tracking them to the deadlines agreed with the Executive.
- 3.1.2 Whilst there is evidence of good practice within the Council and a commitment to address issues identified, there are also examples of good practice in other local authorities, such as Preston and Manchester, as well as other organisations that Birmingham can learn from closer to home, like Witton Lodge Community Association. A joined-up approach with a strong asset transfer policy is imperative to successful community asset transfers and this includes good principles based on long term partnership collaboration and commissioning. This is something which the Committee would encourage the Executive to explore in more depth.
- 3.1.3 The Committee found issues with compliance and governance in particular with the overall Property Strategy and disposal reports to Cabinet, in that they were not aligned with other key drivers such as the Community Cohesion Strategy, Birmingham Development Plan, East Birmingham Growth Strategy or localism and neighbourhood work. We suggest that this needs to be revised in line with the Cabinet report on 'Investing In Our Future' as part of a health check part way through the strategy lifecycle (R01) and ensure that surplus property procedures do not remain opaque and unscrutinised.

<b>R01</b>	As part of a health check on the Property Strategy, the Leader is asked to review the progress made on the analysis and development of the community portfolio.	Leader of the Council	September 2022
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- 3.1.4 The Committee would wish to see the Property Strategy more fully aligned to the Council's holistic agenda, not being seen simply as having a sole, revenue-generation function. These assets are part of how the Council can deliver for the people of Birmingham and should be seen (and assessed) as such. Assets often 'sit' within directorates and therefore risk being silo-ed rather than joining up to support multiple Council agendas. In addition, the Committee wishes to see more collaboration with elected members in making local decisions around local assets and in developing neighbourhood plans post Covid (R02 & R03).

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<b>R02</b>	Recognising the key role many community organisations played in response to the Covid-19 crisis, and the impact the pandemic had on so many local centres and high streets, the Leader is asked to ensure that the Chief Executive and Director of Strategy, Equalities and Partnerships develop a clear strategic framework for community wealth building and	Leader of the Council	September 2022



Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
	inclusive growth, based on the Levelling Up strategy.		
<b>R03</b>	The Leader is asked to explore and implement transparent, open and consultative ways in which communities and ward councillors can be better involved in decisions around assets in the community portfolio. The Executive is also asked to think about how it can actively support communities to have a say in the future of their neighbourhood and report back to Committee in September 2022.	Leader of the Council  Cabinet Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods	September 2022

3.1.5 Communication is clearly key to relationships with tenants and prospective buyers, as well as with elected members, and the Committee welcomes the commitment made in the 27th January 2021 meeting by the Assistant Director of Property to address existing identified communications issues and seek ways in which the Council can be more open, transparent and inclusive in its dealings (R04).

<b>R04</b>	The Leader to ensure Birmingham Property Services (BPS) improve the channels of communication and engagement with existing tenants and prospective buyers, by creating a portal on their website with access to information and deadlines, signposting to "how to" guides and help with navigating the process from start to finish.	Leader of the Council	June 2022
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3.1.6 In addition, the Committee requested the Leader explore streamlining the process for bidding and improving communications with those involved in the bidding process, to include feedback on unsuccessful bids. Clear timelines for response and full disclosure of appropriate information required by tenants and buyers was also cited as a needed improvement to the service as evidence was presented that suggested this was not consistent and could have led to more favourable outcomes for bidders and the Council had it been received at the time (R05).

Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
<b>R05</b>	The Leader to ask BPS to streamline the process for bidding and improve communications with those involved in the bidding process, providing clear timelines for response and full disclosure of appropriate information required by tenants and buyers to submit a bid, and provide feedback on unsuccessful bids.	Leader of the Council	June 2022
<b>R06</b>	That an assessment of progress against the recommendations in this report be presented to the appropriate Overview & Scrutiny	Leader of the Council	September 2022



Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Committee by no later than 30 September 2022.		

### **Motion**

That the recommendations R01 to R06 be approved, and that the Executive be requested to pursue their implementation with an initial assessment brought to Overview & Scrutiny no later than 30 September 2022.



Members of the Committee would like to thank all those who gave their time and contributed to this report with verbal or written evidence:

- Cllr Ian Ward, Leader of the Council
- Cllr Phil Davis as Jewellery Quarter Development Trust chair and Heritage Champion
- Cllr Shabrana Hussain, Sparkbrook ward
- Cllr Zhor Malik, Balsall Heath West ward
- Cllr Karen McCarthy, Bournbook and Selly Park ward
- Chris Naylor, Interim Chief Executive
- Kathryn James, Assistant Director, Property Services, Birmingham City Council
- Karen Cheney, Integrated Head of Services for the Neighbourhood Support and Development Unit
- Jamie Ounan, Innercircle consulting
- John Newson, Balsall Heath is our Planet
- Birmingham Friends of the Earth (BFOE)
- Aylesford Hall Committee
- Patricia Hollinshead, Manningford Hall
- Stuart Holt, Javelin Block
- Barry Toon & Richard Batley, Community Partnership 4 Selly Oak (CP4SO)
- Janet Down, Stechford Baptist Church
- Mohammed Shafique, Ashiana
- Alex McDonagh, Montgomery Street Cooperative
- Sue Fownes, Friends Institute
- Lois Maguire, Northfield Neighbourhood Network Scheme
- Abigail Ryan, West Midlands Urban Community Homes
- Meena Bharadwa, Locality
- John Morris, Localise West Midlands
- Matt Doran, Lucy Reid – National Trust
- Joe Holyoak, Friends of Moseley Road Baths and Birmingham and West Midlands Group of the Victorian Society



# Appendix 1: Contributions to the Inquiry

The experiences witnessed by the inquiry are in large part reflective of cases raised with members locally and can be grouped into the broad categories set out below.

## 1.1 Communication from Birmingham Property Services (BPS)

- 1.1.1 Much of the evidence presented suggested that communication with the service is clearly a key issue. Organisations, individuals and councillors repeatedly raised the frustration they experienced in obtaining consistent and helpful information from the service in respect of assets for sale or rental or in progressing maintenance issues.
- 1.1.2 Those giving evidence emphasised that a lack of communication and feedback on failed bids was also of major concern, especially when compared to their dealings with other core cities.
- 1.1.3 Members heard that those interested in acquiring a building for charitable and community benefit would find it helpful if a list of available assets and buildings were published ahead of being put up for sale. This would enable those interested (such as community groups, SMEs, entrepreneurs and others) to make an informed choice with advanced notice. This was a point reiterated by Matt Doran and Lucy Reid from the National Trust in their written submission. They also observed that providing clear signposting for organisations to know who to approach within the Council would be of great benefit. It would also help transparency as it was felt that currently there was no community or tenant consultation before buildings appear on an auction site.
- 1.1.4 Wide-ranging evidence was presented by community organisations and tenants that back this up:
- Written evidence submitted by tenants of the Friends' Institute outlined a plethora of issues exacerbated by poor communication with them as tenants and then prospective buyers, ranging from lack of notice of closure of the building due to Covid-19 (when tenants could have provided much needed emergency help for the community from there if they had been permitted to access the building) through to not having been informed about the changes being brought about by disposal of the building through the "submission of interest" process, despite having made an initial submission, and exclusion of tenants from promotion of council-organised events highlighting the venue. Other issues are highlighted under the Maintenance of Assets section below from 1.3 onwards.
  - Montgomery Street Co-operative is a diverse group of around 25 enterprises employing up to 80 people. They rent small affordable units from Birmingham City Council (BCC) at the Montgomery Street Business Centre on the Grand Union Canal at Sparkbrook. The site is Birmingham's last remaining business start-up hub. Members heard from Alex McDonagh on behalf of the Co-operative about some of the issues in relation to the future of their premises





that has led to uncertainty and anxiety, such as attempts to sell the site without consultation with them as sitting tenants.

- Communication failures, including no acknowledgement of a letter from the local MP in support of the Co-operative to Birmingham Property Services (BPS) and the Assistant Director of Inclusive Growth as well as a lack of consultation with members of the cooperative around the sale of the site were cited.

1.1.5 More generally, lack of a “golden thread” of two-way communication with BPS through application processes was also raised by many submissions, with applicants unclear about where their proposal had stalled or failed and the reasons why, and sometimes never finding out the final result.

1.1.6 There was strong acknowledgement across the board that there are good officers who are working hard, and of the impact that Covid-19 has made to day-to-day work, but balanced against that is the frustration that they perceive that BPS does not recognise that community cohesion is a priority for the Council, and that community proposals could have contributed towards that goal and helped to build strong communities in many cases.

1.1.7 Examples of this were provided by a number of witnesses, including Javelin Block, the Jewellery Quarter Development Trust and the community groups attempting to purchase the Stechford Cascades site and the library in Selly Oak:

- Giving evidence on 9th December 2020, Stuart Holt of Javelin Block expressed his disappointment over his bid for a property in the Jewellery Quarter to build a contemporary art gallery whilst retaining existing tenants and restoring the building. While he accepted his bid had not been successful, he was frustrated at the lack of engagement with his company by the Council to identify alternative properties for such a high-profile venture, or an exploration of why the bid had been unsuccessful in the first place. He was left with the impression that there was no appetite to invest in young people in the city and felt that his interactions with BPS had been “amateurish”.
- Representing the Jewellery Quarter Development Trust, Cllr Philip Davis also attended the inquiry session on 9th December 2020 and shared a similar story of frustration about efforts by a joint venture partnership which included ward councillors and the local Business Improvement District (and subsequently a commercial partner) to acquire for development a site at Vyse Street Triangle for a design and skills centre focusing on the heritage of the Jewellery Quarter and the concentration of associated businesses there.
- There were some concerns from the applicants that the Council’s sales prospectus misrepresented the local planning regime and the Jewellery Quarter Conservation Area requirements. When the application proved unsuccessful, no response to their proposal seeking dialogue on a partnership alternative to a purely “highest bidder” sale was received. Furthermore, Cllr Davis stated,



“While we have seen improvements at Birmingham Property Services in the last few years concerning transparency and communications with local organisations, there appears to be no effective mechanism at BPS allowing them to consider property deals, sales and partnerships that, in a limited number of cases, recognise both the commercial and community value of particular sites.”

- Janet Down is a management consultant who has been working with Stechford Baptist Church and others in the local community in bidding for the site of the former Stechford Cascades Leisure Centre. In her evidence to the Committee on 9th December 2020, Ms Down echoed the disappointment expressed by other contributors at a perceived lack of pace and ability to envision the opportunities they could see for community ventures in a deprived ward. Poor communication was again listed as a contributory factor to the frustration in failing to make progress, with applicants finding out second-hand about proposals to use the site for housing. They detected a lack of joined-up working/coordination amongst different departments and officers within BCC (see section 1.4 for further information).
- Mohammed Shafique from Sparkbrook-based community organisation Ashiana gave several examples at the 9th December 2020 session of poor communication from BPS when the organisation was trying to acquire buildings, including some in poor state of repair which they offered to improve. In these examples Mr Shafique again expressed frustration at requests being ignored, alleged false information was given about the provenance of buildings and he questioned the consistency of BPS’s decision-making process where some properties appeared to be sold below market value or without being openly advertised. He had worked closely with ward councillors in pursuing some of these applications. In her evidence to the session, Meena Bharadwa from Locality praised the work of Ashiana as a beacon of best practice as a community anchor organisation helping with a rapid response to the current crisis.

1.1.8 BPS Officers acknowledged that communication is an area which needs improvement, both in terms of promotion of properties for disposal but also with ward councillors and tenants. The response from BPS is presented in more detail in Appendix 2.

1.1.9 In his contribution Interim Chief Executive Chris Naylor shared a vision for how the Council could address the disconnect between how it has historically operated and how it should, by suggesting the Council seeks to increase the size and skills of Capital Delivery, Property Management and Building Development teams; develop creative minds who can identify the opportunities; and harness collaborative minds to work with communities to realise opportunities. He further advocated for persuasive communicators who can ensure the Government continues to invest in our infrastructure; commercial minds that can negotiate the deals that fit with the Inclusive Growth ethos; tenacious minds who are outstanding at execution – ensuring schemes are built to high standards; and creative asset managers who can manage with the inclusive growth ethos: meanwhile blending commercial rents for those that can afford it with alternative models that bring social and community benefits.



## 1.2 Partnership working with wards and councillors

- 1.2.1 Good ward councillors know their wards, businesses and community groups, hopefully better than anyone. Evidence received by the inquiry from a number of ward councillors from all parties suggested that it is not routine that they are informed in any detail about property or land in their wards owned by the Council or being made available for sale apart from a very brief tick-box exercise shortly before disposals are approved.
- 1.2.2 John Newson representing community group “Balsall Heath is our Planet” worked with local ward member Councillor Shabrana Hussain to object about the sale of a small plot of land which provides access to a park in the ward. No one had been aware the plot of land was available for sale, and even the new owner has subsequently discovered it is impossible to develop it, since it is shown as part of the park in the Neighbourhood Plan, hence planning permission to build on it has been refused. If it had been flagged prior to sale, these issues might have come to light and its sale avoided. As a result, it has now been left unused.
- 1.2.3 Selly Oak and Bournbrook ward Councillor Karen McCarthy presented written evidence to the inquiry about the uneven experiences with well-loved buildings in her ward, since the disposal process does not always connect well with covenants and the planning process. For example, local residents are unhappy that the Selly Oak Institute has ended up as a furniture warehouse, despite understanding that the disposal limited future use to educational or community uses.
- 1.2.4 Royal British Legion Kings Norton is a local landmark in Druids Heath. The land is owned by the Council on a long-term lease. The Legion and Social Club have been closed for a number of years, and the site has lain derelict. Plans for a Chinese restaurant have fallen through due to Covid. The site is the subject of much local interest. However, getting information about the status of the site, and the leaseholder’s plans from BPS, has not always proven straightforward. This has improved recently but is still reliant on a proactive approach from the local councillor, Councillor Julien Pritchard, rather than having a system for keeping councillors and the local community updated.

## 1.3 Maintenance of assets and procurement

- 1.3.1 In its early days in the 1980s, Montgomery Street Business Centre was managed by what was then the Council’s Economic Development Department. The site was well maintained and managed with picnic tables, planted areas and a patrolled security presence. Later, in the 2010s, management was transferred to BPS. The submission asserted that this change in management brought with it a decline in the material condition of the site and a lack of transparency and accountability. Tenants were repeatedly told by the estate manager that there was ‘no money in the budget to carry out repairs on site’, and that the rationale for the disposal of the site was based on the fact that the costs of managing it outweighed the revenue generated. Many tenants chose to rent units from the Council



on the basis that they assumed a public and civic landlord would have more integrity than private landlords and it would be a "safe bet for us to grow our enterprises there".<sup>1</sup>

- 1.3.2 Evidence presented to the Committee detailed a number of issues including a broken security gate which has resulted in the site being plagued by anti-social behaviour, theft and fly-tipping. Tenants were contacted by the estate manager shortly after the gate was broken and asked to raise £20,000 themselves to pay for the cost of the replacement but they were not permitted to source repairs themselves due to the Council's procurement procedures. The security gate remains broken and unlockable five years later and the alternative security measures are inadequate. In addition, tenants have had to undertake essential urgent repairs to roofs and windows themselves rather than wait for the Council to act.
- 1.3.3 Hollymoor Community Centre in south Birmingham faces a similar issue with the Council's procurement rules making it difficult to carry out affordable repairs. It is currently used as a nursery and local community centre, however it is being underutilised due to a broken boiler system and major outstanding roof repairs. Staff at the centre obtained three separate quotations from the private sector for repair of the boiler, which ranged from £60,000 to £90,000. However, the Council's contracted supplier quoted £425,000 for the same repair. Through this inquiry it has become apparent that this isn't an isolated example but could be a significant reason for many Council assets being neglected across the City Council's extensive property portfolio. The centre has much potential to be a real asset for the community and the local councillor felt it would be beneficial to allow them to apply for funding directly from the Council to pay for repair costs, thereby saving the Council significant costs, creating social value and generating a healthy return on investment for the Council in the long term. Unfortunately, legal restrictions mean that this approach is not permitted where the Council is the landlord of a property and is bound within our legal obligations around procurement and the use of approved specific contractors.
- 1.3.4 Tenants at the Friends Institute in Highgate (Love Light Healing Trust) also highlighted various issues as tenants in their written submission and noted their constant fear of the premises being sold for development whilst they were undertaking many repairs and improvements at their own cost, as well as not being allowed to repair the heating and hot water system themselves due to the aforementioned procurement restrictions that Montgomery Street and Hollymoor tenants faced, which resulted in some members leaving the project.
- They discovered essential repairs were necessary throughout the entire building to make it a safe and accommodating space for the community, from the bad state of walls, doors and floors in each room, to no electricity in some rooms (or dangerous electrics, if present).
  - Upon further investigation one of the Trust's founding members (a professional builder and roofer) assessed that the "Caretaker's Flat" part of the property in particular was in a seriously dilapidated state, having been empty for five years. The Trust had plans to refurbish the

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<sup>1</sup> Written submission by Montgomery Street Co-Operative



house to its original era as a heritage project, with a functioning educational community kitchen with a low carbon retro-refit; re-instate the original fireplace/range and use the kitchen to serve the tenants of the Friends Institute as it had done and enable them to revive the cafe.

- The Grade II listed status required careful considerate work on an already very abandoned property, and the Trust had not anticipated the amount of problems that needed remedy. They were unable to secure the financial resources to relieve some of the financial burden which was compounded by the Council not allowing them to replace the heating system themselves. On top of these issues was the ever-present fear of the termination of the lease and the property being sold.

1.3.5 There are multiple examples of Council-owned buildings not in use due to health and safety-related issues and so community groups cannot use these assets. However, the Committee were told that the costs associated with repair and maintenance are prohibitive to local groups if they are obliged to use the Council's procured provider (Acivico), and this has proved to be too expensive in comparison to the market price for the same service. In addition to this, submissions referred to continuing maintenance problems on assets leased from the Council. With the Council under severe financial pressure, there is an unavoidable tension between revenue savings and capital receipts through the sale of Council assets. With assets sold it relieves the ongoing costs of maintenance associated with ownership and it was felt that this was an option that was favoured by the Council in most cases.

1.3.6 Members were concerned that where assets have been neglected and sold off at a lower value it ultimately costs the Council money in lost potential revenue. This is of particular concern with historic and landmark buildings and those where repair costs are affected by a conservation deficit.

## 1.4 Joined up approach with other Council services and treatment of community buyers

1.4.1 Examples provided by Northfield Neighbourhood Network Scheme indicated that the constituency has numerous empty or underused venues while those in use save the public sector purse thousands of pounds by offering local services and keeping people in their own homes longer, supporting mental health as well as physical health.

1.4.2 Community buyers told the inquiry that they feel undervalued by the Council when they are outbid or expected to "jump through hoops" to no avail when trying to find a venue. Further, they report that communication with Housing and Property Services teams is difficult and costs are high, or groups are expected to take on responsibility for full building maintenance, rent, bills, utilities and then try and get funding for staffing, which can result in projects failing to get off the ground.

1.4.3 There is also a perception that corporate purchasers get better treatment from BPS. For example, Tiverton Baths was disposed of speedily to University of Birmingham, who have reopened it as a gym.



It is taking far longer to get agreement for local community groups in the same area to take on the old Selly Oak library building, despite the conditions and covenants ruling out most other uses.

- 1.4.4 Community Partnership 4 Selly Oak (CP4SO) wanted to revive a cluster of Grade II listed buildings including the abandoned Selly Oak Library as an Asset of Community Value. They stated that there had been no upkeep, care or maintenance by the Council and the site had been vandalised. There remain outstanding issues around the status of the site and the Charity Commission and Trust which are yet to be fully resolved and communications between various parts of the Council and CP4SO have been patchy and not joined up. Once again, the question raised by a community organisation was whether the market price counts for more than the social value of an asset.
- 1.4.5 Locality were commissioned by the Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit (NDSU) to carry out research with a sample of small and medium-sized community organisations and key stakeholders across Birmingham in June 2020. Two of the key aims of the work were to understand relationship changes between community organisations and the Council brought about by the Covid-19 crisis and to identify the roles community organisations can play in city-wide recovery, in tandem with relevant agendas such as inclusive growth.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.4.6 The report referenced responses which indicated how they had experienced a “commercial” approach to Community Asset Transfer rather than one focused on a long-term investment in a community organisation. One stakeholder observed a difference in relationships between the “social” and “economic” side of the Council, and others said they struggled to build relationships with the Council.
- 1.4.7 Community organisations were keen to highlight learning from this crisis period to support a changing relationship with the Council. They spoke about the need for more investment for and recognition of local infrastructure. Some of the organisations had been the local connector for many years; supporting the development of resident-led and smaller community organisations and questioned the logic of not starting with the community when deciding Council strategy.

## 1.5 Value and how it is defined (level playing field)

- 1.5.1 In her evidence the Integrated Head of Services for the Neighbourhood Support and Development Unit (NSDU) Karen Cheney, told the inquiry about the development of a bespoke toolkit to measure the social value of an organisation and impact of a proposed Community Asset Transfer which valued and measured activities previously not valued or undervalued against the Council’s current priorities. Whilst by no means perfect, the tool does emphasise the need to take account of the contribution and value of organisations and their tangible worth in the delivery of desired outcomes in the community or neighbourhoods.

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<sup>2</sup> Locality (2020) “Birmingham’s Collaborative Neighbourhoods: A snapshot of the community-led response to coronavirus and what this means for resetting the civic and community relationship”



- 1.5.2 Inequalities in relation to ownership of assets was highlighted as part of the inquiry. The Council's priorities and objectives include improving inequality and encouraging growth in deprived areas such as East Birmingham and it was suggested that the city could use Community Asset Transfer (CAT) as a way of addressing this and improving local regeneration, as well as requiring consideration of wider social value in commercial disposals.
- 1.5.3 National Trust's written submission recommended the Council seek to actively engage partners and stakeholders in Birmingham and beyond, to look – actively – at how the whole portfolio can deliver for the people of Birmingham and not just in terms of monetary value:
- “Opportunities for different types of revenue generation and public benefit are being missed, where some collective and creative thinking could transform these assets for the benefit of communities, for different forms of revenue generation, and for the betterment of the city's significant heritage estate – e.g. assets in parks such as Cannon Hill which are currently liabilities, but could easily be transformed to generate income to support the park.”
- 1.5.4 Moseley Road Baths (MRB) is a case in point. It is a local resource highly valued by the community, which has contributed greatly for over one hundred years to community cohesion and community health in Balsall Heath but for many years was threatened with closure by the Council as the costs of repairing and maintaining it became untenable. A successful campaign was mounted to save the baths and has created a community asset run by the community for the community with the Council as a partner in the coalition. As Trustee for the Moseley Road Baths CIO, Joe Holyoak, said
- “In Balsall Heath, a deprived district in many ways, MRB has become an element of local pride, and a promise for a better future. Although there is yet a long way to go, it is a remarkable case study of what can be achieved when the Council replaces a negative approach with a positive and cooperative approach and works creatively together with other ambitious partners towards a shared target of community benefit and environmental improvement.”
- 1.5.5 Aylesford Hall is a volunteer-run community hall in Shard End. As a non-profit organisation, it can offer lower hire rates, in keeping with the needs of the local community. It is an essential and invaluable beacon of the local community and has been for many years. It is exceptionally well-managed and maintained, with minimal intervention from the Council, and at virtually no cost to the city of Birmingham. In these unprecedented times, communities need hope and support, which can be found through community venues like this. They hope that Birmingham City Council recognises that the ever-changing needs of society does not always mean the need for change. Sometimes it needs things to stay as they are, to offer familiarity and reliability.



“What would there be to gain if Aylesford Hall were to be sold off? A relatively small sum of money for a tiny piece of land, where a couple of shoe-box houses could be built, not ideally suited to the family requirements in the area”.<sup>3</sup>

- 1.5.6 Similarly, at Manningford Hall in Druids Heath there is a fear among community users that the property’s future is not safe. There is no evidence that this is the case. However, the reliance on these community venues that are often run by volunteers from within the community has become even more apparent during the response to the pandemic. People are therefore naturally protective of these long-standing and familiar assets that are often the only free or low-cost and community-based source of support, education and public activities.
- 1.5.7 Montgomery Street Co-operative told the Committee that they not only provide resources and mutual support for economic resilience in the deprived area of Sparkbrook, but opportunities for community wealth generation that extends and multiplies social value to their local community. They believed that purchase of the site by the Montgomery Street Co-operative would add value to the community in ways that cannot be solely graded on the monetary market value of the site. They did not seek to develop the site as a commercial developer would do but manage the site as the economic hub it was originally intended as, improve it and extend the services available to the local community in a not-for-profit manner. In terms of building back better around Covid-19 recovery and regeneration, Committee members consider the Council should be promoting community-based, collectively-owned and democratically accountable groups such as this.
- 1.5.8 According to an article by the Birmingham Chambers of Commerce<sup>4</sup>, there is now an acute shortage of small affordable units in our city. The costs of relocating their enterprises elsewhere or outside of the city would be prohibitive and result in the break-up of a group of businesses with strong local connections. As a result of this they haven’t been able to plan or invest in their businesses to expand or to take on new people to train and employ. In the face of this uncertainty and the absence of assurances, some tenant members have had to leave, and some businesses have unfortunately folded. The impact of the pandemic has further exacerbated this.
- 1.5.9 Birmingham Friends of the Earth (BFOE) have operated out of premises in Digbeth for decades and first started to develop an adjacent patch of derelict land in the 1990s, holding events and doing some wildlife gardening. This has now become Digbeth Community Garden, which is open to the public and contains a variety of ecological projects from beekeeping and composting to a community space for people to sit and enjoy their surroundings in the heart of the city. Ten years ago, a consortium of local organisations including BFOE were interested in setting up a Community Land Trust (CLT) on this land to incorporate affordable housing, workspace and still keep much of the community garden developed from former derelict land. BFOE supported this despite the reduction in garden space because it was an ecological design and incorporated a lot of other social good.

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<sup>3</sup> Written submission on behalf of Aylesford Hall

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.greaterbirminghamchambers.com/latest-news/news/2020/2/5/smes-struggling-to-find-new-space-warns-kwb/>





1.5.10 While BCC was initially positive about and willing to discuss this pioneering initiative (CLTs are still considered a much-overlooked housing solution in the UK), it always stated that “disposal of this small piece of land could only go to the highest bidder, and the social and environmental benefits could not be taken into consideration”.<sup>5</sup> The consortium found this frustrating, but then the Council eventually ceased all discussions about the future of this land when HS2 was confirmed as going ahead. Since then, the submission from BFOE contends, positive and small-scale developments all across Digbeth have been blighted, as have many existing businesses as the area has felt as if it was waiting in semi-dereliction.

1.5.11 BFOE would like to see a more positive attitude within the Council about social and environmental impacts of land use within its asset strategy. They said:

“Smaller scale land disposal, and allowing community groups access to land, allows for a finer grain of development with a much greater local multiplier and the flourishing of local distinctiveness.”

## 1.6 Role of community organisations in economic recovery

1.6.1 As referenced above, Manningford Hall in Druids Heath is a well-used local community venue run by volunteers. It has been used during the Covid-19 pandemic for emergency community response, with food parcels and hot meals being prepared there to help the vulnerable. As referred to in 1.5.6 above, the local community fear it may be sold off in the future as being of little value in terms of income generation to the city, but its loss would be keenly felt by the many local groups that regularly make use of its low-cost facilities to provide affordable or free services and classes for the neighbourhood.

1.6.2 Meena Bharadwa from national membership network Locality gave the inquiry some background on the national policy landscape around community asset ownership and the value of community spaces in good times and in bad. Financial pressures on local authorities in the wake of austerity measures over the last decade combined with cuts to non-statutory services have contributed to the sale and closure of many buildings and spaces in communities across the country.

1.6.3 In the face of these threats, Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is an alternative to sale which retains valued local spaces for community benefit. In her report to the inquiry, Ms Bharadwa stated:

“Having a Community Asset Transfer policy which is strategically embedded within the local authority, alongside council leadership which values the role of community ownership in delivering positive place outcomes, are important factors in securing the long-term local benefits of community ownership.

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<sup>5</sup> Written submission by BFOE



For these councils, asset transfer is more than an ad-hoc solution for individual spaces; it is part of a holistic strategy encompassing benefits to the local economy, community wellbeing, local democracy and service transformation. Indeed, the benefits of community ownership are best realised when it is centred on creating a long-term partnership between enterprising communities and a supportive public sector.”

- 1.6.4 In fact, community ownership could play a pivotal role in local economic regeneration and recovery. It is estimated that community-owned assets contribute £220million<sup>6</sup> to the economy per annum and offer opportunities for local job creation and training<sup>7</sup>.

“In the context of an economic downturn and potential risk this might bring for existing local spaces, amenities and businesses, community ownership could be a powerful tool for local regeneration and recovery. For example, in the context of the impact of business closures on high streets, community owners can bring innovation, local expertise and accountable governance models, to transform local shops or derelict spaces.”<sup>8</sup>

- 1.6.5 In his presentation to the inquiry, Interim Chief Executive, Chris Naylor, outlined his vision of the Council’s assets and estate as a “means to an end”. He maintained that there remains untapped opportunity in the city that can benefit those who need it, and that as one of the largest landowners in the country the Council can use that land and asset base to help achieve the Council’s aims, such as helping our Route to Zero Carbon objective, supporting culture and the creative and digital industry and building more homes that people need. Moreover, he maintained that more of the financial gains from public sector regeneration investments can be captured and recycled for social reinvestment and that we have an opportunity to reconsider what we mean by “value for money” and “return on investment”, citing East Birmingham Growth Strategy as a good local example, and the Youth Zone in Barking and Dagenham.
- 1.6.6 Presenting alongside Mr Naylor, Jamie Ounan shared examples of good practice in taking a different view of “value”, such as North Somerset Council & Weston General Stores, who sought to reverse the decline in a traditional retail setting by reusing units as workspaces. This approach was rooted in the community and tapped into the existing creative energy to transform an underutilised asset through new ways of working and community wealth building. The Committee were told that this leaves North Somerset Council well-positioned for the world post-Covid when people are looking at

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<sup>6</sup> From submission by Locality, Archer, T. et al. 2019. ‘Our assets, our future.’ Available at: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research/assets-future-economicsoutcomes-sustainability-assets-community-ownership/>

<sup>7</sup> From submission by Locality, Crisp, R. et al. 2016. ‘Community-led approaches to reviewing poverty in neighbourhoods.’ Available at: <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/community-led-approaches-to-reducing-poverty-in-neighbourhoods.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Written submission by Locality



alternative working environments and patterns and could help boost the local economy whilst also transitioning to a low carbon economy. In this way it addresses multiple council priorities for North Somerset from environmental to economic and social priorities.



# Appendix 2: Birmingham Property Services (BPS)

## 1.1 Property Strategy

1.1.1 As part of the inquiry, members expressed their support for the aims and objectives set out in the Property Strategy 2018/2019-2023/24 approved by Cabinet on 13 November 2018 and they acknowledged the twin principles to:

“Utilise property to support the growth agenda, working in partnership with public and private sector partners by reducing constraints and risk, providing confidence, stimulating investment and creating a positive environment for growth...”; and

“Where there is need – enable third parties (non-governmental, not for personal profit, social value-driven partners) to independently deliver the Council’s core objectives, enabling service delivery, developing neighbourhoods, encouraging social cohesion, building capacity, and leveraging external funding through sport, culture and community activities”.

1.1.2 Members also had the opportunity to consider the Avison Young report of July 2020 as part of the Council’s own review of the Property Strategy approved in 2018 and the Investment Strategy approved in 2019. The Avison Young report analysed the Council’s asset portfolio and identified recommendations for future direction in terms of asset management, retention or disposal. It was timely in terms of acknowledging the impact of Covid-19 on the market and how that might influence the Council’s approach to managing its portfolio and assets.

1.1.3 However, members felt the Avison Young report did not address the two principles of the 2018 Property Strategy cited above. While the Avison Young report’s recommendations are clear about the commercial acumen needed to deal with the Council’s immense asset holdings, members were concerned that the revenue and returns-based approach to the commercial portfolio, as recommended in this report, created a real danger that it excludes the commercial portfolio from considerations of social value and the Council’s core objectives as set out in 1.6.5. They maintained that it should not just be the community, regeneration and operational portfolios that are guided by social value but the entire asset stock and its management.



## 1.2 Presentation by BPS to the inquiry

- 1.2.1 In a presentation shared with the Committee which accompanied the Property Strategy Cabinet report from November 2018, Assistant Director of Birmingham Property Services, Kathryn James, outlined some of the challenges BPS face in delivering this, namely:
- Property decisions are made locally in the Council, resulting in disjointed delivery
  - Decisions that are based on short-term financial lead rather than long-term strategic and value capture
  - Meeting the City's growth aspirations by addressing the housing shortage
  - Many of the assets are in very poor condition due to budget cuts over the years
  - 80% of the revenue comes from 20% of the 5,900 property interests in the investment portfolio
  - Need to expand commercial experience internally
  - Operational and community stock is not consolidated to strategic advantage
  - 78% of the land owned by the Council is not formally registered
- 1.2.2 The stated aim of the strategy at the time of launch in 2018 was
- “To maximise commercial and social returns through the City Council's property assets, ensuring they act as a catalyst for development and regeneration initiatives to underpin the social fabric of communities across the city.”
- 1.2.3 Alongside commercial aims such as driving greater returns by developing an investment property portfolio to deliver medium growth in gross income, and utilising land and buildings to unlock development and regeneration aligned with the city's key growth areas, “Supporting communities by encouraging a ‘Sharing Economy’ and ‘Capacity Building’ through the support of third party organisations to deliver culture, sport, community and neighbourhood activities” was also a stated objective.
- 1.2.4 At the inquiry's final evidence session on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021, the Assistant Director of Birmingham Property Services gave a presentation that demonstrated a reflection and acknowledgement of the criticism that had been levelled at the service by submissions to the inquiry in November and December 2020 and offered some hope that they would be or were already being addressed.
- 1.2.5 In the presentation and during questioning Ms James acknowledged that better partnership working between the Council and communities, including collaboration and consultation on community assets was needed.
- 1.2.6 Furthermore, she spoke passionately about the role of community organisations and assets in supporting economic recovery and in responding to the pandemic. Echoing the testimony of others' submissions about the key role community halls and buildings had played in the Covid-19 response, Ms James recounted her personal experience in coordinating the food support response for the city



utilising these networks and venues, as well as their use as testing centres, and for providing PPE to our frontline workers, as well as for a variety of other health and wellbeing activities linked to Covid.

- 1.2.7 A key point clarified by Ms James was what was a community asset within the property strategy and how this was not the same as the commercial property portfolio, highlighting how people often confuse the distinction. In addition, she outlined the high levels of SMEs within the commercial portfolio and the work that will be done to support entrepreneurs through reaching out to them and marketing more of what is on offer and what BPS can do to help them.
- 1.2.8 In response to criticism about not knowing who to speak to in the Council around Assets of Community Value (ACV) decisions she was able to identify the creation of a single responsible post within the new Neighbourhood Directorate and promised a more joined-up approach across Council service areas, which will also prevent delays in the process.
- 1.2.9 Work is also underway on developing a 'lighter' Community Asset Transfer (CAT) process that is less time intensive for both the Council and community groups and will be co-ordinated by the Neighbourhoods directorate.
- 1.2.10 Ms James agreed that better engagement was needed for operation and community assets and that decision-making for these would sit with the Cabinet, and that the opportunity for the community to be involved would be via their ward members on surplus declarations.
- 1.2.11 Vitally, she acknowledged that communication had historically been poor and noted the need for improved communication and feedback for unsuccessful bidders. Feedback needs to be improved and streamlined to ensure bidders receive a constructive response on why a bid has been unsuccessful. However, one of the challenges with this is that an asset selected for disposal needs to be reported on to Cabinet to decide on before discussions can take place with bidders. The Cabinet reporting process therefore had implications for commercial confidentiality. BPS are streamlining their reporting process and feedback accordingly and will report back to the Committee on progress.
- 1.2.12 Prior to auctions, a marketing flyer is to be sent to ward members and groups on their mailing list, and improvements to the Property Services website are in train, with links to Council open data to be embedded within it. The website will be used to try and achieve a more level playing field for disposals of assets; however, this does require more resource as it is time consuming and a balance needs to be achieved that also gives the Council best value. This includes looking at the whole of the Council's assets, including land that can be better utilised for community and other use.
- 1.2.13 In addition, the team is working on a joined-up approach with colleagues and partners to tackle wider economic issues and objectives of the Council including the Economic Recovery strategy and East Birmingham Inclusive Growth strategy.
- 1.2.14 Encouraging and supporting under-represented groups or those excluded from getting access to purchasing Council assets can be improved through better communication and advertising of opportunities and will be picked up through the property services update to its website.



- 1.2.15 Ensuring information is digitally accessible will ensure that a wider audience is reached. In addition, tenants' surveys will be reintroduced through the website to collect valuable data on tenant experience and feedback on what people are looking for from the Council.
- 1.2.16 The Leader stressed when he attended the November 2020 meeting that members and officers are keen to learn from best practice elsewhere on both community and commercial property portfolios and reminded the Committee that the Council needs to protect its assets for benefit of the city.

## 1.3 Conclusion

- 1.3.1 Whilst the Committee welcomed the proposals outlined by the Leader and BPS to address some of the concerns raised during the inquiry, they were disappointed that some of the issues raised by people giving evidence and members were not fully reconciled.
- 1.3.2 They are keen to ensure that the tracking of recommendations set out in this report, together with suggestions made in the spirit of open-mindedness, such as that referred to by the Leader in 1.1.16 above, will be given full consideration outside of this inquiry and genuine attempts made to learn from good practice elsewhere.
- 1.3.3 Finally, as referenced in 1.2.6 above, the recognition by the Assistant Director of Property of the vital role played by community organisations in the pandemic was welcomed by committee members, who share her appreciation of such organisations, who often operate under restricted funds and rely on volunteers and the goodwill of others. As such, the committee would be keen to explore outside of this inquiry ways in which the Council might be better able to support them.



## Reference materials

The following information was considered as part of the Inquiry and has been used to compile this report: -

Birmingham City Council Cabinet Report – Property Strategy 2018/2019-2023/24 approved by Cabinet on 13 November 2018

Birmingham City Council Investment Property Portfolio Strategy approved by Cabinet on 30 July 2019

Birmingham City Council Strategic Review Investment Portfolio July 2020 – Avison Young

Birmingham’s Collaborative Neighbourhoods: a snapshot of the community-led response to coronavirus and what this means for resetting the civic and community relationship (2020) – report by Locality, commissioned by the Neighbourhood Support and Development Unit at Birmingham City Council

Better Services, Stronger Economy: A keep it local guide for community organisations (2018) – Locality

West Midlands Urban Community Homes (wMUCH) written submission by Abigail Ryan (2020)

Localise West Midlands written submission by Jon Morris, Chair (2020)

National Trust written submission by Matt Doran and Lucy Reid, also referencing the Protecting Community Assets Inquiry: <http://www.protecting-community-assets.org.uk/> which is a useful inquiry into exactly this sort of question that National Trust participated in.