

The Cabinet

**5th February 2020 at 3.30pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Y Davies (Leader and Chair)
Councillors Ali, Crompton, Millard, Shaeen and Taylor.

Apologies: Councillors Hadley, Moore and Underhill.

In attendance: Councillors Ahmed, Ashman, Bawa, Bostan, Chidley, S Davies, Downing, E M Giles, L Giles, Hartwell, M Hussain, Dr Jaron, I Jones, O Jones, R Jones, S Jones, Khatun, McVittie, Padda, Rollins, Rouf, Simms, Singh and M Yaseen.

31/20

Leader's Announcements – Councillor Bob Lloyd

Members paid tribute to late Councillor Bob Lloyd following his sudden and unexpected death on 1st February 2020.

Members expressed their deep sadness and shock at the loss of a colleague and a friend, who had dedicated over 30 years of his life to community work.

For many years before becoming a Councillor, Bob had been a champion of the people, supporting many community groups and charities and volunteering as a school governor. He had carried on the work of his late father, also a former Sandwell Councillor, on Tipton Litter Watch by becoming Chair of the organisation and supporting its growth. Bob was also passionate about health services and had a wealth of knowledge, which he enjoyed sharing.

Members spoke of his joyful personality and positive outlook, even during difficult times, and how he was always able to see things from another's perspective. His focus was always on working together for the people of Sandwell, irrespective of political differences.

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Having recently been appointed to the Cabinet he had felt privileged and excited about the opportunity this gave him to shape services to make things better for ordinary people.

Members, officers and representatives of some of the organisations that he supported were present, along with his partner, children and other family members. A minute's silence was held in memory of him.

32/20 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd January 2020 be approved as a correct record.

33/20 Leader's Announcements – National Apprenticeship Week

The Leader announced that an urgent additional item had been added to the agenda – Towns Fund (referred to at Minute No. 37/20).

The Cabinet Member for Skills and Employment highlighted Sandwell's great work and success in the delivery of apprenticeships.

The Council was a leading employer in apprenticeships and had been 'highly commended' employer at the Regional Apprenticeship Awards in 2019. The Council had also been shortlisted as a Top Employer in the National School Leaver awards 2019 and was shortlisted for the Investors in People Best Apprenticeship Programme awards 2019.

In line with Sandwell's Inclusive Economy Deal and in partnership with local businesses and the Combined Authority, the Council was developing a Skills Strategy. The Strategy would reiterate the need for apprenticeships as they were particularly effective in tackling the low skill base in Sandwell.

Members received a presentation detailing the types of apprenticeships on offer and Sandwell's performance data. 3.25% of the Council's workforce were apprentices, against a target of 2.3%. Qualifications were available in a range of subjects and levels. The Council also offered tailored access routes for care leavers and candidates with special educational needs and disabilities.

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Three apprentices were present and shared their experiences with members. The Leader congratulated them and on their success and the positive impact they had on the Council.

34/20

Budget 2020/21 – 2022/23 – Provisional Settlement

Members were informed of the detail of the 2020/21 provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, which had been announced by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on 20th December 2019.

The key headlines included:-

- an additional £1.5billion of funding for social care. £1billion of this was additional funding through the social care grant, which replaced the Adult Social Care Grant and Winter Pressures Grant. Councils were expected to fund the remaining £0.5billion through a 2% precept increase;
- revenue support grant and business rates baseline had been increase in line with inflation;
- the limit for which the Council must hold a referendum to increase Council tax had reduced from 3% to 2%;
- New Homes Bonus baseline continued to be 0.4% and a consultation would be held on the future of this funding;
- continuation of the Independent Living Fund.

The provisional settlement was broadly in line with the prudent planning assumptions set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. Members expressed disappointment that the government continued to pass the burden of adult social care funding to local taxpayers.

Approval was also sought to the net revenue target budgets for 2020/21 to 2022/23.

A further detailed report would be submitted later in the month, following the final settlement announcement.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board was of the view that the report should also be considered by the Board in order to add value.

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Resolved that subject to findings and recommendations of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board:-

- (1) that the directorate net revenue target budgets for 2020/21 to 2022/23 detailed in Appendix A be approved;
- (2) that chief officers develop detailed budget plans for be submission to the Cabinet, alongside the Corporate Plan, in February 2020;
- (3) that the movement of the following budgets to central items be approved:-
 - Contract sum payment for Sandwell Children's Trust from Children's Services;
 - Business Rates Growth payment to West Midlands Combined Authority from Corporate Management;
- (4) that the Executive Director - Resources submit an application for funding to the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership for development costs for the proposed scheme at Birchley Island;
- (5) that the Executive Director - Resources accept the Towns Deal capacity funding of £486,058.

35/20

Drug Treatment Medication Costs

Approval was sought to vary the Council's existing contract with Alcohol and Drug Service provider, Cranstoun, to fund a 50% increase in prescribing costs in 2019/20, as a result of an increase in the cost of buprenorphine, a drug used to treat opioid addiction.

The cost of buprenorphine had increased significantly in May 2018 due to a supply issue. This had led to an overspend of £95,424.74 on the contract in 2018/19. Public Health had worked closely with Cranstoun, to review its budget and working practices to identify efficiencies.

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There were no indications that the price would reduce to previous levels and so the Council had continued to work with Cranstoun to mitigate the impact of the price increase. Alternative supplies of buprenorphine had been sourced, however some forms of the drug were not suitable for all clients.

It was estimated that the price increase would result in additional costs of £83,820 in 2019/20 and £74,291 in 2020/21. Taking into account the variation of £47,712.37 agreed in 2018/19, the total variation across the three years was around of £130,712, which it was proposed would be met from the Public Health budget.

Resolved:-

- (1) that a variation to the current Adult Alcohol and Drug Service provider contract with Cranstoun, to fund 50% of the increased costs incurred in respect of prescribing buprenorphine in 2019/20 be approved;
- (2) that the Director - Public Health approve any necessary variation to the current Adult Alcohol and Drug Service provider contract with Cranstoun, to fund up to a maximum of 50% of the increased costs incurred in respect of prescribing buprenorphine in 2020/21.

36/20

West Bromwich Interim Planning Statement and Masterplan

Approval was sought to the production of a West Bromwich Interim Planning Statement and the commissioning of a West Bromwich Masterplan to reflect the changing economic conditions that West Bromwich now faced.

The West Bromwich Area Action Plan (WBAAP), adopted in 2012, formed part of the Council's Local Plan. The proposals in the WBAAP had, in large part, come to fruition, however the plan was not due to be reviewed until 2026 and there were now significant issues that required attention.

Changes to the retail industry had contributed to a significant level of vacant retail premises within the town centre. Employment issues that the current WBAAP/Local Plan originally sought to address had also changed and the upsurge of traditional employment uses such as manufacturing meant that less vacant employment land had come forward for redevelopment for housing.

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In the face of the changing retail, employment and housing landscape it was desirable to have more flexibility in securing the further regeneration of West Bromwich through the production of an Interim Planning Statement and an associated Masterplan.

A review of the Local Plan was underway, however, the revised Black Country Plan (previously known as the Black Country Core Strategy) was not scheduled for adoption until 2023 and the two documents needed to conform. It was therefore prudent to produce an Interim Planning Statement and Masterplan to form a basis to access external funding. Should the Council not choose this route, the existing plans would become more and more out of date, reducing prospects of securing investment and development for the continued regeneration of West Bromwich.

The Masterplan would aim to provide business confidence in a number of development sites, whilst also providing a clear, deliverable vision for a sustainable and resilient town centre. The Masterplan would present deliverable place making projects, opportunities for the Council to take forward with its partners and would be underpinned by priorities of the Council's 2030 vision and Inclusive Growth deal.

The Interim Planning Statement (IPS) would be produced by the Growth and Spatial Planning Service Area, using resources already allocated as part of the plan-making work. The production of the Masterplan would be led by the Service Area, however, would require additional expertise which would need to be commissioned externally, at an estimated cost of £200k.

An extensive program of consultation was proposed to gather views of stakeholders including members of the public, community groups and businesses.

Scrutiny would be consulted on the draft documents prior to public consultation.

Resolved:-

- (1) that an Interim Planning Statement for West Bromwich Town Centre, be produced by the Growth and Spatial Planning Service Area;

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- (2) that the Director – Regeneration and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Director – Resources, award a contract for consultants to support the production of a Masterplan for West Bromwich Town Centre;
- (3) that a consultation exercise be undertaken with the community and stakeholders to inform the development of the Interim Planning Statement and Masterplan documents for West Bromwich and a further report be submitted to the Cabinet on the outcome of such.

37/20 Towns Fund

Approval was sought to award contracts for consultancy support to deliver the Towns Fund for Smethwick, Rowley Regis and West Bromwich.

The Towns Fund was a government fund, aimed at delivering comprehensive regeneration to 101 selected town centres across the country; enabling new housing/employment, developing new skills and providing new digital and physical infrastructure. The government had selected the towns of West Bromwich, Smethwick and Rowley Regis in Sandwell. Up to £25m was available for each town.

To access the funding, the Council was required to prepare a Towns Fund Checklist. The Checklist was a high-level document outlining background information and potential interventions. The Council was also required to lead on the development of Town Deal Boards across all three towns, which needed to comprise a wide range of key stakeholders from community, business, voluntary, public-sector and faith organisations. Each Town Deal Board was required to develop a Town Investment Plan (TIP) by summer 2020, outlining the proposals for each town, and funding from central government would be allocated on the strength of these plans.

Given the practical complexities of having three towns in Sandwell, an overarching strategic 'Super Board' would also be established, to provide strategic direction, which the Town Deal boards would report into. The Super Board would include representatives from the voluntary and community sector, the private sector and the Combined Authority. It was reported that the President of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce had agreed to chair the Super

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Board. Independent chairs would also be appointed to chair each Town Deal Board.

The Council had already received capacity funding of £162k (in addition to the £25million on offer) for each town and it was proposed to use this funding to procure expert consultancy services to develop the Town Investment Plans. The procurement of consultancy services would ensure that the Council was able to access a dedicated team of experienced bid writers to provide the best chance of securing the maximum funding and ensure that capacity was retained within the team to further continue the high quality delivery of complementary projects/submissions such as the Future High Street Fund.

The item did not appear on the 28-day Notice of Key Decisions because the fast-evolving nature of the Towns Fund initiative had resulted in a quicker procurement turnaround than anticipated and the contract value also exceeded the threshold provided for in the Council's Scheme of Delegations. Due to the requirement to implement associated governance structures in the coming weeks, it was not possible to delay consideration of the proposal to enable it to appear on the next Notice of Key Decisions. In accordance with Section 15 of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution relating to Access to Information Procedure Rules, the Chair of the relevant scrutiny board had been consulted.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director - Regeneration and Growth award contracts to the below organisations for consultancy support to deliver the Towns Fund for Smethwick, Rowley Regis and West Bromwich, to be funded using the capacity funding of £486k received from central government:-
 - (a) Metro Dynamic Ltd in respect of Smethwick and West Bromwich, for an initial period of six months with an option to extend for a further 12 months;
 - (b) Arcadis in respect of Rowley Regis, for an initial period of six months with an option to extend for a further 12 months;

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- (2) that the Director - Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer enter into appropriate contracts to enable the course of action set out in Resolution (1) above to proceed.

38/20

Rent Arrears ICT Software Product – RentSense from Mobysoft

The Cabinet received a report and presentation seeking approval to enter into a two-year contract with Mobysoft to integrate RentSense ICT software into the Council's rent arrears recovery processes. The proposal would enable the delivery of an efficient and effective Income and Money Advice Service that could respond flexibly to current and future demands.

Fit for purpose arrears monitoring systems were central to reducing rent arrears, increasing cash collection, creating capacity to deal with vulnerable residents, mitigating the impact of Universal Credit and preventing homelessness.

The current rent arrears system did not have the capabilities that the Council required, which was resulting in officers having to manually manage cases. This was no longer sustainable given the increase in demand as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit and the complex demands that tenants presented with. Efforts to develop the system had proved unsuccessful and therefore a solution outside of the system was required.

An options appraisal had identified the Mobysoft RentSense system as the option that best met the Council's requirements and qualitative and quantitative feedback from other users supported this. RentSense was currently working with the current system provider, Capita, to automatically integrate the actions taken within RentSense into Capita's Open Housing management system. This would deliver further efficiencies to those already identified.

It was proposed to enter into a two-year contract at a cost of £408,442, to be met from existing resources within the Housing Revenue Account. The business case provided by Mobysoft anticipated a return on investment of £698,498 in the first year of the contract.

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Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director – Housing and Communities enter into a two-year contract with Mobyssoft Limited for the provision of a new arrears ICT software product RentSense;
- (2) that the Director - Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer enter into appropriate contracts to enable the course of action set out in Resolution (1) above to proceed;
- (3) that any necessary exemptions be made to the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action referred to in (1) above to proceed.

39/20

Sandwell's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

The Cabinet received a report and presentation which sought approval for Sandwell's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (SCWIP).

The government had published its Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy in April 2017 with the aim of making cycling and walking the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey. The strategy sought to double the 2013 number of journeys, or part journeys, made by cycle by 2025. It recognised that achieving this would require a sustained investment in cycling infrastructure by central government, local transport authorities and third parties. The Government expected that Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) would be the principal vehicle for targeting this investment.

The Combined Authority had developed an LCWIP that identified and enabled a plan to develop strategic cycling and walking networks throughout West Midlands up to 2028. To complement this work, the Council had commissioned work to develop a Sandwell LCWIP that would enable a plan to develop local cycling and walking networks throughout the borough until 2030.

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The Sandwell Plan would replace the Sandwell Cycling Strategy which was published in 1999. Whilst the overall remained relevant, the advent of LCWIPs had provided an opportunity to update the strategy.

The Plan would have a prioritised plan for improvements to the local network within Sandwell, which aligned with existing Black Country and West Midlands strategies for planning and transport. It would be refreshed in a three to five-year period, incorporating new and updated data sources to support cycling and walking interventions in Sandwell.

Each individual scheme within the Plan would be the subject of public consultation and would be considered by the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport.

The Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board had considered and endorsed the draft Plan in autumn 2019.

Resolved that the Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan be approved.

40/20

Community Wealth Building in Sandwell

Approval was sought to progress and develop programmes to support and deliver Community Wealth Building in Sandwell.

Community Wealth Building described a set of objectives, policies and actions where a local authority committed to using its institutional power to ensure that the wealth created by a local economy benefited that economy and its communities directly and to the maximum possible benefit. Examples of this included procuring more services locally or using providers who used the local supply chain and local labour. The Cabinet also received a presentation detailing the opportunities for incoming investment to Sandwell and what it would mean for residents.

In July 2019, the Council had committed to becoming a strong community wealth council through the Sandwell Summit, which launched the principle of community wealth and sought views from business, voluntary sector and anchor institutions on how best to take this agenda forward. The Council had subsequently engaged the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), a thinktank involved in the development of a number of initiatives across the

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country to support better community wealth outcomes. CLES had completed a review of key strategy documents and papers and carried out interviews with senior officers and members. The resulting Diagnostic Report had identified that Sandwell had a number of strengths that would support wealth building, but also identified some areas for development.

A set of detailed recommendations had been collated in response to the Diagnostic report, which included the need for a more strategic and connected approach to land and assets and further understanding of the importance of alternative financial institutions and the importance of procurement as a tool for wider economic development. The Executive Director – Neighbourhoods would be taking the recommendations forward, supported through appropriate arrangements to monitor delivery. The Cabinet would receive annual reports on progress.

Resolved that the Executive Director - Neighbourhoods progress and develop programmes to respond to the recommendations contained within the Sandwell Diagnostic Report to support community wealth building in Sandwell.

41/20 Minutes of the Cabinet Petitions Committee on 18th December 2019

The Cabinet noted the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Petitions Committee held on 18th December 2019.

42/20 Decisions the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport taken on 8th January 2020

The Cabinet noted the Decisions taken by the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport on 8th January 2020.

(The meeting ended at 4.57pm following an adjournment between 3.42pm and 3.50pm.)

This meeting was webcast live and is available to view on the Council's website (<http://sandwell.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>).

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