Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

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**8th November, 2018 at 4.30pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor P Hughes (Chair);
Councillor Ahmed.

Apologies: Councillors E M Giles and Rollins.

In attendance: S Knowles (Head of ICT, Digital and Revenues and Benefits);
N Biddle (Digital Transformation Lead).

20/18   **Digital Strategy 2018-2021**

It was reported that the Cabinet would be considering the Digital Strategy 2018-2021 at its meeting on 14 November, 2018. The draft Strategy had been submitted to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board to seek its views prior to Cabinet's consideration of the draft Strategy.

The Digital Strategy set out, in a non-technical way, Sandwell's high-level vision, principles and ambitions for digital transformation. The outcomes set out in the Strategy had been determined following engagement with the Council's workforce and the communities of Sandwell. The outcomes focussed not only on developing digital services, but also ensuring residents were supported in a digital world.

The Strategy set out four strategic outcomes:

- Digital Communities supporting Social Inclusion;
- Skills, Confidence and Trust;
- Transformation of Services;
- Organisation Fit for Future.

In order to realise the strategic outcomes three key themes had been identified:

- Digital by Default Workforce;
- Access to Services;
- Digital Inclusion.

Five guiding principles for delivery had been developed to support decision making and help ensure needs and opportunities would be prioritised to deliver maximum benefits for the whole Council and the people of Sandwell:

- Start with community needs not our own;
- Work together;
- Provide support;
- Make it simple, easy and better;
- Be data driven.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Whilst extensive consultation and engagement had been carried out, members felt that some communities and towns had been under-represented. Officers confirmed that there would be continual community engagement throughout the work underpinning the Strategy.

- The strategic outcome 'Digital Communities supporting Social Inclusion' was developed to address comments raised during the engagement exercise.

- There was a need to ensure that it was not a 'Digital or Nothing' approach which could prevent some people from accessing services or could increase social isolation. Officers confirmed that this was recognised within the Strategy and had been raised during the consultation process.

- There were three managers, each with responsibility for one of the three themes within the Strategy. The managers would work collaboratively to ensure that issues and topics from each theme were addressed across wider digital-related work and were not taken in isolation.

- A delivery plan would be developed once the Strategy was agreed. This would set out the detail of work to realise the Strategic Outcomes.

- It was intended to establish a community network of third sector organisations. This network would help identify community need and potential solutions and improvements.

- Feedback from the consultation indicated that people wanted services and support to operate from facilities that already existed rather than to build something new. This included libraries but also other community settings across the borough. This was felt to help people feel more comfortable in accessing support and digital services as they were already used to such settings.

- The Digital Strategy, and the work within the delivery plan, would link with the Town Plans and the inclusive growth agenda.

The Board welcomed the Digital Strategy and supported the Strategic Outcomes, Key Themes and Guiding Principles that had been identified. However, members commented on the need to ensure that the Strategy also reflected the growing importance of regional and national opportunities, particularly those presented by the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Resolved that the Cabinet be recommended to include within the Digital Strategy 2018-2021:-

(1) an additional Strategic Outcome around Strengthened Partnerships;

(2) reference to Sandwell's involvement with regional and national opportunities, particularly how the Strategy relates to the West Midlands Combined Authority;

(3) Sandwell's existing key strengths including the Council's services and facilities, such as libraries, that had been maintained despite the Government's austerity measures and the strong third sector in the borough.

(Meeting ended at 5.29 pm)

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