

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**

8th March, 2016 at 6.00 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present:

The Mayor (Councillor B Price);
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Webb);

Councillors Ahmed, Allcock, Allen, Ashman, Bawa, Carmichael, Cherrington, Cooper, Costigan, Crompton, S Crompton, Dr T Crompton, K Davies, P Davies, S Davies, Y Davies, Downing, Eaves, Edis, Eling, Frear, Garrett, Gavan, Giles, Gill, Goult, Hadley, Haque, Hartwell, D Hosell, S Hosell, P M Hughes, P Hughes, Hussain, Dr Jaron, Jarvis, I Jones, S Jones, Khatun, Lewis, Lloyd, Meehan, Melia, Millard, Moore, Piper, Preece, R Price, Rouf, Sandars, Shackleton, Sidhu, Tipper, Tranter, Trow and Underhill.

Apologies:

Councillors Dhallu, Edwards, Frazer, Hackett, Hevican, R Horton, L Horton, O Jones, Phillips, Rowley, Tagger and Taylor.

19/16

Honorary Alderwoman Joan Niven

The Council stood in silent tribute to mark the passing of Honorary Alderwoman Joan Niven.

Mrs Niven was elected as a Conservative councillor for Smethwick in 1963 and served on Sandwell and its predecessor authorities until her retirement from the Council in 1991. Mrs Niven had served as the Deputy Mayor of Sandwell in 1978/79 and became an Honorary Alderwoman on 21st April 1998.

On behalf of the Council, Councillor Melia paid tribute to Mrs Niven.

Members joined the Mayor in extending their condolences to Mrs Niven's family.

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20/16 **Mayor's Announcements**

Details of Mayoral engagements since the last meeting of the Council had been circulated to members.

Many events had been attended by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. In particular, the Mayor referred to visits to the Big House by pupils of both Wood Green Junior School, Wednesbury and Burnt Tree Primary School, Tividale. The Mayor also commented on the fantastic production of The Lion King she had attended at Sandwell Academy, West Bromwich.

21/16 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2016, be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies from Councillors S Crumpton and Dr T Crumpton.

22/16 **Petitions Under Standing Order No. 5**

No petitions were received under Standing Order No. 5.

23/16 **Questions Under Standing Order No. 6**

No questions were received under Standing Order No. 6.

24/16 **Council Finances 2016/17 to 2019/20 (Key Decision Ref. No. FR038)**

It was moved, duly seconded and agreed, that Standing Order No. 11(6) be suspended to allow the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, in moving the motion regarding the Council's finances 2016/17 to 2019/20, to speak for up to ten minutes.

In outlining the background to the proposed Council finances, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources advised the Council that the final settlement announced by the Minister on 8th February confirmed that all authorities would receive at least the amount indicated in the 2016/17 provisional settlement.

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Sandwell had frozen Council Tax for the last five years in return for a freeze grant provided by Central Government and would have frozen Council Tax again in 2016-17 if Central Government funding had been available. However, the Government had now announced the end of the freeze grant.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government had now recognised pressures in the adult social care sector and had announced that authorities could increase the relevant basic amount of Council Tax for the financial year beginning in 2016 by an additional 2%, without holding a referendum, to assist in meeting expenditure on adult social care functions. Subject to the annual approval of the House of Commons, the Secretary of State intended to offer the option of setting this additional increase each year, up to and including 2019/20.

In relation to the financial year beginning in 2016, the Secretary of State had determined (and the House of Commons had approved) a referendum threshold of 4% (comprising 2% for expenditure on adult social care and 2% for other expenditure) for adult social care authorities. The Council could therefore increase its basic amount of Council Tax up to this percentage in 2016 without holding a referendum. Members were of the view that the 2% precept for adult social care would not cover the increasing costs.

It was therefore proposed to increase Council Tax by 3.99% as follows:

	%
Sandwell MBC	1.99
Adult Social Care Precept	2.00
Total	3.99

The Deputy Leader presented a balanced budget for the authority, despite the shift in Government policy with Council Tax payers encountering an increase in payments.

The medium term business plans for each of the Council's services had been well received by the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Board, along with the medium term strategy and capital programme.

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The Deputy Leader advised that, despite cuts of around £156m since 2010, this Council could proudly show how services had been protected for the benefit of the residents of Sandwell and commented on:-

- more green flag parks;
- children's centres;
- an excellent refuse collection and gritting service;
- brand new leisure centres;
- a jobs guarantee in place for employees with redeployment rather than redundancy;
- providing assistance to young people to help them into the workplace;
- protected budget for voluntary organisations;
- investment in town centres and the environment, clean streets and tree planting;
- protection of the social care budget;
- Facing the Future projects;
- significant reductions in the use of agency staff in social care and savings through the employment of permanent staff;
- use of funds to keep older people active, including free swimming;
- working closer with the NHS;
- smarter procurement;
- libraries and communities centres raising money through activities.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that where charges were made for services these were fair, reasonable and affordable and the Council would continue to invest to provide good quality services for the residents of Sandwell.

In response to questions, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources commented as follows:-

- Invest to Save projects - the Council had continued to invest in its residential services at Ingestre Hall when neighbouring authorities had been forced to close their facilities. Generations of Sandwell residents had enjoyed the facilities at education centres over many decades.

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There were four residential education centres in Sandwell and a change in education funding had threatened the service, however, Sandwell's approach was to ensure that these facilities were sustainable for the long term. The managers of the centres played a key role in ensuring the facilities offered by the centres were diverse. Schools both in and outside of the Borough made use of the facilities;

- the austerity argument had worn thin as an excuse for reductions. The Government was shifting the burden and would continue to do so, however, the Council would maintain its budget in the continued attack on public services. There continued to be local authorities who over the last five years had suffered only minor reductions to their budgets, in fact one authority had received an increase in budget;
- bedroom tax – Sandwell had helped residents affected by the bedroom tax by using the discretionary housing payment. The only way to avoid the tax was for residents to move to smaller properties, however, there were not enough properties and properties were not being built in great numbers due to Government housing policies. The number of people being hit by the tax had not reduced and the Government had indicated that it would provide extra discretionary housing payments, however, this had reduced;
- pay to stay – where tenants earned £30,000 or more the Government proposed that they pay market rent with the difference in rent payment going to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not the housing provider. It was also proposed that the local authority would collect the payment on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer which would involve the administrative burden and the cost of establishing the earnings of the tenants in question being met by the Council and not the Government. The idea had not been thought through and would penalise tenants;

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- school funding formula – academies were currently funded by the same formula as non-academies. It was the Government's intention that all schools should become academies by 2020 and there should be a nationally funded formula. Historically, education was funded as any other council service with a ratio of dedicated grant funding and council tax component. Some authorities had prioritised education with extra money allocated to schools and schools in Sandwell had benefitted from better funding for this reason. When the Government apply the same funding everywhere the extra that council tax payers contributed would be given to schools in other areas where historically they had not contributed as much. Consultation was currently underway with the intention to introduce changes in 2019.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources thanked everyone involved in the budget process for their effort in helping to deliver a great budget which promoted the Council's values and aimed to protect services for the people of Sandwell.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, and Standing Order 12, the decision relating to Council Finances 2016/17 to 2019/20 was put to a named vote as follows:-

For:

Councillors Ahmed, Allcock, Allen, Ashman, Bawa, Carmichael, Cherrington, Cooper, Costigan, Crompton, S Crompton, Dr T Crompton, K Davies, P Davies, S Davies, Y Davies, Downing, Eaves, Edis, Eling, Frear, Garrett, Gavan, Giles, Gill, Goult, Hadley, Haque, Hartwell, D Hosell, S Hosell, P M Hughes, P Hughes, Hussain, Jarvis, I Jones, S Jones, Khatun, Lewis, Lloyd, Meehan, Melia, Millard, Moore, Piper, Preece, B Price, R Price, Rouf, Sandars, Shackleton, Sidhu, Tipper, Tranter, Trow, Underhill and Webb.

Against:

None.

The Leader wished to place on record his recognition of the hard work of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources in managing the budget for the Authority.

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Resolved:-

- (1) that the revised financial position of the Council for 2015/2016 be received;
- (2) that the Council's General Fund budget for 2016/2017 as detailed in Appendix A to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (3) that the provisional budgets for 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 as outlined in Appendix A3 to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (4) that the 2016/2017 Housing Revenue Account as detailed in Appendix C to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (5) that the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy together with prudential indicators outlined in Appendix D be approved;
- (6) that the Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2019/20 as set out in Appendix E and the Capital Strategy as set out in Appendix F to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (7) that the supporting information on the robustness of the budget process and adequacy of the Council's reserves as detailed in Appendix G to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (8) that the Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendix H to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (9) that the extension of the Facing the Future Programme to deliver the required savings in 2017/18 be approved;
- (10) that the existing Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules are carried forward into 2016/17, subject to a full review and rewriting being completed in 2016;

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- (11) that it be noted that the Cabinet on 9th December 2015 approved the amount of 69,913.98 as its Council Tax base for the year 2016/2017 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 33 (5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;
- (12) that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2016/2017 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992: -
- | | |
|--|--------------|
| (a) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act; | £988,023,024 |
| (b) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act; | £902,543,266 |
| (c) Being the amount by which the aggregate at 12(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 12(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year; | £85,479,758 |
| (d) Being the amount at 12(c) above, all divided by the amount at 11 above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year; | £1,222.64 |

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(e) Valuation Bands

	£
A	815.09
B	950.94
C	1,086.79
D	1,222.64
E	1,494.34
F	1,766.04
G	2,037.74
H	2,445.28

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 12(d) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;

- (13) that it be noted that for the year 2016/2017 the major precepting authorities have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority	Police & Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands
	£	£
A	37.35	74.37
B	43.58	86.76
C	49.80	99.16
D	56.03	111.55
E	68.48	136.34
F	80.93	161.13
G	93.38	185.92
H	112.05	223.10

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- (14) that, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 12(e) and 13 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, sets the following amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2016/2017 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Valuation Band	£
A	926.81
B	1,081.28
C	1,235.75
D	1,390.22
E	1,699.16
F	2,008.10
G	2,317.04
H	2,780.43

- (15) that the Chief Financial Officer be authorised to take any necessary action to collect revenues and disburse monies from the relevant accounts;
- (16) that the requirements of any relevant legislation, to consider reports as a consequence of the approval of the Council's Finances 2016/2017 report, be dispensed with on the grounds that in the opinion of the Council the items are urgent.

25/16

Approval of draft Order to establish a Combined Authority

Council received an update on the progress of the work to create a Combined Authority for the West Midlands. Approval was also sought to final consent for the Council to become a constituent member of the Combined Authority and approval of the draft Order to establish the new body.

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At its meeting in July 2015, Council gave approval to the continued pursuit of the Council's interest in the creation of a Combined Authority for the West Midlands. In order to progress those interests, a Combined Authority Shadow Board had been established. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive were authorised to agree all matters, appropriate to their respective position, that were required to progress the development of the Shadow Board and to secure the delivery of a Combined Authority.

At its meeting in October 2015, Council received a report setting out the progress that had been made by the Shadow Board towards the next stage of establishing a Combined Authority including undertaking the Governance Review previously agreed by Council. Council confirmed its commitment to becoming a constituent member of the Combined Authority and endorsed the draft Scheme, which set out the basis on which the Combined Authority would work in practice, together with the Governance Review, for submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

The Scheme, as approved by the seven prospective Constituent Councils, was submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 26th October, 2015.

After further dialogue in relation to the Scheme, and having been satisfied that the necessary consultation had been completed, the Secretary of State had now confirmed his intention to establish the West Midlands Combined Authority.

An independent due diligence exercise had been undertaken in order to ensure that the Council had sufficient information and confidence to enter into a Combined Authority arrangement. The due diligence report provided assurance to the Council that all relevant statutory processes had been followed and that progressing a Combined Authority would maximise opportunities for Sandwell residents and businesses.

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Council noted that the proposal for the Combined Authority was based upon the draft Scheme approved by Council in October 2015 and did not include a provision for a mayoral authority. Following the publication of the Scheme, a Devolution Deal was signed by the Leaders of the seven Constituent Councils, and the three Local Enterprise Partnership Chairs in November 2015. The proposed Devolution Deal was dependent on a separate approval by each Constituent Council and would be the subject of a separate report to the Council in due course.

The Council confirmed its commitment to formally become a Constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority, and consent to the draft Order.

In response to a question regarding the need to have robust scrutiny arrangements in place, the Leader confirmed that it was imperative that there was a scrutiny function in place scrutinising the work of the Combined Authority and potentially the work of the Metro Mayor.

With regard to the Metro Mayor, the Leader confirmed that he would only commit to the deal if there was a cabinet model in place with appropriate democratic processes.

Following a question regarding any links between the Combined Authority and the EU in respect of grants/loans, the Leader confirmed that there had never been any discussions about Europe at any point during the Combined Authority negotiations. The Chief Executive also confirmed that neither the subject of Europe or European Directives had been raised at any point in discussions in relation to the Combined Authority.

Resolved:-

- (1) that Council consents to the draft Order to establish a Combined Authority;
- (2) that the Council become a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority with effect from the commencement date determined by the final Order;

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- (3) that the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council be authorised to agree, on behalf of the Council, any minor drafting amendments to the draft Order and take any other actions necessary to give effect to the Council's commitment to the Order, including consent to the final Order;
- (4) that the draft Constitution for the West Midlands Combined Authority be received;
- (5) that the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any technical amendments to the draft Combined Authority Constitution;
- (6) that, in support of resolution (2), Council appoint the Leader of the Council to the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- (7) that nominations for one other member of Cabinet to be appointed to the West Midlands Combined Authority and two further members to act as substitute members be submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2016 for approval.

26/16

Annual Pay Policy Statement – 2016

The Localism Act 2011 required local authorities to prepare an annual Pay Policy Statement setting out their policies relating to the remuneration of their chief officers, the remuneration of their lowest-paid employees and the relationship between the pay of chief officers and that of other employees.

The Act determined that the Pay Policy Statement must cover a range of the authority's policies relating to the pay of Chief Officers including:-

- the level and elements of remuneration for each officer (including salary, bonuses, performance-related pay and benefits in kind);
- remuneration of chief officers on recruitment;

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- increases and additions to remuneration; and
- the approach to the payment of chief officers on their ceasing to hold office under or to be employed by the authority.

Supplementary guidance had since added to and clarified the information required to be published, notably that the Council should be given the opportunity to consider proposals for “large salary packages in respect of a new appointment” and “large severance packages for staff leaving the organisation” and that the Council should state the thresholds at which it wished to require approval.

The guidance considered that £100,000 was an appropriate threshold.

Section 40 of the Localism Act required the Council to have regard to this guidance in the exercise of its functions under pay accountability provisions. The Council followed the spirit of the guidance, should particular circumstances dictate, and this approach had duly been reflected in the Pay Policy Statement.

On 1st February, 2016 the pay level ratio within the Council between the lowest paid (full time equivalent) employee and the Chief Executive was 1:10.

An initial equality impact assessment screening indicated that a full assessment was not required.

In response to a question regarding the pay compared to other local authorities, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources did not feel it appropriate to discuss the pay of other authorities, however, the information was publicly available. The Deputy Leader confirmed that there was an equal pay policy in place and officers were highly valued.

The Leader wished to place on record the decision that had been taken to freeze senior officer pay. The Leader also confirmed that members had contributed to savings through member allowances. The Leader also recognised that there would be a requirement to address the issue of the living wage in the near future.

Resolved that the Pay Policy Statement for 2016 be approved.

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27/16

Annual Report of the Planning Committee for 2015

In accordance with the Council's arrangements for the principal member with responsibility for key Council functions to report periodically to the Council on the activities of the relevant committee or decision making body, the Chair of the Planning Committee, Councillor Frear, presented the annual report of the Planning Committee for 2015.

The overall number of planning applications received during 2015 showed a reduction compared with 2014. A 'Prior Approval' system had been introduced by the Government in 2013 which allowed householders greater scope to extend their properties. Before this date, such extensions would have required a formal planning application to be submitted.

Prior Approvals did not appear in the formal figures for the numbers of applications dealt with but the process and the work required was the same.

The large percentage of applications approved in part reflected the openness of the service in encouraging developers and prospective applicants to engage in pre-application discussions which were currently provided free. This approach gave a message that the Council, despite the existing economic difficulties, was very much open for business and ready to facilitate development opportunities.

In addition to planning applications, the Development Management Team had dealt with around 500 complaints regarding alleged breaches of planning control. Officers remained aware of the fact that the credibility of the planning system as a whole rested on the ability to take timely and appropriate enforcement action.

Planning Committee was integral to the Council achieving the Government's performance targets with regard to the time taken to determine planning applications and the local planning authority was monitored closely by the Government.

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The planning service had consistently continued to exceed performance targets throughout 2015. Building on this progress, in June 2014 Sandwell achieved the national award from the Royal Town Planning Institute of “Local Authority Planning Team” for 2014/15.

With the threat of poorly performing local planning authorities being put in special measures by the Government, the ability to deal with planning applications in an effective and efficient manner was particularly pertinent. The continued support and pragmatism shown by Committee members proved invaluable for planning officers to continue to achieve the high performance and customer satisfaction levels that they had to date.

Resolved that the Planning Committee Annual Report for 2015 be received.

28/16

Report from the Lead Member on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

Councillor Tranter presented an update on the work of the Fire Authority on behalf of Councillor Edwards, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority. With the agreement of the Mayor, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer was invited to attend and address Council.

Particular reference was made to the following:-

- on 9th February, 2016 the Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government announced the final settlement for 2016/17 at £58.665m, resulting in a core funding reduction of £3.278m for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority;
- the four year settlement offer (provisional for 2017/18 – 2019/20) would result in the following core funding reductions:-
 - 2016/17 - £3.278m
 - 2017/18 - £3.985m
 - 2018/19 - £1.691m
 - 2019/20- £0.690m.

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Total core funding reduction was therefore expected to be £9.644 million (15.6%) over the remaining life of the current Parliament, in addition to the reductions already made from 2011/12 to 2015/16 of £28 million (35%), taking the total cut in core government funding to circa 50% in this nine year period;

- the most effective way to ensure delivery of the budget savings was to suspend recruitment further, resulting in a reduction in the organisation's operational strength, primarily as firefighters left through retirement;
- it was anticipated that there would be a further reduction in the overall operational staffing establishment of 154 firefighter posts with the introduction of voluntary additional shifts at plain rate to supplement the organisation's operational service delivery model. The service had already lost 275 firefighter posts during 2011 to 2015/16 as a result of budget reductions;
- the key areas identified for income generation through flexible funding included:-
 - commissioning through supporting the health sector and reducing risk to vulnerable people and through other public bodies such as local authorities, etc;
 - income generation through social value opportunities;
 - sponsorship;
- the fire and rescue service had already made considerable savings over the last five year period following a number of internal restructures, predominantly across the Support Service functions. This approach would continue over the next four financial years with specific functional reviews scheduled for People Support Services, Administration and Fire Control. The intention moving forward was to consider once more the arrangements and structures for all Service Support functions combined with a further management review across the Service as a whole;

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- as part of the Fire Authority's budget process, there was an annual exercise which required budget holders to review and update their budget requirements for future years. It was anticipated that there would be reductions across a range of budgets as part of this exercise;
- variations to income from Council Tax, within assumed government limitations, would generate additional income of £2m over the period 2016/17 to 2019/20. West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority continued to set the lowest precept figure of all fire and rescue services in England. In 2016/17 a band-D property would pay only £1.08 a week. The increase applied for in 2016/17 was less than 2p a week;
- the Fire Authority continued to provide protection, prevention and deliver a response services to fires and other incidents that was amongst the best in the country. The service delivery model provided by whole-time firefighters working out of 38 community fire stations enabled the Fire Authority to perform against a risk based target response time of five minutes to incidents that threatened life or property. The actual average time to reach such incidents was currently running at 4 minutes 42 seconds which was believed to be the best in the country.
- firefighters spent around 40% of their time delivering prevention activities which had made a major contribution to driving down house fires by 40% in the last ten years. The newly agreed 'Safe and Well' home checks took prevention much further by gathering an extensive amount of information from residents about home safety, health and wellbeing, lifestyle, fuel poverty, winter warmth, employment and other issues affecting quality of life;
- the Fire Authority was now actively engaged in discussions with all Council partners about how work could be delivered in much greater collaboration to produce a wide range of improved health and wellbeing outcomes for residents across the West Midlands. Flexibility as a service, the skills of firefighters and an integrated approach to prevention, protection and response made it possible for the Authority to engage in these wider prevention activities with its partners.

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It was for this reason, and the contribution the service made to the local economy that the Fire Authority had an ambition to align to the West Midlands Combined Authority;

- in 2013/14 the cost of dwelling fires, industrial and commercial fires and road traffic collisions in the West Midlands stood at £198,651,600. Without the Fire Authority's response and assertive interventions these costs would spiral with devastating impacts upon communities. Working with partners in the West Midlands Combined Authority would present an opportunity to explore how these significant costs could be reduced.

In response to a question as to whether there had been any impact through the use of smaller response vehicles, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that efforts were made to ensure that the most cost-effective resource was deployed, depending on the incident. The impact had been positive and rather than sending a fire engine with five officers to a small lower risk fire, the response vehicle was deployed which carried three officers. This practice enabled fire engines to be deployed effectively to house fires and road traffic accidents.

With regard to the loss of 275 firefighters, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that it was challenging, however, the Fire Authority undertook to maintain the current level of service, if not improve it, by looking at opportunities to work in different ways in response to the imposed budget reductions.

29/16

Report of the Lead Member for the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority

The Leader, Councillor Cooper presented an update on the work of the Authority on behalf of Councillor R Horton, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (Centro).

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Particular reference was made to:-

Bus Network

- work was ongoing to identify specific initiatives that would be delivered with partners through the new Bus Alliance;
- discussions had commenced with the owners of Merry Hill Shopping Centre regarding future development plans for the site. With the extension of the Metro to Merry Hill and Brierley Hill now a real possibility as part of the HS2 Connectivity Package, work would take place to ensure benefits were maximised and that this was fully integrated with wider improvements to bus services and infrastructure, including a new bus station and improved connectivity to Brierley Hill and the Waterfront;

Park and Ride

- the work at Bescot Stadium Station had been completed and usage at the park and ride location had increased. This location was also being used to trial automatic number-plate recognition to help manage car park capacity and security;
- an anti-skid surface had been applied to the main car park at Tame Bridge which should allow the car park to stay completely open during the winter months;
- work had commenced on the upgrade of CCTV and lighting at all car parks across the network and included a move to digital CCTV and LED lighting. Resurfacing work at various car parks had also commenced;
- the expansion of the park and ride network would continue through the development of a detailed multi-modal park and ride programme to ensure that the most effective use could be made of both development funding and the capital available. The programme would also take into account the improvements required at sites to encourage walking and cycling to stations as well as park and ride;
- a new Considerate Parking Enforcement contract would ensure that the current low levels of inconsiderate parking at locations such as Cradley Heath could be maintained;

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Swift Smart Ticketing

- National Express had introduced a discounted rate for Swift pay-as-you-go customers that offered a saving against single fares and day tickets. There were now over 9,000 customers benefitting from Swift pay-as-you-go;
- February would see Swift move onto the rail network with the migration of the nNetwork direct debit scheme across to Swift following the successful deployment of Swift technology on to the gates at New Street, Moor Street, Snow Hill, Five Ways and University stations. Further work would be undertaken in the coming months to move the thousands of nTrain direct debit customers across to the Swift platform enhancing the profile of Swift on the rail network even further;

Smarter Network Smarter Choices

- the Local Sustainable Transport Funded Smart Network, Smarter Choices programme was a wide ranging project that aimed to tackle congestion, reduce carbon emissions and strengthen the economy by improving and promoting walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing options. The programme ran from 2012 to 2015 across ten congested corridors in the West Midlands and then successfully secured funding to continue in 2015/16, focusing on key areas of regeneration:-
 - WorkWise had supported 5,845 unemployed jobseekers across the West Midlands (including 479 Sandwell residents) since April 2015 to find, start and stay in new employment with free journey planning and ticketing support to travel to interviews and new jobs;
 - of the 89 new employers signed up to the 2015/16 programme, and the 56 employers active from the 2012/15 programme, there were nineteen sites signed up to the programme in Sandwell, covering over 11,200 employees. These employers and their staff benefited from a tailored Travel Support package to improve access to their workplaces, reduce congestion and encourage healthy active travel;

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- of the new Education sites signed up to the 2015/16 programme, and the Education sites active from the 2012/15 programme, there were thirteen schools and one college signed up to the programme in Sandwell, covering over 2000 employees and 10,100 students;
- from April 2015 to January 2016, 8723 participants had benefitted from cycling support (including cycle training, maintenance training, route planning, journey accompaniment) across the West Midlands, including 757 Sandwell residents;
- the Bostin Bikes pilot had commenced in August 2015 and would continue until March 2016. The project offered Black Country residents the opportunity to loan a bike whilst undertaking cycle training and then purchase the bike at a reduced price upon successful completion of their Level 2 on-road cycle training. Bikes had also been assigned specifically to Sandwell Public Health through their CANDO officers to help raise physical activity levels among local residents. Sandwell Public Health also funded the deposit for the participants, meaning they got their bike for free upon completion of the CANDO programme;
- the Bostin Bike Commuters Pilot had also commenced in January 2016, offering a further 100 bikes to employees in a selection of Black Country businesses engaged in the programme;
- the Managing Short Trips programme of infrastructure schemes would make improvements to canal towpaths in the Black Country together with associated physical highway improvements, such as footway widening, improved crossing facilities and tactile paving. The programme was on schedule to deliver the £1.785m forecast for 2015/16, with improvements to 1.7km of canal towpath improvements along the Birmingham new mainline canal between Galton Bridge and Bridge Street North having started on site in January 2016;

High Speed 2 Connectivity Package

- following submission of the HS2 Midlands Growth Strategy in April 2015, an agreement had been reached within the West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Deal to fund key proposals within the strategy.

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The vision of the HS2 Connectivity Package was to harness the unrivalled connectivity and investment of HS2 to create a step change in the Midlands' economic performance, driving growth and significantly improving outcomes for its people, businesses and places. Strategic partners across the region had worked together to identify a robust set of schemes aimed at delivering excellent local and sub-regional connectivity to HS2 stations;

Metro

- new trams went into service On Midland Metro Line 1 in September 2014, the depot extension had been completed and work to construct the tramway in Bull Street, Corporation Street and Stephenson Street was in its final stages with the line having been opened to Bull Street in December 2015 with the remainder of the line set to complete in Spring this year;
- Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had visited the Bull Street tram stop in November 2015 and named tram 35 Angus Adams in memory of the former ITA Chair;
- in its recent announcement within the West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Deal, the Government announced its commitment to funding the Eastside Metro extension to Digbeth, subject to a business case, to support the first part of the HS2 Growth Strategy, and confirmed its support for the work of the West Midlands Combined Authority Shadow Board to develop a delivery plan, encompassing the Metro extensions from Curzon to Interchange and from Brierley Hill, in order to realise the full benefits of HS2. Work on the business case for the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill extension would be completed in summer 2016.

In response to concerns expressed regarding problems caused by commuters parking in Cradley Heath, the Leader undertook to take the matter forward for investigation.

30/16

Update from the Council's Representative on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel

The Council's representative on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel, Councillor Cooper, Leader of the Council, provided members with an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

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The Panel had met four times since October 2015 and had undertaken a number of statutory tasks:-

- in October, 2015 the Panel held a Confirmation Hearing for the appointment of Chief Constable;
- in February, 2015 the Panel reviewed the Police and Crime Commissioner's policing precept and budget for 2016/17.

In addition to these statutory duties the Panel agreed to examine matters relating to the budget and the Police and Crime Plan in greater detail. Topics looked at included:-

- estates capital budget;
- the operating model for the WMP2020 Programme;
- the use of budget reserves;
- hidden crimes; and
- the local role in responding to national threats, including cyber-crime.

Question time with the Commissioner had raised other pertinent issues such as:-

- proposals for collaboration between the police and fire services; and
- neighbourhood policing.

The Panel had continued its programme of mini-scrutiny inquiries examining particular topics in more detail with key witnesses, with a view to making recommendations to the Police and Crime Commissioner:-

- in November 2015 the Panel looked at the Police and Crime Commissioner's arrangements for Community Safety Grants and explored whether the current approach of dividing community safety funding between the seven districts was the most efficient and most likely to secure real outcomes for people. The Panel's report contained five principles for the Commissioner to consider when making a final decision on future funding (a local funding approach was vital, simplified monitoring arrangements, longer term funding, revisiting the proposed grant cuts and exploring opportunities for joint working across the districts).

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- in January 2016 the Panel considered a six-month progress report on the implementation of the Panel's Tackling FGM in the West Midlands report. The Panel welcomed the progress made by the Commissioner, West Midlands Police, the West Midlands FGM Task Force, local authorities and a number of health, public health and community safety agencies who had reported back to the Panel. Members felt it was important to maintain a high profile of FGM and agreed to further updates.

Throughout the year the Panel had also dealt with complaints submitted about the conduct of the Police and Crime Commissioner and signposted a number of cases that fell beyond the Panel's remit onto the appropriate body.

The Panel had a duty to raise awareness of it with key stakeholders, the public and the media. The relationship the Panel built in the local area with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees across the Region; Community Safety Partnerships; and other partners (e.g. health) was key to its success. Efforts had continued to engage the public at meetings by holding them at venues across the region and through public question time.

In response to a question regarding the impact the Combined Authority would have on the Police and Crime Panel, the Leader confirmed that the original intention was to merge with the Metro Mayor, however, the Police and Crime Commissioner election would take place on 5th May 2016 with the Commissioner being elected for a four year period. There would be an election for the Metro Mayor in 2017 for a three year term, subject to approval, bringing the Police and Crime Commissioner and Metro Mayor elections together in 2020 with the potential for a merger of powers at that point in time.

31/16

Minutes and Policy/Strategic Recommendations of the Cabinet

The Council received the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 13th January and 3rd, 10th and 24th February, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Leader.

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**Meeting of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council –
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32/16 **Summary of Matters Considered at the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Board**

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Board, Councillor Sandars, presented the summary of matters considered at the meetings of the Board held on 11th February, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Chair of the Board.

33/16 **Summary of Matters Considered at the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

The Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board, Councillor Underhill, presented the summary of matters considered at the meeting of the Board held on 22nd February, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Chair of the Board.

34/16 **Summary of Matters Considered at the Community Safety, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Board**

The Vice Chair of the Community Safety, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Board, Councillor Ashman, presented the summary of matters considered at the meeting of the Board held on 10th February, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Vice Chair of the Board.

35/16 **Summary of Matters Considered at the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board**

The Chair of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board, Councillor Sandars, presented the summary of matters considered at the meeting of the Board held on 7th January, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Chair of the Board.

**Meeting of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council –
8th March, 2016**

36/16 **Summary of Matters Considered at the Housing Scrutiny Board**

The Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Board, Councillor P Hughes, presented the summary of matters considered at the meetings of the Board held on 23rd February, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Chair of the Board.

37/16 **Summary of Matters Considered at the Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board**

The Chair of the Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board, Councillor S Jones, presented the summary of matters considered at the meetings of the Board held on 16th February, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Chair of the Board.

38/16 **Summary of Matters Considered at the Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board**

The Chair of the Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board, Councillor Ahmed, presented the summary of matters considered at the meeting of the Board held on 15th February, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Chair of the Board.

39/16 **Minutes of the Audit Committee**

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Councillor Sidhu presented the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 21st January, 2016.

No questions were asked of the Chair.

(The meeting ended at 7.58 pm)

Contact Officer: Trisha Newton Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3193

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