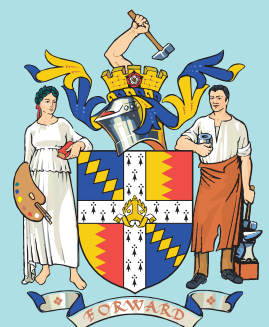


The Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report 2008**





<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>What We Do</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Succeed Economically</b>	<b>4</b>
Employment Strategies	4
Maximising the Impact of Regional Airports	5
Congestion	5
Birmingham Academies Programme	6
Raising Standards in Literacy and Numeracy	6
Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Overview	7
The Growth Agenda	7
<b>Stay Safe in a Clean, Green City</b>	<b>8</b>
Graffiti	9
Waste and Recycling	9
Street Cleanliness	9
Road Accidents	10
Domestic Violence	10
Domestic Abuse and the Impact on Children	11
Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers	12
Special Educational Needs	12
<b>Be Healthy</b>	<b>13</b>
Health Inequalities	13
Education on Relationships and Sexual Health	14
Housing Provision for Older People	15
Home Care	15
<b>Enjoy a High Quality of Life</b>	<b>16</b>
Decent Homes	16
Satisfaction with Parks	17
Community Libraries	18
People with Learning Disabilities	19
<b>Make a Contribution</b>	<b>20</b>
Community Cohesion	20
Youth Representatives	21
The Third Sector and Social Enterprise	21
Voluntary Sector Partners	22
Community Organisations and City Council Buildings	22
City Council Decision Making and The Councillor Call for Action	23
<b>Achieving Excellence</b>	<b>24</b>
Business Transformation and Value for Money	24
The Use and Cost of Consultants	25
The City Council's Workforce	26
Working in Partnership and the Local Area Agreement	26
<b>Getting in Touch</b>	<b>27</b>



## Preface

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

In this Annual Report you will find a summary of some of the main pieces of work which my Scrutiny colleagues and I have carried out this year, or intend to begin shortly. I hope you find it interesting. It is a straightforward way in which we can be accountable to the City Council, and to Birmingham people, for the work we do.

Firstly, this is about making sure that when the City Council and other public services are deciding what to do, they decide on the basis of all the available, reliable information, including the views of local people and their elected representatives. After that, our work is to make sure that the Council and its partners actually do what they said they were going to do.

Our ability to carry out this task depends on some important fundamental points. Scrutiny Members are independent of the Council's decision makers, the Executive. Through our impartial, objective testing of policies, service delivery and monitoring improvement, we provide Birmingham people with the assurance of energetic probing and questioning on their behalf. We must maintain not only this independence but a vibrant work programme tackling key issues which matter to our constituents.

There have been some developments in our work this year. Firstly we have a new committee dealing with Equalities and Human Resources. This deals with a range of people issues – promoting cohesion between the many and various communities in the city and developing the City Council's own workforce towards first class status. Secondly I must mark the national recognition of Birmingham's excellent scrutiny work through Cllr Len Clark winning the inaugural national title of "Scrutiny Chair of the Year" in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's awards.

Another new aspect of our work is the Councillor Call for Action, which you can read about later in this report. Here Birmingham's novel approach of involving a wide range of partners such as West Midlands Police has attracted national interest. Indeed we scrutineers are increasingly looking beyond the City Council's own services and working with others – the police force and the fire brigade, the health service, businesses and voluntary organisations. Accordingly the structure we have used for our report is based on what all these bodies have agreed as their joint ambition for our city as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy. This shows very directly how our work is a contribution to improving the lives and prospects of our constituents.



**Councillor Alistair Dow (centre) with Councillor James Hutchings (right) and Councillor Ian Ward (left), the lead scrutineers from the three main political groups.**



## What We Do

The basic idea of overview and scrutiny (O&S) is a simple one. Elected Councillors undertake inquiries, on behalf of the public, to make sure that the City Council and other public services are making the improvements to services and to people's lives that they say they are.

We can address any issue relating to the wellbeing of Birmingham's people and communities, but mostly we look at the priorities which the decision makers have set.

By looking at the evidence on what people need and on how services are delivered, and by looking at the different ways in which services might be provided, we aim to help decision makers:

- receive all the relevant information when they come to take decisions;
- develop policies for the future which will deliver better outcomes for Birmingham people and improved value for money;
- in both cases, benefit from public views and engagement.

O&S is an important pillar in the governance of the City. The City Council recognises the importance of independent challenge to ensure that its policies and practices are as well-rounded as possible. The Council's commitment to scrutiny is further demonstrated by the fact that its recommendations are taken for debate to the full City Council meeting. When these recommendations are agreed they are then tracked by the appropriate O&S Committee.

We carry out our work through 12 all-party committees as shown diagrammatically on the page opposite. Between them they cover all the work the Council does, and the contributions of other important agencies in Birmingham, such as the police and fire services, the health service, universities and colleges, businesses and transport operators. We hold regular meetings which are nearly always open to the public, and details can be found on the internet. Even if a meeting has to be held in private, because it is dealing with matters which are confidential to the people concerned, our conclusions and recommendations will be made public.

Recently, Overview and Scrutiny has gained powers to champion the interests of local people across a range of local issues. The Scrutiny function is increasingly featuring in discussions and developments in community engagement, empowerment and local accountability. One recent example is that Overview and Scrutiny committees are now able to hear Councillor Calls for Action when Elected Members experience difficulty resolving issues locally, and we talk about this later in our report.



**Finance and Performance Sub**

Chairman:  
Cllr James Hutchings

**Co-ordinating**

Chair:  
Cllr Alistair Dow

**Adults and Communities**

Chairman:  
Cllr Len Clark

**Children and Education**

Chair:  
Cllr Jon Hunt

**Equalities and Human Resources**

Chairman:  
Cllr Keith Barton

**Health**

Chairman:  
Cllr Deirdre Alden

**Housing and Urban Renewal**

Chair:  
Cllr Emily Cox

**Leisure, Sport and Culture**

Chairman:  
Cllr John Alden

**Local Services and Community Safety**

Chairman:  
Cllr Mark Hill

**Regeneration**

Chairman:  
Cllr Timothy Huxtable

**Transportation and Street Services**

Chair:  
Cllr Martin Mullaney

**Vulnerable Children**

Chairman:  
Cllr Margaret Sutton



## Succeed Economically

What does Birmingham intend to achieve?	Is Overview and Scrutiny making a contribution?
More people, including people with disabilities, will be in work – unemployment and worklessness will be reduced significantly	✓
More companies and employers will establish businesses, and will prosper and remain in Birmingham	✓
Economic inequalities between communities will reduce, and disadvantaged people will have more opportunities	✓
Educational performance and adult skills will continue to improve	✓
More young people will be in education, training and employment	✓
Road, rail and air access to, and within, the city will improve – congestion in the city will be managed	✓
Environmental impact will be minimised through sustainable development, including reducing CO2 emissions, preparing for the effects of climate change, using resources more efficiently, recycling more and protecting the natural environment.	✓

In many people's eyes, this is the top priority for the city and the City Council. Accordingly, several of our major inquiries have economic prosperity, education, skills and transportation at their heart.

### Employment Strategies

A key measure of Birmingham's economic success is how many residents are able to share in that success – and the best way is through sustained employment with opportunities for development. However, there are some parts of our city that have persistently high unemployment and high numbers of people on benefits – and this despite a period of sustained economic growth.

A number of initiatives over the past few years have sought to help those disadvantaged in the labour market. The Regeneration O&S Committee is undertaking an examination of these, to see how worklessness is being tackled by the City Council and our partners.

*"The city is facing new economic challenges as the financial situation worsens. This means the City Council has to be even more focused on assisting people who are out of work, by helping to create employment opportunities by regenerating derelict sites, improving the viability of Birmingham's Local Centres and working with learning and skills providers."*

**CLlr Timothy Huxtable, Chairman, Regeneration O&S Committee**



Members are looking at the different strategies currently in place to reduce worklessness in Birmingham, with a particular focus on work in the eleven wards with the highest worklessness figures. They are considering what the figures on worklessness really mean, how efforts to tackle worklessness are governed and delivered, and what is needed in Birmingham to make an impact on this problem. The Review Group intends to bring a report to City Council in February which will challenge the Council and its partners in their approach to tackling worklessness.

## Maximising the Impact of Regional Airports

In the past, the Regeneration O&S Committee has looked at small businesses in the city and how these can be supported. It has now commenced a piece of work focusing on one of the largest employers in the region – the Airport. This overview of ‘Maximising the Benefits of Regional Airports’ will examine the role local airports play in local economies, and how the City Council working with partners can maximise the benefits promised by Birmingham International Airport. Evidence from a number of key partners including representatives from the business and commercial sectors will be heard at the committee meetings. Recommendations for further increasing Birmingham’s economy and leisure opportunities will be presented to City Council in April 2009.

## Congestion

The City Council is working with Centro and other West Midlands authorities to reduce congestion in the region. There are a number of methods being trialled, including the high occupancy vehicle lane on the A47 and Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnerships with bus companies. The Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee is keeping a close eye on all these, and is not afraid to court controversy in its pursuance of the best outcomes for Birmingham. For example, in spring of this year, the Committee undertook a “select committee style” examination of the Stratford Road Red Route (at the time a pilot) to see what impact it had had on traffic flow and congestion. They spoke to traders and residents, as well as the “experts” and were left in no doubt of the strength of feeling of some of those involved. However, the evidence was clear: traffic flow had improved, air quality had improved and more parking had been provided. The Committee therefore recommended that the Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services should make the Red Route permanent, which he did a month later.

*"Tackling congestion is a huge issue and our Committee is keen to ensure all options are thoroughly explored. Red Routes, bus lanes, metro – all these measures and others should be debated fully in a public arena."*

**Cllr Martin Mullaney, Chair,  
Transportation and Street Services  
O&S Committee**



### Birmingham Academies Programme

As part of its Transforming Education Strategy the City Council has embarked upon a programme which will result in the development of seven Academies in the City. An Academy is a publicly funded school, which takes pupils of all abilities and is established by sponsors from business, local organisations or voluntary groups working in partnership with both central government and the local authority. Under the new trust arrangements Academies will be expected to bring forward additional sponsorship money to be used for the benefit of its pupils. During July the Children & Education O&S Committee “called in” an Executive decision on the “closure” of two schools affected by the programme because of concerns about the level of consultation that had been undertaken. This action resulted in the establishment of a more transparent and robust procedure for the future agreement of school closures and the process for consultation being strengthened. In addition the Committee has met with the sponsors of three of the upcoming Academies to question them on topics such as consultation issues, teacher working conditions and the role of the governing bodies.

### Raising Standards in Literacy and Numeracy

The Children and Education O&S Committee has recently commissioned a very exciting piece of research exploring the standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by children attending Birmingham maintained schools. The main aims of this piece of work were:

- To review the research evidence on factors affecting attainment in literacy and the reasons for the significant gender differences.
- To provide information on the differences in course content between GCSE English and the Basic Skills Level 2 literacy qualification at Key Stage 4.
- To provide information on what is being done to support schools in raising literacy standards.

*“There’s rightly been a national emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy and Birmingham schools have responded magnificently.*

*We are concerned though that boys’ achievements seem to be lagging well behind those of girls.”*

**Cllr Jon Hunt, Chair, Children & Education O&S Committee**



**Councillor Jon Hunt Chair of Children & Education O&S outside Perry Beeches School, Great Barr**





This culminated in a joint report from the Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Families and the Chair of the Children and Education O&S Committee. It was presented to full City Council in November. This was an opportunity to showcase the full range of work which has been undertaken to raise standards of literacy and numeracy in the city and to seek the views of Members on how these achievements can be further enhanced.

## Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Overview

Again as part of the Transforming Education programme the Council has secured £1 billion of investment from the government to build or refurbish all secondary schools within the city over the next 15 years. A new Member review group from the Children and Education O&S Committee has been established to explore and identify issues relating to BSF in Birmingham. The Members will be on hand to act as a critical friend to the Executive feeding back comments and observations on an ongoing basis as the programme develops. The review will explore progress, whether the City Council is on track to achieve its vision and the degree to which BSF can be used as a force for local regeneration within communities. In addition the review group will be exploring in detail learning from previous Private Finance Initiative schemes and best practice from other areas in the country. The group aims to ensure that the lessons learned can be absorbed into the Birmingham model.

## The Growth Agenda

The City Council and its partners are looking to secure sustainable population and economic growth for Birmingham over the next 20 years. Proposals for this – known as the growth agenda – are fundamental to many of the other improvements the partnership wishes to see. The success of the wide ranging proposals in the growth agenda is a high priority.

As a fundamental, high-priority area it is a fitting subject for a scrutiny inquiry. As a long-term, strategic agenda – albeit one which involves the successful delivery of a number of shorter-term projects – it required a different approach from much of the other scrutiny work. Members have therefore aimed to give the proposals a “healthcheck”, to see that Birmingham’s ambitions are clear and well-founded, and that resources and systems are likely to be in place to deliver them. The focus has been on a small number of key issues, for example holding a number of sessions with employers, universities and council officers about the prospects for developing a more highly skilled workforce in Birmingham. Transport, housing targets and planning matters have also featured strongly, as has the impact of the changing economic situation. Fundamental to the whole agenda are projections for population growth and demographic change, and Members are particularly keen to understand these and make sure they are being interpreted correctly.

This inquiry is due to be completed soon. But already one aim has been achieved. When the inquiry began, elected Members’ knowledge of and involvement in the growth agenda was limited. This has changed; more Members are now able to assess how developments in their local areas will be affected by the agenda for the city as a whole.

*“It is essential that Members understand the Growth Agenda. Once they do, they can see how to link growing prosperity for our city to improving the lives of our constituents.”*

**Cllr Alistair Dow, Chair,  
Co-ordinating O&S Committee**



## Stay Safe in a Clean, Green City

What does Birmingham intend to achieve?	Is Overview and Scrutiny making a contribution?
More people will consider their neighbourhood and city to be clean and safe	✓
Crime rates will continue to fall, especially in wards where rates are highest	✓
Crimes of particular concern will be reduced, including violent crime such as public place woundings, gun and knife crime and incidents involving alcohol, drugs, guns and gangs	✓
The number of fire-related crimes will continue to decline	✓
Fear of crime will be reduced, including tackling issues that people perceive as threatening and destructive, such as graffiti	✓
Fewer children and young people will be victims of crime or will offend or become persistent offenders	✓
Fewer people will sustain injuries as a result of road traffic accidents	✓
Concern about hate crime will remain low or decrease further	<b>Not this year</b>
Vulnerable people will be effectively safeguarded – including children, young people, older people, people with mental health problems or learning disabilities and victims of domestic violence	✓
Satisfaction with, and cost-effectiveness of, recycling and waste-management services will improve	✓

This theme is particularly important to Birmingham people when they think about their local areas, and for Councillors trying to improve their wards. In this section we outline some of our major pieces of work this year. As well, we regularly look at progress, and in particularly closely monitor trends in crime.



Councillor Martin Mullaney, Chair of Transportation & Street Services O&S with a ward based cleaning team



## Graffiti

Graffiti is a major source of blight and can make people feel unsafe in their area. The Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee therefore looked at how the city can use a three pronged approach of removal, enforcement and prevention to minimise the instances of graffiti. This will help residents to feel safer in their communities. One of the Committee's key recommendations was stronger partnership working with services such as the Police, to share information and good practice. The findings emphasised that those committing acts of vandalism should be caught and dealt with. However, prevention is equally important and Members therefore recommended that a "graffiti wall" be trialled in the city, to see if that helps reduce the problem. A graffiti wall is in place in Kings Heath.

*"We are pleased with the successful roll-out of domestic door-step recycling across the city. We now want to ensure businesses - shops and offices - are recycling as much as possible."*

**Cllr Martin Mullaney, Chair,  
Transportation and Street Services  
O&S Committee**

## Waste and Recycling

The Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee have long been supporters of recycling in the city. The most recent piece of work on the subject examined the different containers available for the household collection of recycling materials, and what would work best in Birmingham. This year, the Committee is revisiting past recommendations to see how things have progressed – indeed the city is making substantial increases in recycling year on year – and what extra steps would encourage more people to participate. A further issue the Committee will be following up in coming months is that of business recycling – is the Council doing all within its power to encourage local businesses to recycle and helping them to do so?

## Street Cleanliness

Birmingham has had wardens patrolling its streets and parks for several years now, and both Members and residents alike are full of praise for their good work in helping to keep our city "clean and green." They are a highly visible, very responsive service, on hand to work with the community – but also empowered to issue fines to those who dump rubbish or litter our streets. Funding for the wardens has always been an issue – with the majority employed through short term finance. Recent changes to that funding have meant a review of the service is taking place. The Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee therefore felt that this would be an opportune time to examine the service and ask: how can the city maximise the impact of Wardens?



*Councillor Mark Hill, Chairman of Local Services & Community Safety O&S making his own contribution*



*"The impact of domestic violence is huge in terms of social and economic costs. Domestic violence can result in psychological damage, injury, damages to communities and even death. There are also financial costs: costs to the Police, Health Service and Local Authority Housing and Social Services are estimated in the region of £97 million per annum in Birmingham. We should be unequivocal in demonstrating that the City Council and partners are committed to holding perpetrators to account and making men, women and children across the city safe."*

**Cllr Mark Hill, Chairman,  
Local Services and  
Community Safety O&S  
Committee**

Members have heard from Council Officers, partners such as the Police, and residents about their experiences of how wardens work in constituencies. The findings will help to define the way the warden service is to be organised in the new financial year, and assist the wardens in doing their good work.

In addition, ward based cleaning teams are currently being deployed across the city and the Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee have taken a close interest in the progress with the roll-out.

### **Road Accidents**

Further to receiving an update on road traffic accident statistics, the Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee has decided to undertake a closer examination of this important area. Traffic management is more than just a matter of dealing with congestion on our roads, so the Committee will be looking at the most effective way of ensuring there are as few road accidents as possible.

### **Domestic Violence**

The reduction of domestic violence is a key target for the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership. The City Council therefore signed up to the Pan-Birmingham Domestic Violence Strategy 2006-9 and Members of the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee examined whether the Council was on course to meet its commitments under that strategy.

The Members took evidence from key council service providers such as Housing and Education on what is being done to keep victims/survivors and their children safe. Innovations include the use of legal devices such as injunctions to limit the movement and behaviour of an

individual and so provide greater protection to victims/survivors and the community. The positive thing here is that the City Council takes the action (rather than the victim) and this sends a powerful message to perpetrators and those who would take this issue less seriously.



The Committee's findings centred on the importance of ensuring that activity to reduce domestic violence is embedded in mainstream activity in all relevant organisations. It must not be seen as just an add-on to other work. One of the key recommendations is that a campaign should be run, with partners, to raise awareness of domestic violence in society, to highlight its unacceptability and the consequences that abusers will face. The overview report also highlighted the need to work with children and young people to raise awareness, and the need for support for children and young people in refuges. The effect of domestic violence on children and young people can be extremely serious, and as can be seen from the next section is now to be the subject of scrutiny work in its own right.

## Domestic Abuse and the Impact on Children

Our view that one of the many adverse consequences of domestic violence and abuse can be its effect on the lives of children and young people is widely shared. As part of the Brighter Futures Conference arranged by the Children, Young People and Families Directorate we showcased some of the work Scrutiny is doing and asked attendees, through a small competition, for review suggestions.

People from the Directorate and from the voluntary sector suggested that the impact of domestic abuse on children would be worthy of investigation. The Vulnerable Children O&S Committee has decided to investigate this, seeing it as a natural progression from its own work on safeguarding children and from other scrutiny work on domestic violence.

It is estimated that in Birmingham there may be 33,000 children affected by domestic abuse. The Committee will be exploring current support and services that are available to these children and young people. It will take evidence from those organisations that have a role in commissioning, developing or delivering initiatives to support children and young people who have in the past or are currently witnessing domestic abuse.

*"Children and young people who are victims of, or witnesses to domestic abuse are some of the most vulnerable members of our community. The Committee have therefore identified this area of concern as a priority for further investigation this year."*

**Cllr Margaret Sutton, Chairman,  
Vulnerable Children O&S  
Committee**



### Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers

Difficulties associated with the recruitment and retention of children's social workers have impacted on the service provided to children, young people and their families and on staff working within the Children's Directorate. The Vulnerable Children O&S Committee has spent much of this year exploring these impacts. It has called senior officers to give evidence on the various initiatives used to recruit and retain staff. It has also required regular updates on the effectiveness of these measures. The Committee remains concerned that without suitably qualified and experienced staff, service delivery will be affected, and staff will continue to experience high levels of stress and sickness. This is not just a problem for Birmingham - there is a national shortage of Children's Social Workers - but Members want to understand what other steps the City Council

can take so that more social workers remain in its workforce. Key drivers appear to be not only pay, but also working conditions, development opportunities, and the support given to staff. Members of the Committee have visited Duty and Assessment Teams and have submitted reports about some of the challenging working conditions that staff are expected to work in. The Committee will continue to work with the Directorate on this issue until retention, in particular, shows signs of a sustained improvement.



*Councillor Margaret Sutton, Chairman of Vulnerable Children O&S with Bhupinder Singh, Senior Practitioner with the Children & Families Duty and Assessment Team*

### Special Educational Needs

Over the past year or more the Children and Education O&S Committee has had an ongoing role in overseeing and contributing towards the development of the city's new Strategy for Special Education. This work has been undertaken in a number of different ways. To ensure that parents were fully aware of and involved in the process the Committee first ran a series of public consultation meetings across Birmingham. These attracted around 300 parents and carers, culminating in a comprehensive report of findings which was presented to City Council and was used to influence the next stage of the Executive's work. Following on from this, the Committee set up a cross party overview group to scrutinise, publicly and in detail, the ongoing work to develop the strategy. The Chair of the Committee also attended the Strategic Working Group (which was charged with drawing this up).

Recently, the Committee was able to give a warm welcome to the emerging strategy. The proposed principles for the pattern of future provision will maintain the current diversity, including both special schools and resource bases, with locality as well as city-wide provision and support. In addition, the Committee was pleased to see priority being given to increasing the provision for children of all ages with autism. However, this is not the end of the process. The Committee will keep an ongoing involvement by monitoring the implementation of the strategy.



## Be Healthy

What does Birmingham intend to achieve?	Is Overview and Scrutiny making a contribution?
Health for all will improve, in particular for people who belong to the least healthy groups, narrowing the gap in life expectancy between the least healthy areas and the city average	✓
More people will choose healthy and active lifestyles, lowering levels of obesity, increasing levels of physical activity, stopping smoking and encouraging healthier eating	✓
More people will live independently for longer	✓
More people will live in warm homes with modern facilities	✓
Residents' mental, physical and emotional well-being will improve	✓

In common with other big cities throughout the world, Birmingham suffers from a number of problems affecting people's health. In some areas of the city ill-health is much more common and more severe than in others. Our partnership with the NHS means that we are particularly effective in scrutinising these issues, although as can be seen on the next few pages other services make an important contribution too.

### Health Inequalities

One of the main focuses of the work for the Health Scrutiny Committee is to monitor progress being made to reduce health inequalities in the City. The Committee is ideally placed to assess progress as it can look at services that are provided by both the City Council and NHS in Birmingham.

Members have concentrated on seeing how some of the most hard to reach communities access services in the city. For example, the Committee has recently completed a review of 'The Health Needs of Newly Migrant Communities'. This looked at people who have recently arrived in Birmingham and their experience of using health services. The review found that little is known about the varied communities within Birmingham and service provision is not systematically planned.



*Councillor Deirdre Alden, Chairman of Health O&S meets with West Midlands Ambulance Service staff*



*"The Health Scrutiny Committee plays an active role in helping to make sure Birmingham's citizens receive health care fit for the 21st Century. We also strive to ensure that health needs are continually at the forefront of the minds of all Birmingham's Cabinet Members."*

**CLlr Deirdre Alden, Chairman, Health O&S Committee.**

The Health Committee has been playing an active part, since the original Department of Health consultation on the smoking ban, in increasing the awareness of the dangers of nicotine and the importance of tobacco control. Members have monitored progress by the City Council's Regulatory Services in enforcing the ban. The Committee has also submitted a detailed response to the Department of Health outlining its views. It recommended that further controls are needed on both advertising and the availability of tobacco products.

Healthy eating is key to addressing some of the health inequalities in Birmingham. The Committee has been actively promoting work carried out by the

Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership to make communities aware of the implications of poor diet. One way the Committee is seeking to achieve this is through encouraging all Councillors to raise the profile of men's health within their wards.

Over the coming year the Committee will be carrying out a detailed review of the provision of dementia services in Birmingham. This will be looking at the availability of early diagnosis of all types of dementia as well as the support and information provided for carers.

In order to look at local health inequalities the Committee is also inquiring into how the Council is working in partnership with the NHS in each of the constituencies in Birmingham. Through considering the individual health plans for constituencies the Committee will serve as a conduit for highlighting good practice in individual areas.

### **Education on Relationships and Sexual Health**

This scrutiny review is led jointly by the youth representatives and a group of Elected Members from the Children and Education O&S Committee. It aims to explore the effectiveness of sex and relationship programmes in schools in Birmingham. To date the review has explored the work carried out by a range of providers focussing on preventative actions aimed at promoting sexual health. The group has taken a keen interest in exploring best practice from elsewhere.

In addition, the young people have carried out a consultation exercise with other youngsters to explore their experiences of Sex and Relationships Education and presented their findings to the review group. A second survey of school governing bodies has also taken place and the results fed back.

The Committee intends to produce an early report on its findings so that these can influence the review that is currently being undertaken at a national level.





## Housing Provision for Older People

The Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee is currently conducting a joint review with the Adults and Communities O&S Committee. This is exploring how a range of housing options are being developed in partnership to match the aspirations of older people in the city. It has so far looked in depth at sheltered housing and extra care schemes. As well, the group has considered the range of support available in the community to enable older people to stay in their own homes, such as assistive technology, aids and adaptations. Members have also spoken to a range of older people's groups, registered social landlords, local authority officers and current users of the services. The review will next explore best practice and how learning from other areas in the country can be applied to Birmingham. It will also aim to feed into the work currently underway to develop the Housing in Later Life Strategy.

## Home Care

The Adults and Communities O&S Committee presented its review into Home Care Services to the City Council in November 2008. This review was a natural progression for the Committee which had previously looked at the challenging areas of residential care and day opportunities. The Committee reviewed home care as it recognised that effective home care and support is essential if people are to remain in their own homes for longer. In this review, Members looked at current provision by both the local authority and the private sector. The pressures arising from national policies, local challenges and demographic changes were explored. They also looked at how services need to change to ensure that people who require care and support, and their informal carers, are at the heart of assessment and service provision. The report identified challenges for the City Council in the way that it commissions and provides services, but it also recognised the opportunities that were available through greater engagement with the third sector and social enterprises.



**Councillor Len Clark, Chairman of Adults & Communities O&S at the new Norman Power Centre with Mark Dickens, General Manager**

*"During their lifetime, most people will be involved with Social Care, whether as a recipient of care or as an organiser of a relative or friend's care; social care is everybody's business. This review strives to influence the way that services are commissioned and provided so that the individual can choose, and be in control, of the care and support that they need. We are committed to ensuring that services are of a high standard and offer people real choice, control and flexibility."*

**CLlr Len Clark, Chairman, Adults and Communities O&S Committee**



## Enjoy a High Quality of Life

What does Birmingham intend to achieve?	Is Overview and Scrutiny making a contribution?
More people will be satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live	✓
Local centres will be thriving, clean and attractive.	✓
More residents will be satisfied with the range of housing available to them to meet their needs and wants	✓
The city's housing stock will be modernised to ensure it is of the best standard	✓
More older people will be active and involved in the community	✓
People providing informal care to relatives and dependants will receive better support	✓
More people will be satisfied with our parks and open spaces and will have access to cultural activities (such as libraries and museums) and enjoy our leisure and entertainment facilities at a time and place that suits them	✓

People's quality of life depends heavily on having decent housing in an attractive neighbourhood with good facilities, and on having the support needed at home. With the City Council providing 68,000 homes, much of our focus has been on helping to improve the quality of that service. We have used a variety of approaches here, with fewer major inquiries than in other areas and a greater concentration on the performance achieved. Once again, though, other services contribute as well.

### Decent Homes

Good housing is a fundamental aspect of a high quality of life. This year the Housing and Urban Renewal Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to monitor closely the modernisation of the Council's housing



*Councillor Timothy Huxtable, Chairman of Regeneration O&S in stirchley local centre*



stock through the Decent Homes Programme and the performance of housing repairs contractors. This was done both through receipt and detailed discussion of regular progress and performance reports to the committee as well as inviting the contractors to meetings for direct questioning.

Another key focus of the Committee's work is to scrutinise efforts being made to maximise the housing stock, particularly as demand for social housing is rising. In line with this it has been looking closely at the supply of affordable housing, the under-occupation and overcrowding of properties, and the Council's lettings and allocation arrangements.

The Committee also continues to play an active role in monitoring 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.

*"Everybody needs good housing and my Committee is determined to offer the Housing Department every support in their efforts to provide this. The department works with all residents of Birmingham whether homeowner, private or social tenant, homeless or newly arrived. My Committee looks at performance both strategically and in detail but most of all we are there to ensure the department offers a unique service for every users' unique set of needs."*

**Cllr Emily Cox, Chair, Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee**



*Councillor John Alden, Chairman of Leisure Sport & Culture O&S at Grove Park Harborne*

## Satisfaction with Parks

Research has shown that over 80% of Birmingham's residents use our parks. Birmingham has a proud history of providing parks – the first freely accessible park in the country was Calthorpe Park, opened in 1857.

The Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee has been concerned about the reduction in resources available to keep parks attractive, safe and welcoming to all residents. Good quality green space plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of urban life, helping to provide opportunities for city dwellers to relax, take exercise, play sport and meet friends and



neighbours. The existence of accessible, attractive parks contributes to wider objectives such as improved health, more sustainable neighbourhood renewal and better community cohesion. However, the recent history of parks throughout the country has been a story of reduced expenditure and a lack of investment which has left some parks less attractive.

Members recognise the importance of parks and have wanted to understand the current resources available from sources internal and external to the City Council. Visiting Handsworth Park in July this year, and seeing at first hand the results of a £9m refurbishment, gave the Committee a clear insight into the issues involved. Since then Members have considered the condition of other parks in the city and have received presentations from experts on sources of finance. They are particularly concerned about the lack of up-to-date facilities for users of sports areas in parks. This inquiry is expected to conclude in April 2009 with a report advising the Cabinet Member on how additional resources might be secured to make improvements to our parks.

### Community Libraries

The Library Service makes a significant contribution to corporate priorities as it operates at the very heart of the community, engaging with local people, offering informed guidance and supporting their needs, inspirations and aspirations. The Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee produced an overview report on Community Libraries in April 2008 which set out the strategic and operational context of the service and suggested some actions for change.

*“My Committee has had the opportunity to work with the Executive at a time of great change for the library service - from a service focussed on essentially transactional functions to activities which have a real impact on people’s lives and make a significant contribution to the priorities of the City Council.”*

**Cllr John Alden, Chairman,  
Leisure, Sport and Culture O&S Committee**

The fundamental purpose of the public library service has not changed. Research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development suggested that “a love of reading is more important for a child’s educational success than their family’s wealth or class.” The public library is a trusted community resource which provides a universal entitlement to the skills and joy of reading, knowledge in all its forms (including print, audio, visual and digital media), essential information for all stages of life and involvement in the social, learning and creative life of the community.



Members heard that the community library service is currently undergoing considerable change. There is a redirection of staffing skills and resources towards active interventions which have greater impact on reading, learning, the skills and knowledge base of the city's population and on Council objectives, including community cohesion, economic advantage and a healthier society. This redirection is being facilitated by a shift towards self service for all transactions, whether conducted by personal visit, by telephone or internet.

At the same time as the service is realigning itself to meet the wider priorities of the City Council, it is looking at ways of responding to the wishes of the public for increased access to services including more lunchtime, evening and weekend opening. Following the overview, Members have received update reports on pilot projects and options being considered to improve the service in line with their suggestions.

Taken in conjunction with the proposals for a new Central Library, the issue of what a library service in the 21st century should comprise will remain pivotal to our work programme.

## **People with Learning Disabilities**

Recently, the Adults and Communities O&S Committee has spent much of its time focussing on older peoples services such as the exciting development of care centres. The Committee has also looked at services for people with learning disabilities and has decided that support and services for this vulnerable group requires additional in-depth scrutiny. In 2006, the Committee completed a review into day services which made some very challenging recommendations, not least around the modernisation of learning disability day services and the development of alternatives to traditional day care. Over recent times the Committee has expressed concern that these improvements have not taken place as quickly as was hoped. Therefore, a further scrutiny review will be undertaken during this municipal year. Its main focus will be the partnership between NHS and the City Council in the provision of services for people with a learning disability. The Committee is keen to engage with key partners and receive evidence from them on the modernisation of learning disability services and helping people with such disabilities lead as independent a life as possible.



## Make a Contribution

What does Birmingham intend to achieve?	Is Overview and Scrutiny making a contribution?
More people in general (and hard to reach groups in particular) will feel that they can influence local decisions and have a say in their services	✓
People will have a range of ways to communicate, interact and take part in local decision making and influence their neighbourhoods and services	✓
People will celebrate the city's diversity, culture and history and be proud of its achievements – including acting as ambassadors for the city	✓
The community and voluntary sector will increase the scope of their activities so that they feel they are full partners in the life of the city and are making a particular contribution	✓
Newly arrived and established communities will be able to communicate, share experiences and exchange information throughout the city. Communities will be at ease with themselves and each other; people will value the increasing diversity of the city's population; people will enjoy positive relationships	✓
More people will be clear about how they are expected to behave, will take responsibility for their own and their children's behaviour and will respect others and their neighbourhood	✓
More people will be able to choose how they get involved and feel they have a voice in their community	✓

To a large extent, it is what Birmingham people themselves do and how they do it which makes our city successful. The City Council and its partners wish to encourage active citizens to take part in making local decisions, volunteer to provide local services and activities, and build positive relations between all types of communities. For our part, we try to do the same in our work – we make sure that we listen and involve local people and service users. But we also investigate whether the City Council as a whole is supporting voluntary and community services as much as it might, and whether its own decision making processes are open and attractive to Birmingham people.

## Community Cohesion

Building good integration and cohesion across the city is crucial to ensure that we secure the benefits that are mutually desirable for our communities and ourselves. During the last year the Equalities and Human Resources O&S Committee looked at Birmingham's refreshed Community Cohesion Strategy and Action



Plan which takes forward key recommendations for local authorities from the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. This year we will be monitoring progress with its implementation.

Everybody realises the harm caused to individuals, families and communities by gang related activity. To try to reduce this, Birmingham has developed a multi-agency approach led by the police but also involving the probation service, the youth offending service, the anti-social behaviour unit, youth services, schools and colleges and community groups to support statutory agencies and the community. It is a priority for the Committee to look at the multi-agency work of this partnership in reducing the impact of street gangs.

*"Ensuring good relations between our different communities and equal opportunities for all, no matter what their background, remains a key priority for the city."*

**ClIr Keith Barton, Chairman,  
Equalities and Human Resources  
O&S Committee**

## Youth Representatives

The Children and Education O&S Committee has been very pleased to welcome on board the new youth representatives from the UK Youth Parliament and has very much appreciated their enthusiastic input into the work of the Committee. There have been many opportunities for including them in both debate and discussion during the course of this year. For example, they have raised some topics for discussion at Committee including concessionary transport for Birmingham students, recycling in schools and the negative portrayal of young people within the media. In addition, the representatives are playing a key role in the Committee's review of education on relationships and sexual Health

*"The Council recognises that there is a vital contribution to be made by the Third Sector; not least in the Adults Social Care sphere. My Committee will be examining in some detail how the relationship between the Adults and Communities Directorate and the Third Sector could be strengthened."*

**ClIr Len Clark, Chairman, Adults  
and Communities O&S Committee**

## The Third Sector and Social Enterprise

The Adults and Communities O&S Committee has continued to hold the Executive to account around its relationship with the Third Sector. The Committee has received and questioned the content of many reports particularly around the commissioning of services from the Third Sector. It also considered calling in a decision around grant funding for third sector organisations but, following a meeting with the Cabinet Member and her officers, Members were satisfied that the decisions taken were based on effective consultation and had linked funding to the Directorate's commissioning priorities.

The Committee sees the role of the third sector in all its guises including voluntary, community and faith



organisations as essential to the development of a wide range of care and support services that will offer greater choice to individuals and their carers. True and effective partnership is vital if there are to be improvements made to adult social care services. The recently completed Home Care review called for the Council and in particular the Adults and Communities Directorate to give greater priority to developing and sustaining social enterprises. The Committee intends to complete a further investigation into the progress made by the Adults and Communities Directorate in effectively engaging the third sector, encouraging new providers into the City, developing social enterprises and well-being services.

### Voluntary Sector Partners

During the year the Housing and Urban Renewal O&S Committee has met with the following external organisations and gained an increased understanding of the services they provide to our most vulnerable households:

Ashram Housing Association;  
Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid;  
Birmingham Citizens Advice Bureau;  
Fireside; Focus Future's Rough Sleepers Team; Salvation Army; St Basil's; Trident Housing Association; and Wesley Supported Accommodation Service.



**Councillor Emily Cox, Chair of Housing & Urban Renewal O&S at Salvation Army Hostel with Gary Murphy, Centre Manager**

These sessions have explored the value for money of funding that goes to the organisations from the City Council and how this is measured as well as how the services benefit the citizens of Birmingham.

### Community Organisations and City Council Buildings

An interesting area for enquiry is whether there are times when community and voluntary organisations could make better use of some of the City Council's property than it is currently doing itself. The Finance and Performance Sub-Committee took an overview of this issue, concentrating on how to deliver the greatest benefit to local people. Members realised that, while the principle of transferring property was attractive, the implementation would raise a number of problems, including the capacity of the organisations to manage property, the state of repair of particular buildings and the financial consequences for both parties. Prompted by our work the Cabinet has now agreed a protocol to guide decisions in this area.





*“The City Council delivers its services and undertakes its administration in too many buildings of too poor quality. As part of business transformation, the City Council will be making sure its property is of the best standard for both customers and staff. An equally exciting prospect is to see whether, and if so how, community organisations could make better use of some Council premises.”*

**Cllr Hutchings, Chairman, Finance and Performance Sub-Committee**

## City Council Decision Making and The Councillor Call for Action

A couple of years ago an inquiry was carried out into progress with the City Council’s policy for the devolution of some decisions to local level, and the localisation of some management functions. More recently the District Auditor has made some recommendations in the same area. The Executive has been developing policy at the same time as running the existing system, with the introduction of concepts such as neighbourhood management. During the coming months we intend to consider the progress that has been made, and whether there is scope for some further scrutiny work aimed at helping local people feel they have a voice in their community.

Meanwhile we have already moved faster than other councils in the country to develop what is known as a “Councillor call for action”. If a City Councillor is having difficulty in trying to secure an improvement which local people say they want, that councillor will now be able to ask a Scrutiny Committee to look at the issue.

A small group of elected Members was asked to design an appropriate process to introduce this principle in Birmingham. Practising what Scrutiny preaches, they approached their task by working with partners to develop a protocol called a Gateway process. This puts the emphasis on resolving matters locally, with partner agencies when appropriate and with matters only coming to Scrutiny as a “last resort”.

When this is necessary, however, the Scrutiny Committee will invite all relevant people to give their views on the matter – the Councillor, local community representatives, the service providers involved including Cabinet Members – and recommend a way forward. As with all our work, however, people need to understand that we can only recommend – it is for others to decide what will happen in practice.



**Councillor Alistair Dow & Councillor James Hutchings meeting staff at the new Sutton New Road offices**



## Achieving Excellence

The City Council's ambition is for all our services to be rated excellent This means:	Is Overview and Scrutiny making a contribution?
Transforming our business and providing value for money	✓
Being customer focussed	✓
Having a first-class workforce	✓
Equality and diversity	✓
Putting sustainability at the heart of everything we do	✓
Becoming Europe's leading digital city	✓

The other themes in this annual report relate to action taken by the City Council, other bodies and agencies, or even local people themselves. This one is different. It is all about the way the City Council runs itself as an organisation. If this improves, local people benefit from better services and value for money, and also from stronger democratic leadership. This is therefore an important area of enquiry for us through all our Committees, but in particular the Co-ordinating Committee and its Finance and Performance Sub-Committee. In this area we use formal inquiries less often, instead favouring a system of regular progress reports and tackling blockages to progress as they arise.

## Business Transformation and Value for Money

The City Council is now two years into its ambitious business transformation programme, which over 10 years aims to:

- improve services;
- give staff more fulfilling jobs;
- increase efficiency.

The costs of this programme are substantial, and we continue to be concerned over whether all of the spending involved represents the best value for money. Costs, though, are expected to be outweighed by savings, currently expected to reach £1.5bn over the next ten years.

The first transformation workstream – Corporate Services Transformation, affecting mainly back-office finance and performance management work – was implemented a year ago. We are therefore

*“The District Auditor has commented that Business Transformation is a risky business. But the risks of not doing it are much higher.”*

**Cllr Alistair Dow,  
Chair, Co-ordinating O&S Committee**



currently considering the impact it has made in that year. This includes questioning whether the claimed benefits really flow from the transformation programme or from other ways of keeping costs down.

A more general issue is for the City Council to learn from this first transformation workstream, both what has worked well and what has worked less well. This will help with the rest of the programme, making sure that the fundamental changes the Council is making are brought in with minimum disruption and maximum impact. The officers responsible for Business Transformation are to be commended for putting together a frank assessment of the Corporate Services Transformation programme and highlighting many lessons which can be learnt. While their report does not remove all our concerns, we welcome the opportunity for candid dialogue.

In last year's annual report we commented that the service and process changes had not been fully communicated to staff, and the experience of the first programme bears that out. Similarly there is great difficulty in explaining to staff, managers and Members the aims of and progress on further aspects of Transformation. The City Council needs to find a way of putting this right before the programmes dealing with improved customer service and a more modern property estate come to fruition.

The next phase of this inquiry may look at how well the property programme is providing the infrastructure for better customer service. That is desirable in itself, and Members will want to consider carefully the planned costs, benefits and timescales involved. But it also highlights another aspect of the City Council's highly ambitious transformation programme. Whilst it is organised into nine workstreams, some dealing with back office and corporate functions and others with the improvement of services received by customers, these nine do not exist in watertight compartments. Instead, several of them relate to each other, and improvements in one area will depend on progress being made in another.

## **The Use and Cost of Consultants**

One of the controversial aspects of Business Transformation is its use of consultants to help the City Council change and improve. But this is far from the only area in which the Council engages consultants. Members decided that a useful piece of work would be to look at the processes for obtaining good value for money when employing consultants.

Members were clear from the start that they were not questioning the value of consultancy services – there are good examples where consultants have helped the Council to achieve results it would not have obtained on its own. Their concern was to get the balance right, and therefore focussed on the performance not of consultants but of the Council in its role as client.

Members have now produced an interim report which firmly makes the point that the City Council needs more reliable information on its use of consultants and their cost, along with clearer approval processes and robust controls.

Following these interim findings, the Chief Executive will report back early in the New Year. Members will consider his report and decide what further scrutiny work is required here.



## The City Council's Workforce

An integral part of the City Council's ambition for transforming its business and achieving excellence is to develop a first-class workforce. As part of working towards this objective the Equalities and Human Resources O&S Committee receives workforce monitoring information on a quarterly basis. This data across the council includes headcount, diversity profile, performance and development of staff, turnover, recruitment, total pay bill and information on the council's performance indicator results against targets. Members struggle with the reliability of the information on workforce issues and attach particular importance to the Excellence in People Management strand of the Business Transformation programme improving this.



**Councillor Keith Barton, Chairman of Equalities and Human Resources O&S considering the agenda for the next meeting**

## Working in Partnership and the Local Area Agreement

Public sector organisations, in Birmingham as elsewhere, are increasingly expected to work together. This should improve the services which people receive. The statements of outcomes with which we open each chapter of this report have been agreed by the City Council and its partners, and all the services concerned are trying to achieve them. Detailed aims and targets are the subject of a formal agreement between the City Council, its partners and the Government, known as the Local Area Agreement.

Overview and Scrutiny now has a statutory role in looking into progress on all aspects of this Agreement, and to suggest improvements if that is warranted. We already work closely with partners in some areas – health and community safety are prime examples.

We are really grateful for the contribution partners make to our work. We now need to take this approach of positive engagement to an even wider group of partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for Birmingham.



*Councillors Alistair Dow, Len Clark, Tanveer Choudhry and James Hutchings with John Cade, Director of Scrutiny visiting Fort Dunlop*



## Getting in Touch

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

### You can contact us:

- by post:                   The Scrutiny Office  
                                  Council House  
                                  Victoria Square  
                                  Birmingham  
                                  B1 1BB
- by phone:                 0121 464 6872
- by email:                 scrutiny@birmingham.gov.uk

You can also find out more about what we do at: [www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny)



Printed by  
Design and Print,  
Birmingham City Council  
on Environmentally  
Friendly Paper

