

Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board Agenda

Wednesday 11 November 2020 at 5.45pm

This agenda gives notice of items to be considered in private as required by Regulations 5 (4) and (5) of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

To confirm the minutes of the meetings held on 25 September and 12 October 2020 as correct records.

3. Declarations of Interest

(a) To receive any declarations of interest from members relating to any item on the agenda, in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Conduct and/or S106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(b) To receive any declarations of the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.

4. Additional Items of Business

To determine whether there are any additional items of business arising which should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

Public Items

5. Medium Term Financial Strategy

To consider a presentation on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

David Stevens
Chief Executive

Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillor L Giles (Chair);
Councillors E M Giles, Moore and Rollins.

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

Information about meetings in Sandwell



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Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Apologies for Absence

The Board will receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Board.

Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Friday 25 September 2020 at 5.45pm

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair);
Councillors E M Giles and Rollins.

In Attendance: Councillors Piper and Preece.

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Sue Stanhope (Interim Director – Human Resources), Neil Cox (Director – Prevention and Protection) and Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead – Service Improvement).

33/20 **Matter of Urgency**

There were no additional items of business to consider as matters of urgency, however the Chair requested a briefing in relation to Sandwell Leisure Trust.

34/20 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 6 and 20 August 2020 were agreed as correct records.

35/20 **Reset and Recovery – Phase 1 Findings**

Further to Minute No. 8/20 (18 June 2020) the Board received an update on the activity undertaken during, and the findings from, Phase 1 of the Council's Reset and Recovery Framework.

The Reset and Recovery Board had established three impact working groups:-

- Staff Impact
- Community Impact
- Economic Impact



Each of these working groups was led by a member of the Council's management team and was made up of Council officers and representatives from strategic partner organisations.

Each of these working groups had the following remit:-

- to share impact intelligence (including service user/community intelligence) from directorate areas and external contacts, discuss findings, themes and future implications;
- to agree the key messages from analysis of the intelligence to feed into the overall impact report, with particular focus on the following points:-
 - the impact of COVID-19 on existing issues (negative/positive impact);
 - whether COVID-19 resulted in new issues for the borough/council;
 - suggest areas for the next stage (thematic working groups).

These working groups had now concluded their work as part of Phase 1 and the findings of each were shared with the Board.

From the Communities working group it had been identified that COVID-19 had exacerbated existing weaknesses in Sandwell's community relating to underlying poverty and deprivation. It was recognised that the Council needed to do something different to address these underlying vulnerabilities and to do this effectively it was important to ensure:-

- engagement was done in the right way and was culturally sensitive;
- changes in the Council's organisation to do things more corporately;
- resources were more focused in areas of most need;
- clear measures of success.

The Economy working group had identified a number of challenges facing the borough:-

- disproportionate impact on young people – lack of apprenticeship vacancies, university options, unstable employment;
- low skills base – Sandwell’s starting point was lower, residents who became unemployed and were less skilled were usually less resilient financially and in finding new employment;
- impact on those 50 plus – as with other economic crises it was forecast that people aged 50 plus would be disproportionately impacted;
- skills and employment support demand would be different – higher skilled cohort meaning that the more disadvantaged moved further away from the labour market;
- digital exclusion/poverty – still a major barrier for residents to complete training and develop their skills;
- mental health – anxiety for those returning to work or accessing the labour market;
- economic impact on Sandwell’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities – a stronger understanding was required in order to tackle the issues as an organisation.

Finally, the Staff working group had identified that staff had coped well with adapting quickly to a new working style and maintaining service delivery in adverse circumstances, but it was recognised that this style of working had not suited everybody equally for a variety of reasons.

The working group had highlighted that the Council needed to:-

- define the new operating model and embed this within the organisation;
- balance the needs of staff with the needs of the organisation;
- continue to listen to the voice of staff through regular pulse surveys;
- augment communication mechanisms in light of remote working, particularly with the frontline and those without remote access.

From the comments and questions by councillors, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Communication with staff had improved with the utilisation of Microsoft Teams, however it was acknowledged that other methods were required to reach those employees without access to computers.
- A range of methods had been used throughout the COVID-19 situation to communicate important information and guidance to the public. This had included social media, websites, partners in the third sector and use of channels such as community radio stations.
- The Council had in place a range of measures to support the health and wellbeing of its staff, including access to counselling and a toolkit for managers. The counselling could be accessed without specific referral and was also available to councillors.
- The future operating models of the Council were being considered following a move towards staff working from home during the COVID-19 situation. It was acknowledged that some members of the public would want to continue to access some services in person however.
- Members expressed gratitude to the Council's Revenues and Benefits service for the speed of the response to issues around the introduction Government's financial help schemes for business.

The Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board reported that her Board had agreed to 'drill down' into specific aspects of the reset and recovery from COVID-19. Members of the Scrutiny Management Board concurred with utilising that approach across the scrutiny function.

36/20

Senior Management Restructure

The Chief Executive and Interim Director – Human Resources presented proposals for a restructure of the Council’s Senior Management (Director-level appointments). The Board welcomed the opportunity to be consulted on the proposals and the Chief Executive confirmed his intention to work with the overview and scrutiny function on future service transformation work.

The proposals were designed to introduce a flatter management structure with clearer lines of accountability. The proposals included a Deputy Chief Executive post and nine director-level posts. It was reported that this would achieve a saving of approximately £120k.

From the comments and questions by councillors, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Consultation with all individuals impacted upon by the proposals had been carried out.
- The proposals had been designed to increase clarity of areas of responsibility.
- It was planned to communicate the changes, and who was responsible for what area, through both the Council’s intranet and internet. It was suggested that the all member briefing arrangements that had been introduced during the COVID-19 situation were an effective way of ensuring that all councillors were briefed on changes. Town meetings were also a method to communicate changes.

Resolved that the proposals for the senior management restructure be endorsed.

37/20

Executive Forward Plan

The Board received the Executive Forward Plan for October 2020.

Meeting ended at 6.51pm

Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Monday 12 October 2020 at 5.45pm

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair);
Councillors E M Giles, Moore and Rollins.

In Attendance: Councillors Piper and Preece.

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Surjit Tour (Monitoring Officer and Director – Law and Governance), Rebecca Maher (Interim S151 Officer), Tammy Stokes (Interim Director – Regeneration and Growth), Rebecca Jenkins (Towns Fund Programme Manager), Alexander Oxley (Planning Regeneration Support Officer), Alan Reynolds (Senior Planner), Hayley Insley (Planning Regeneration Team Leader) and Santokh Singh (Neighbourhood Engagement Manager).

38/20 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor L Giles declared an interest in Sandwell Towns Fund (Minute No. 40/20) as his father worked for Sandwell Adult and Family Learning service.

Councillor E M Giles declared an interest in Sandwell Towns Fund (Minute No. 40/20) as her husband worked for Sandwell Adult and Family Learning service.

Councillor Piper declared an interest in Birmingham Airport Update (Minute No. 42/20) as he was formerly the Council's nominated representative on the Birmingham Airport Shareholders Committee.



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39/20 **Matter of Urgency**

The Chair advised the meeting that an urgent item had been submitted for consideration by the Board in relation to Birmingham Airport. This was due to the timescales involved for decisions to be made on the matter.

40/20 **Sandwell Towns Fund Update**

The Board received a presentation on the process used to identify Towns Fund project proposals. The Towns Fund was established by the Government and it had also identified the towns that were included - in Sandwell the towns of Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich had been selected.

As part of the Towns Fund there was an opportunity for accelerated funding to bring quickly deliverable projects to fruition – all three Sandwell's towns had been successful in putting forward bids for the full amount possible.

Local Boards had been established for each of the towns, these were independently chaired, but Town Chairs and Cabinet Members were included on each Local Board. Members highlighted that wider engagement with local ward councillors, particularly at the start of the Towns Fund process, was lacking. The Board stressed the importance of engaging local members as projects proceeded to ensure they could communicate progress effectively with their constituents.

A Superboard had also been established which considered the shortlisted projects by the Local Boards and would agree the final Town Improvement Plans for submission to the Government. An overview of the process for the Plans, and the projects, to date was presented to the Board.

Members suggested ways in which engagement with councillors and local communities could take place as the Towns Fund process continued:-

- Town Board meetings offered an opportunity to engage and communicate;
- Clear and specific updates on individual projects in each town should be provided to members along with what next steps should be expected.

An overview of the different projects in each town was provided to the Board. These were as follows:-

Rowley Regis

- Britannia Park Project;
- Rowley Regis Education Facility;
- Canal Network Improvement: Dudley No2;
- Canal Network Improvement: Old Mainline;
- Rowley Regis Travel Scheme;
- Energy Efficiency Scheme;
- Blackheath Bus Interchange and Social Space.

Smethwick

- Smethwick Travel scheme: Cycle and Walking Provision;
- Grove Lane Regeneration: Housing Development;
- Sandwell Adult Family Learning: Ron Davis Centre;
- Youth, Community and Sports Smethwick: Albion Family in the Park;
- Centre for Health Education;
- Rolfe Street Regeneration.

West Bromwich

- West Bromwich Digital Den;
- West Bromwich Green Corridor;
- West Bromwich Town Hall Quarter;
- West Bromwich Travel Scheme;
- Securing Sandwell's Engineering: The Sandwell Civil and Mechanical Engineering Centre;
- West Bromwich Town Centre development.

Other projects that had not been shortlisted across the three towns had been included in Project Pipelines for potential future investment.

From the comments and questions by councillors, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- The Government had approached the Council to submit Town Improvement Plans to outline projects to bid for funding for Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich. The Council had not been able to suggest other towns or influence Government's decision on this matter.

- Members highlighted the continued need for improvement projects in other towns in the borough, such as Wednesbury.
- Any cycling and walking improvements outlined across the Town Improvement Plans would support the Council's strategic approach as set out in the Sandwell Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan.

The Chair thanked officers for attending the meeting and highlighted the ongoing need to ensure all councillors are updated throughout the Towns Fund process.

41/20 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order, 2006, relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

42/20 **Birmingham Airport Update**

The Interim S151 Officer presented an update on the financial situation of Birmingham Airport, of which the Council was a shareholder along with the other West Midlands local authorities.

A number of different factors relating to the Airport and their potential longer-term impacts were discussed. The Board undertook to share these with the relevant members of the Cabinet.

Resolved that the views of the Scrutiny Management Board in relation to Birmingham Airport be shared with the relevant members of the Cabinet.

Meeting ended at 7.44pm following an adjournment between 6.51pm and 6.52pm

Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Declaration of Interests

Members to declare:-

- (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.