

Birmingham City Council
Improvement Stock-take Report

29 June 2018

Introduction

“The first lesson I would take from the fact that BIIP has been in place a long time, too long really. This is because we failed to address some of the issues that were in the Kerslake review and we need to get on and do this.... We have got to do the work that enables them to have the confidence in this organisation.”

The Leader of the Council – May 2018

The Kerslake Report was published in December 2014 and the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel (BIIP) was established in January 2015. Since then, the Council has undergone significant changes in the leadership of the organisation, and has provided regular update reports that have been published alongside the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel's letters to the Secretary of State regarding Birmingham City Council's progress.

The Council wants to secure better outcomes for the citizens of Birmingham in a challenging and fast-moving financial, social and economic environment. The Council is therefore committed to addressing issues raised by the 2014 Kerslake Report and subsequently the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel (BIIP).

Following the all-out elections in May 2018, the Leader and Deputy Leader have been elected for a four year period, cementing a degree of continuity and stability and paving the way for strategic long term planning. The new Chief Executive was appointed in April 2018 and some early decisions have brought some more stability to the Council Management Team, with a permanent Chief Finance Officer, Assistant Chief Executive and clarity around roles that need to be filled. The Council commenced a recruitment process for a permanent Director of Children's Services and Director of Public Health in June 2018.

The Council and the Panel have accordingly agreed that a collaborative approach provides us with the best opportunity to achieve the required Council improvements. Both the Council and Panel will therefore meet on a regular basis with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and co-operate together in order to drive progress against a clear set of improvement plans.

At the heart of the improvement agenda are elements of sound organisational governance as reflected in the Local Government Association's criteria for an effective organisation:

- Effective political leadership and managerial leadership, working as a constructive partnership;
- A good understanding of the local context which informs a shared long-term vision and a clear set of priorities that is translated through a healthy organisational culture and understood by the workforce and partners;
- Effective governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to challenges and manage performance, change, transformation and disinvestment;
- Capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities, supported by relevant organisational and workforce development; and
- A financial plan in place to ensure its long-term viability and evidence it is being implemented successfully

This stock-take report represents the Council's self-assessment against these criteria which is underpinned by a suite of detailed corporate governance and service improvement plans. It provides a précis of the Council's position up to March 2018, indicates some of the changes that are being made in this financial year and highlights priority areas for

improvement. The structure of the report seeks to be consistent with previous updates provided to the BIIP and Secretary of State to ensure comparability.

Critical Issues

The Council is approaching these challenges, however, in the context of extensive failures in past corporate governance. Historically, senior officer advice given to Elected Members prior to decision-making has been variable and there have been failures to implement the difficult decisions that Elected Members have taken. Many such examples have been conducted without requisite transparency for the benefit of Elected Members or the citizens of Birmingham.

The corporate governance plan, referred to in this stock-take report, aims to address that challenging history by building on the work already undertaken to fundamentally change the culture of the organisation. This includes a whole-system review approach to role definition of Elected Members and Officers, staff/union engagement procedures and formal decision-making processes.

The last three years have been especially problematic in relation to financial 'grip' within BCC. The level of savings delivered has fallen below the planned level, and other spending pressures have also emerged, which has meant that additional uses of reserves have been required over and above original plans to balance and deliver the budget since 2015/16. Further planned structural uses of reserves are required in 2018/19. If the Council is to move towards financial stability then it must ensure that it develops robust spending and saving plans. If problems are identified in year, resolutions must be identified from within existing budgets, with use of reserves being the option of last resort.

As the Council confronts the financial challenge, it will also need to improve the transparency of its reporting and decision-making as, previously, both the scale and nature of these financial issues were not always apparent to Elected Members or citizens. In addition to changes to financial reporting, the Council signalled a significant change in approach with the publication of the out-turn report for 2017-18. For 2018-22, the Council will adopt a priority-based budgeting approach that will align the use of financial resources with its policy priorities, and involving consideration of performance and unit cost information. The budget setting process will also focus on exploration of the opportunities for service re-design and partnership working and with links to the development of capital and asset strategies. In this way, the Council can streamline the resources it uses to make a best fit with the priorities of the Council and reduce spend on lower priority areas.

Political Leadership

This section concerns effective political leadership working as a constructive partnership, with clear definition of roles and a shared agenda with the Council's senior officer team.

The period since 2014 has been marked by significant turnover in the senior political and managerial leadership through voluntary or negotiated departure and recourse to interim appointments. This enabled major organisational change to be secured but was experienced by many as disruptive and protracted.

The INLOGOV report (2017) provides a baseline of issues for political groups to consider and subsequently tackle. All such issues remain pertinent in 2018 and make up an important part of the Council's corporate governance programme, including:

- The need to look beyond the BCC 'bubble' to understand emerging best practice around public service reform;
- Hierarchies within BCC can impede the development of effective working relationships between officers, Members and partners;
- A tension is developing between the new and more traditional ways of working;
- There is a call for more collaborative approaches;
- A blurring of officer, elected Member and partner roles is taking place; and
- A softer set of skills will be needed in future, including listening, learning from others and engaging with residents in a variety of ways.

The judge's findings in relation to the waste dispute of 2017 highlighted member-officer relations and local disagreements about role definition, with the judge noting that, "neither party (officers or members) comes out of this sorry saga with any credit at all."

From 2018, in line with a key recommendation of the 2014 Kerslake report, inaugural elections following boundary changes have ushered in a common four year term for councillors, with the next 'all out' election in 2022. Subsequently the Leader and Deputy Leader, elected by the controlling Labour Group, enjoy a four-year term as part of a review of Labour group protocol. The number of councillors has been reduced from 120 to 101, based on one or two-member wards. The Council also recruited, through permanent appointment in early 2018, a Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive and a Chief Finance Officer, while extending the contract for the Director of Adult Social Care and Health for two years. This provides internal stability to deliver long-term strategic planning and culture change, although the external environment continues to be marked by significant uncertainties and challenges.

Importantly, the Cabinet from May 2018 is more diverse, with half the ten Cabinet Members being women and four of the ten Cabinet Members from black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. It is also a significantly younger cabinet than previously. The Cabinet changes also highlighted the improved emphasis on financial grip and internal challenge with the creation of a new Finance and Resources portfolio. Progress has been made over recent years with improved interaction between political groups, including ensuring the Council holds regular cross-party leaders' meetings. These are marked by a good tone, level of honesty and support.

Also, whilst historically the quality and timeliness of formal reports and advice has not been efficient (resulting in the lateness of reports, slow decision-making and poor pre-meeting briefings) these processes are formally under 'lean' review as part of an overhaul of committee support arrangements.

The Council's vision and priorities agreed by all party leaders in 2017 has continued to be the focus for the Council's activity, delivery and performance arrangements. This is being

updated to reflect the new administration's manifesto, while providing a strong platform for service reform over the four year period. Performance monitoring against identified key performance indicators (KPIs) has been central to the revised approach to the performance management framework introduced in 2017-18, but this will now be thoroughly reviewed to ensure alignment to the new Council Plan agreed by Cabinet in June 2018. It will bring in changes that will provide comparability with peer cities and aim to promote a more consistent focus on outcomes and encourage 'stretch' in terms of our performance ambitions.

The Overview and Scrutiny committee structure and support function has also been reviewed on a cross-party basis with the findings reported to Full Council in March 2018. Whilst not all recommendations have been implemented fully by the Executive (for example, political balance of Committee Chairs) the Leader has committed to outlining a clear rationale back to the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the spirit of openness and transparency.

A Modern and Progressive Organisational Culture

Effective political and managerial working must be underpinned by an organisational culture that promotes shared working across Directorates, encourages transparency and honesty, and supports leaders to take personal responsibility of issues and challenges

Culture change is a long-term endeavour, requiring sustained commitment from the entire body of Elected Members and Senior Leadership community of officers. Effective mechanisms and processes are required to gain wider ownership and buy-in from employees. The Kerslake Report in 2014 identified a 'council knows best' attitude and the need to look outside and learn from others. It also called for the clarification of officer/member roles, referring to these being blurred in Birmingham. The Council has accepted this as a governance hallmark to be demonstrably achieved. Members have spent time looking at good practice in comparable city authorities, visiting with officers Oldham, Leeds, Manchester and, most recently, Bristol and Nottingham.

The Council's formal member/officer protocol, in turn framed by BCC values and behaviours, is an important new development, but ensuring widespread understanding of it and building the confidence that everyone will meet its standards in their day-to-day interactions needs to be culturally embedded. Implementation of the protocol will be carefully monitored and reported to the Panel. Meanwhile, a new induction programme ('Welcome/Welcome back') event for the councillors elected in 2018 has begun. It covers themes about council structures, functions, standards and ethics, alongside round table conversations with officers about how to appropriately influence the organisation. It seeks to develop better understanding about councillors' roles and enables councillors to explore how to appropriately pursue ward casework.

Working with Members is shaped by the Council's People Strategy. Promoting appropriate values and behaviours are a key part of this strategy and these are widely publicised across the organisation. The strategy promotes a culture of resilience and transparency to aid the tackling of difficult decisions in a challenging environment.

The Council will now undertake work to ensure that the People Strategy is 'owned' by the workforce at all levels since recent insights, evidenced by weak staff survey responses, suggest that this is not currently the case. There is a need, therefore, to reinforce a new organisational culture programme which will be developed internally through staff, member and partner engagement. The workforce plan flowing from the workforce strategy will define a new 'culture dashboard' with appropriate performance measures and timelines for monitoring improvements. This will also be reported to the Panel.

Low staff survey response rates indicated significant silo-working, detachment of senior management and a lack of effective communication. It is accepted that internal communications has not always been cross-directorate, strategic and timely and there are ongoing improvements being made to establish a consistent one-council approach.

The Chief Executive and Council Management Team (CMT) are committed to developing a joint, overarching approach to communications. A specific internal communications strategy, informed by LGA's recommendations for improving communications, is being developed. There will also be ongoing training for Members around internal communications networks to enable more agile provision of information.

Managerial Leadership

This section concerns effective managerial leadership working as a constructive partnership, with clear definition of roles and a shared agenda with the Council's Elected Members.

As noted above, since the Kerslake Report the Council has seen a high degree of turnover in critical senior positions, a high proportion of interim post holders and extensive unfilled vacancies. Prior to and since the Kerslake report publication, the organisation has lost a wealth of experience and skills at all levels through rounds of redundancies necessitated by cuts in local government funding and spending. This has proved challenging and has been reflected in some of the staff survey responses relating to senior management and leadership (e.g. only 21.6% of respondents felt the Chief Executive and strategic directors keep their promises (2016 survey)). However, it is accepted that the Council was not proactive about redesigning and implementing its redundancy and other human resources policies which prevented it from retaining and developing the talent and experience needed in the way other councils have managed to do so. It is also accepted that key staff survey responses have remained consistently low both prior to and since the Kerslake review (e.g. only 35.6% of respondents to the 2016 survey agreed that senior managers were sufficiently visible and accessible to staff at all levels and only 33.3% agreed that the Council is good at engaging employees in decision making).

Steps are being taken to enhance organisational leadership, including:

- A re-invigorated approach to the Executive and Management Team meetings whereby significant time was committed throughout late May and June to review the 'State of the City', develop a new Council Plan and associated performance framework and then move towards an early Medium Term Financial Plan and associated budget cycle;
- A senior officer development programme with induction, information, guidance and peer support;
- Dedicated sessions of the Extended Leadership Team (ELT) of JNC officers' whereby development sessions will from now on be taking place on a monthly basis with crucial topics being covered, such as good governance, equal pay, the Council Plan and performance framework and the Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget process. The emphasis for these renewed ELT sessions on peer learning and joint policy development is supporting 'one Council working' across directorates and professional disciplines;

- Changes to Council Management Team (CMT) arrangements to embed rigour and forward planning and use of technology to address staff resistance to change (for example, Chief Executive updates, blogs and use of Yammer).

In parallel there will be comprehensive and transparent advice to Members with effective implementation of decisions, the reinstatement of a rigorous forward plan, implementation of a revised budget and performance board, with monthly updates and senior officer engagement in the overview and scrutiny work programme. Both will be tracked and evaluated as part of Corporate Governance Improvement Plan monitoring.

Strategic Planning, Financial and Performance Management

Effective corporate and financial framework to ensure strategic focus, transparency and governance

The Council's vision, priorities and values were reviewed and agreed in 2016/17 and a delivery plan was produced with directorates and Cabinet Members for the 2018+ budget. A refresh following the May 2018 elections and the new Cabinet involves integrated planning and priority sessions for EMT/CMT in June to plan for 2018–2022 aligned to the medium term financial plan (MTFP). Informed by the administration's election manifesto and insight data, including detailed demographics and resident opinion, it will address service priorities and demand pressures facing directorates.

Performance Management had made some improvements in some respects since the Kerslake Review. CMT monthly performance boards since April 2017 have consisted of the key areas of focus for identified KPIs at a council, service and organisational level.

It is apparent, however, that current KPIs are not all outcome-focused and the Council does not make sufficient use of available customer insight data or consistently compare its performance to other core cities or leading council benchmarks. Taken together this limits confidence in existing performance targets. Equally, the performance cycle is not adaptable enough to inform in-year decisions, strategies, plans or resource deployment where adjustments are required. This leads to a lack of peer learning, a tendency to avoid self-critique and there is insufficient focus on achieving performance stretch. The council performance appraisal system – reviewed and updated in 2016 – requires further adjustment. It is currently misaligned and inconsistently applied. Despite historically leading to performance-related pay increments, the model has limited quality assurance and no peer-validation or strategic talent management arrangements.

To address these issues there will be a further strategic review of the performance framework in concert with the production of the Council Plan 2018-2022. Each month CMT and EMT sessions will consider clear performance, budget and risk profiles and act to address resource or performance-led interventions in a timely manner. There will be a strategic review of the current appraisal system assessing 'best in class' public and private sector examples and a revised performance appraisal system will be introduced in 2018.

Financial Planning

As with the rest of the local government sector, government funding cuts combined with significant local expenditure pressures in core service areas have amplified the challenges faced by the Council requiring deep financial cuts to be made. In the seven years to March 2018, the Council had taken some £642m out of its the annual budget and anticipates having to make further annual cuts of £123m by 2021/22 which would represent total annual savings of £765m over the eleven-year period. Inevitably reductions of this magnitude over a relatively short time period have impacted on front line and back office services and by

March 2022, the Council will have taken more than 50% from its net annual budget. Partly in response to this, and partly because the Council has not taken or effectively implemented the difficult political decisions required to 'grip' and address its financial challenges the Council has reached to its reserves to stabilise its financial position. This has exacerbated the challenges the Council will face in the next two years.

While it is the national policy position of the LGA and the national Labour Group to challenge the central government policy of austerity, we recognise that this is no excuse for failing services or lack of moral purpose. The Council is now committed to embracing innovative and more efficient ways of working, including doing much more in partnership, in order to meet the expectations of residents and achieve the standards set by our national peers.

The last three years have been especially problematic in BCC, as highlighted in the external auditor's reports of 2016 and 2017, where an adverse value for money conclusion was included in the 2017 audit opinion. The audit reports focussed on the Council continuing to take action to manage the emerging trend of under-delivery of savings and recommended that the officer and political leadership work together to ensure the Council's financial stability remains a top priority. The level of savings delivered has fallen below the planned level, and other spending pressures have also emerged, which has meant that additional uses of reserves have been required over and above original plans to balance and deliver the budget since 2015/16.¹ Indeed in 2017/18, against a planned use of reserves of £46.6m, the Council needed to use £63.1m (including £9.5m one-off in respect of a subsidiary) and a further structural use of reserves of £28.6m is required in 2018/19. At month 2 of the 2018-19, the Council is forecasting an overspend of circa £27m in addition to use of structural reserves. Steps are currently being taken by the Cabinet member and Council Management Team to eliminate this overspend by seeking mitigations from services. In parallel, the Council will be reviewing its client-based approach and efficacy of trading ventures. The immediate challenge is to ensure that this requirement does not grow and the reporting cycle has been brought forward by 3 weeks to ensure timely reporting to assist decision-making and mitigations.

If the Council is to achieve long-term financial sustainability, it must ensure that it develops and delivers robust spending and saving plans consistent with its spending priorities. To achieve this there will need to be much greater accountability for Directors and Cabinet Members and an enhanced role for EMT in overseeing financial performance. The Council will adopt a priority-based budgeting approach that will align the use of financial resources with its policy priorities, integrate revenue and capital planning and consider performance, benchmarking and unit cost information in developing its plans. The budget setting process will focus on exploiting opportunities for service re-design and partnership working and link better to the development of capital and asset strategies. In this way, the Council will more effectively than has previously been the case streamline the resources it uses to better reflect the priorities of the Council and more effectively reduce spend on lower priority areas.

Beginning in 2018/19, access to Directorate reserves used as mitigations for base budget issues and savings non-delivery has been removed and Directorates now hold only grant

¹ In 2016/17, Directorates overspent by £71.9m. The Directorate overspend was primarily down to savings non-delivery in Adult, Social Care and Health and Place Directorates as well as some base budget pressures. Corporate mitigations, including use of capital receipts flexibility, were identified totalling £42.1m. 2017/18 showed a similar picture with Directorates overspent by £12.7m. The Directorate overspend was primarily down to base budget pressures in Place Directorate and some savings non-delivery across most Directorates. Furthermore, Corporate overspends of £24.1m occurred in 2017/18 relating to ACIVICO (£9.5m) and non-delivery of the Council's Future Operating Model (£14.6m). Corporate underspends were identified of £15.9m. In total, therefore, there was the need to use £12.9m of additional reserves taking the total use of reserves for 2017-18 to £63m.

and ring-fenced account reserves for specific items of expenditure. Where a service identifies that its budget is going off-track there will be a hierarchical approach to bringing the budget back on-track:

1. The service will be expected to identify recovery plans and/or new savings proposals to bring its own overall spending back in line with the agreed budget;
2. Where such mitigation is not possible, CMT will consider how it may re-balance budgets across the Council to achieve the same aim;
3. Only with these routes exhausted and so as a last resort would CMT and Cabinet consider whether it would be appropriate to apply reserves.

To support this, the Finance function itself is being redesigned to promote effective business partnering supported by a strong technical core – with 20% less resource. Achieving this ambition and changing how the Council manages its finances will demand a broader set of skills and will require a fresh injection of new thinking.

Community Cohesion

Community cohesion is a key priority for the Council. Recent progress has included a partner summit in December 2017, which enabled proactive engagement with local partners and city exemplars; the hosting of an MHCLG working session; and follow-up engagement to seek to achieve alignment between national, WMCA and local strategies. Our new Community Cohesion Strategy was taken to Cabinet in June 2018. Through this new strategy we will be seeking to frame the language and priority themes around cohesion in the city; redefine the Council's role as a convening and enabling presence (rather than dominating); and champion ongoing learning around excellent practice in the city with a series of community and partnership engagement sessions taking place from July to September 2018 and an annual practice-sharing summit in November each year.

Commonwealth Games

Birmingham was confirmed as the host city of the 2022 Commonwealth Games on 21 December 2018. A great deal of work went into securing this decision during the later months of 2017/18. Work began on addressing the many opportunities and challenges associated with host-city status in the first week of January with the creation of a Commonwealth Games Project Team, which is leading on the work internally. A Project Director was successfully appointed and started work with the Council on 29 May 2018.

The Project Team has created an internal governance structure which draws upon the expertise within the Council. A small Project Management Office function coordinates the projects work which is driven within the business, taking a whole council approach, learning from the best practice of Glasgow, Manchester and Gold Coast approaches to the games.

The project's immediate deliverables, and first successes, were the delivery of the handover element of the closing ceremony and the athletes' homecoming as part of the Gold Coast games. The handover was seen by hundreds of millions of people around the world and showed Birmingham at its vibrant and diverse best. This event was delivered in 8 weeks, on time and on budget, to significant acclaim.

Current priorities include the Capital Programme comprised of the Athletes Village, Stadium, Aquatics Centre and Transport infrastructure. As these are the most time pressured and fundamental products required for the Games, work has progressed at pace to ensure we are able to deliver them in good time.

A fundamental ingredient to the success of Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games will be the partnership governance arrangements between the key strategic partners. Mirroring our own internal arrangements these have been mobilised since February 2018 with key meetings between chief executives from BCC, the sponsoring Government department (DCMS), the Commonwealth Games Federation and associated delivery partners, the West Midlands Combined Authority, Transport for West Midlands and West Midlands Police.

The Commonwealth Games represents a tremendous opportunity for the city and the Council. It promises to be a catalyst for improvement and a driver of quality and excellence in the city's service delivery and a platform for national and international leadership. The Council is, however, aware of the scale of the undertaking and the fact that the Games present a series of substantial strategic and reputational risks. These risks are being overtly assessed and managed through the Council's CWG programme arrangements.

City Partnerships

The vision for Birmingham is to be a city of growth where every child, citizen and place matters. The broad priorities of children, housing, jobs and skills and health have been in place for many years, for such investment is a long-term, complex process. These themes command a consensus across partners and have been in place for many years. The Council, however, has received support to further develop the city vision by recreating a partnership framework to do so, with shared purpose and objectives.

A recent review of partnership activity highlighted significant gaps in the quality and efficacy of 'products' that reflect how well partnership working is operating in practice – such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, annual Public Health reports, learning arising from statutory reviews and formal planning around shared accountability frameworks. It is apparent that the partnerships the Council is involved in operate in silos, and do not appropriately link across, share insight or effectively build and use capacity in the city. The Council intends to build on recent successes, e.g. the setting up of the Children's Trust, and maintain a transparent and proactive approach to maximise learning and facilitate collaboration with other partners.

The Leader's partnership summit held in January 2018 began discussions with partners, reinforced the importance of previously agreed city vision themes and secured a commitment to develop a shared outcomes framework and undertake a partnerships structural review. Work to create an accountability and performance framework for the city vision themes to deliver is needed; for a different, enabling form of city leadership; to maximise opportunities (such as the Commonwealth Games and HS2); to move towards a more integrated operating model; and crucially to improve outcomes for residents — as evidenced by the recent challenging CQC report. Work is underway to support a further round of partnership engagement in July 2018, and building positive partnership behaviours and a shared ethos is at the heart of personal development processes for senior Elected Members and officers alike.

Local Leadership

The Kerslake Review called for a new model for devolution. After a slow start and some initiatives that were not fully implemented across all wards or maintained, significant progress is being achieved in this area. There has been recent work to develop a new ward-based approach alongside the transition to the new wards and four-yearly elections and to establish a positive approach to the development of further parish councils within the city. Thus, Cabinet endorsed a policy statement in March 2018 *Localism in Birmingham*. An important Overview and Scrutiny Committee review highlighted failings in our current work with the two existing parishes and the need to put in place a more responsive approach.

Cabinet consequently endorsed a Green Paper, *Working Together in Neighbourhoods*, which responds to the Overview & Scrutiny report on parishes and sets out a broad direction of travel, including a process for creating further parish councils and for developing local devolution deals to enable services to be delivered at the local level where appropriate.

The Green Paper was published shortly prior to the May election and will be followed by a 'summer of engagement' and a White Paper in the autumn. The role of the Assistant Leaders and the Cabinet Committee has now been wound up and Cabinet member accountability has been tightened-up within the Homes and Neighbourhoods portfolio. This work will be taken forward with the input of a Cross-Party Working Group, as recommended by the O&S report. The Group will include external experts, for example the National Association of Local Councils or representatives of parish councils from elsewhere in the country. At the same time, a new operations group will be put in place to ensure better working with the existing parish councils.

The City Council does, however, face serious challenges in identifying the necessary resources to maintain or enhance support to councillors and their ward work. The new ward-based approach hinges on the ability to hold regular Ward Forums to engage residents and organisations, and on the production of a Ward Plan setting out service and place improvement priorities. Diminished internal resources make this difficult, especially in the context of the switch to single-member wards and the increase in the number of wards from 40 to 69. There are also resource implications in the Council's commitment to improving the responsiveness of local services. A senior-level working group will seek contributions from the city's diverse and strong civil infrastructure (neighbourhood forums, community development trusts, residents' associations and social enterprises). This work will be completed during 2018-19 and will inform the budget process.

Regional and National Leadership

Collaboration with the Combined Authority, the elected Mayor and the other West Midlands authorities has developed over the past year as the new framework of governance we have created is bedded in. A busy year has included the agreement of a further devolution deal and major steps forward on priorities such as transport investment and housing, as well as piloting new local industrial strategies. Birmingham has been at the heart of these developments through both member engagement and officer capacity. The City Council is also the lead city on industrial strategy within the Core Cities group.

The Council Leader has the important portfolio of Economic Growth for the Combined Authority and the Council is consequently actively supporting this role through regular briefings from the CA leadership team and clear officer responsibilities within BCC. We have, meanwhile, established a system to engage identified lead officers in all aspects of the CA agenda. The Council's Strategic Policy Team will be at the heart of work led by the local authority chief executives to develop a shared policy agenda with the CA and to take forward further work with government identified in the second devolution deal.

Service Improvement Blocks

In addition to the Corporate Governance Improvement Plan there are four service areas which will be subject to additional focus as part of our improvement journey. These will be embedded into the council planning and performance framework for ongoing evaluation and review. These are:

- Adult Social Care
- Education

- Children's Social Care
- Waste Management

How Success will be Monitored

In order to appropriately monitor the Council's progress, the Council intends to deliver a 'mixed methodology' approach to evaluation. In part, this will rely on formal performance management using industry-standard metrics and comparing Birmingham with peers nationally. There will be monthly performance monitoring of the delivery against the Council Plan and improvement plans through CMT and the Council's Cabinet, and all such information will be transparently shared with the BIIP and MHCLG.

The Council and BIIP will monitor early indications (the 'tracers') of improvement in social outcomes, through our adherence to the 2018-19 budget and stronger grip on issues such as homelessness, skills, community cohesion, waste and equal pay.

It will be crucial for Birmingham to look beyond its own practices and evidence base in order to improve. The Council will continually look to professional bodies, peers and national associations whose frameworks Birmingham can use to benchmark excellence and maturity. In some cases, we are using published frameworks to self-assess against and monitor internally over time. In others, we are proposing to engage these third-party bodies in targeted pieces of evaluation work to ensure objective evaluation of progress.

Ultimately, Elected Member, staff, partner and citizen feedback will be the most important test of whether things have changed. In addition to use of formal feedback mechanisms such as the residents' survey or citizens' panel, we feel that it is important to regularly 'take the temperature' with some key internal and external audiences throughout 2018-19. We have devised a simple, ongoing evaluation method against our corporate governance improvement plan. For a set of key stakeholders - for example, key Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs, the Chief Executive and statutory Council officers, Audit (internal and external) and statutory partnership chairs - we will have a structured conversation on a monthly basis to ascertain their appreciation of the Council's progress (actions) and quality (maturity) of those outputs, along with an opportunity to note specific comments or concerns. We will seek to share such insights with MHCLG and the BIIP as part of our regular updates, and feel that such qualitative approaches to evaluation will augment the more formal reporting regime.