

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Wednesday 17 March 2021 at 5.45pm

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

In Attendance: Councillor Preece.

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Rebecca Maher (Interim S151 Officer and Head of Finance), Surjit Tour (Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Clare Sandland (Service Manager – Finance), Steve Lilley (Finance Business Partner), Gary Charlton (Waste and Fleet Service Manager), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager - Democracy) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager).

SERCO: Annette Joyce, Regional Director, SERCO.
Dave Lynas, Contract Manager, SERCO.

25/21 **Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Rollins and Councillor Piper.

26/21 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Moore declared an interest as a member of Sandwell Litter Watch which has a contractual relationship with SERCO.

Councillor L Giles declared an interest as a volunteer on SERCO 'Adopt a Street Litter Watch'.



27/21 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

Concerns were raised by the Board in relation to a matter to be considered by a Committee and subsequently Cabinet, however, no pre-decision scrutiny consideration had been factored in due to the short timelines.

It was subsequently agreed that the concerns of the Scrutiny Board should be formally submitted to the Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer and that he be requested to clarify to members why it would not be possible to carry out pre-decision scrutiny on the item on this occasion.

28/21 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 9,18 and 24 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

29/21 **Street Cleansing and Litter Collection Update**

The Board received an update on the current position in relation to street cleansing and litter collection in Sandwell from the Regional Director and Sandwell Contract Manager for SERCO.

The Board noted the following in relation to issues highlighted:-

- all front-line services had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic with a reduced service in most areas. The Sandwell site had experienced higher number of Covid cases than other areas;
- cleansing services had operated throughout the pandemic within DEFRA guidelines and provided measures to protect staff. Social distancing in refuse vehicles had been difficult to maintain but teams had created operating bubbles – the same people operating in the same vehicle and on the same



- routes, vehicles were cleaned by fogging machines at the end of each round;
- there had been up to a 40% increase in waste tonnage compared to the same period in 2020, which equated to 20,000 tonnes of additional waste collected. The extra work load and increased staff absences (due to illness, long Covid, isolation and shielding) had an impact on staff and reduced capacity to deliver all services, as a result some rounds had ended late;
 - Sandwell residents had been patient and appreciative of the waste collection crews hard work, the service had slipped behind schedule at the height of the pandemic with high infections rates and over 100 staff off work.
 - waste service was incredibly proud to have caught up the backlog of collections by 5 March 2021, this was achieved by staff working additional hours, crews started shift at 6am and worked until 8pm, they also worked Saturdays and Sundays to close the gap;
 - street cleansing had provided a reduced service because staff were redeployed to refuse waste collections. Also, food waste collections were suspended, but the recycling and bulky waste had continued. Garden waste collections were due to commence in March 2021;
 - 10 staff had been deployed to assist street cleansing to carry out deep cleansing and address problem areas, they were responding to fly tipping, emptying bins and litter picking requests;
 - fly tipping had increased in the pandemic and increasing number of large fly tips off the back of vans and onto land was reported. It was indicated that large fly tipping was business related rather than residents. All incidences were reported to SERCO via the Council;
 - refuse and cleansing workers had worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and services were starting to resume normal activity. It was reported that when tonnages reduced back to normal levels, the food waste service could be restarted;
 - SERCO thanked residents and councillors for continued support throughout the pandemic.



The Board welcomed the update and thanked officers for all their hard work in continuing to run services during an unprecedented period.

The Board noted the following in relation to issues raised:

- the Mobile Cleansing Team consisted of staff who could be deployed to areas highlighted in need of deep cleansing, the resource was currently in Wednesbury which had been highlighted as a priority area;
- the reduction in cleansing operation was due to the need to prioritise residual waste collections. Cleansing division drivers were redeployed to refuse vehicles. Drivers must undertake an assessment to operate vehicles and due to the social distancing bubbles new driver assessments could not take place at this time;
- the HWRC recycling booking system was working well in Sandwell, people attended in their allocated time slot and work was ongoing to review and improve the website and booking system. There was resultant reduced congestion and traffic around the site was flowing well. Members raised a concern that although the booking system improved efficiency, it decreased user's flexibility to attend when they wanted or needed to, and this may deter people from using the recycling facility. It was questioned if there may be a link to the spike in fly tipping. It was clarified that the booking system was a Covid measure, not a policy measure, which would need to be reviewed;
- preparation for a public litter and fly tipping awareness campaign was in progress;
- the environmental enforcement team was working in conjunction with waste services to address the larger fly tipping occurrences in the Borough;
- it was confirmed that there was no budgetary implication from dealing with the reported increase in waste tonnage and additional staffing resource for street cleansing and clarified that where other services had been reduced or suspended the resource could be moved around to address priorities. All changes had been within the constraints of the current budget;



- in terms of enforcement cameras, the waste and fleet manager undertook to discuss with Environmental Enforcement team to find out what resource was available to focus on hotspots for fly tipping in the Borough;
- actions had been taken against fly tippers and fines and penalties had been issued, further detail on numbers of fines and penalties would be supplied to members.

The Chair thanked SERCO for a comprehensive update on street cleansing and litter collections and asked the Regional Director to pass the Boards thanks on to all staff for their outstanding service.

30/21

Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring 2020/21

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 24 February 2021, had referred the Council-wide budget monitoring report for Quarter 3 for consideration by the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

Details of the Council's revenue and capital expenditure, as at the end of December 2020, were received by the Board.

The Acting Director of Finance advised that at a directorate level, excluding Public Health and central items was forecasting an underspend of £8.4m, there were notable variances within this:

- £9.9 million projected underspend against Adult Social Care largely due to the impact of Covid on placement cost and other services that had been suspended;
- £1.1 million projected overspend against regeneration and growth largely due to the Property Maintenance Account;
- £2.9 million projected overspend against Children's Services due mainly to the SEND transport budget pressure.

Including Public Health and Central Items, the directorate-level forecast outturn position increases to an underspend of £10.4 m. It was noted that underspend on public health budgets remained ring-fenced.



After the use of reserves brought forward and one-off balances the position overall for the Council would be a small underspend of £203,000. The projection also included the use of £15.9 m of Covid Emergency Grant Funding and the remainder of that funding would be used to offset a loss of business rates, income from council tax and commercial income.

Other recommendations in the Cabinet report included:

- increase £0.632 m to Sandwell Children’s Trust to fund Covid pressures;
- creation of earmarked reserve for Elections Services £ 0.15m for Covid safe elections;
- Revenue Capital of £0.6 m for IT equipment for the Sandwell Children’s Trust

The Board noted the following in relation to issues raised:

- the Council was anticipating an increase in the take-up of postal votes which would mean an increase in printing costs associated. There had been a positive response to the campaign to make the electorate aware of postal votes.
- The Board noted the request to further consider the Property Maintenance account in the next municipal year 2021-22.

The Board noted the reasons for the variances at the end of Quarter 3 for each service area.

Meeting ended at 6.38 pm

To view the meeting, click [here](#)

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

