

## **Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board**

**5 December, 2016**

### **Summary of Matters Considered at the Board**

#### **Report of the Chair, Councillor Ahmed**

The Scrutiny Board met on 5 December, 2016 and the following items were considered. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at <http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/>

#### **Update from the Interim Director – Neighbourhood Services**

The Board received an update from the Interim Director – Neighbourhood Services on the wide range of service areas within that directorate.

The Neighbourhood Services directorate provides a wide range of services to the public including housing, waste management, community safety, call centre, parks and green spaces, street cleaning, welfare rights, community services and locality working.

The Interim Director also gave the Board an overview of the performance of the service areas within his directorate.

#### **Community History and Archives Services**

The Board received an overview report on the Community History and Archives Service, more commonly known as CHAS. CHAS maintains both archives (which are unique documents) and printed materials (such as books and magazines) that relate to Sandwell.

As a service, CHAS has three key purposes: to collect, preserve and make available the documentary history of the borough of Sandwell. It has been based at Smethwick Library since 1992. CHAS makes material available both in person, at the search room at Smethwick Library and, increasingly, online. CHAS receives approximately 60,000 visits (both in person and online) per year.

CHAS is formally recognised as a “Place of Deposit” by The National Archives and was subject to an inspection regime by that body. This inspection regime has been replaced with a requirement for Places of Deposit to be accredited. CHAS needs to seek accreditation by the end of 2017. To successfully obtain such accreditation, the Council will have to ensure that the storage facilities used to hold archives meet The National Archives’ specified standards for records repositories. If the Council is unable to gain accreditation, certain elements of the archived material (the public records part) will need to be transferred to another agency or provider that does have accreditation. Currently, the facilities do not meet the standard, although it is recognised that CHAS has taken steps in order to make improvements and has high customer satisfaction ratings. In the latest inspection, carried out in 2009, The National Archives reiterated the need to relocate the archives to more suitable premises.

The Board resolved to request the Cabinet to identify and consider other suitable buildings in Sandwell that could be used to house and deliver the Community History. Members highlighted the importance of retaining Sandwell’s historic documents locally to enable easy access by the community. There was the potential to access Heritage Lottery funding to part-fund a new facility for CHAS which could also be explored.

Members noted that CHAS had successfully implemented reduced budgets but has increased numbers of visits to the service. CHAS also had six regular volunteers and was working in conjunction with another local authority to learn from their successful volunteer recruitment measures.

The Board asked the Interim Director – Neighbourhood Services to consider introducing an Apprentice post within CHAS. It was noted that Apprentices were already successfully included within the Library service and members felt that using such a post in CHAS could help alleviate some of the pressures related to the digitisation of archive documents.

## **Events Programme**

The Board deferred consideration of this item to a future meeting.

## **Councillor Ahmed**

### **Chair of the Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board**