

Minutes of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

**10th March, 2020 at 6.00pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Her Worship The Mayor Councillor Dr Jaron (in the Chair);
Deputy Mayor Councillor Hartwell;

Councillors Ahmed, Akhtar, Akhter, Ali, Allcock, Allen, Ashman, Bawa, Bostan, Cherrington, Chidley, Crompton, S Davies, Y Davies, Dhallu, Edwards, Gavan, E M Giles, G Gill, M Gill, Hackett, Hadley, Hevican, M Hussain, Z Hussain, Jarvis, I Jones, O Jones, R Jones, S Jones, Khatun, Mabena, McVittie, Melia, Millar, Millard, Padda, Phillips, Piper, Preece, Rouf, Shackleton, Shaeen, Simms, Singh, Tagger, Tranter, Trow, Underhill, White and Worsey.

Officers: David Stevens – Chief Executive;
Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and
Monitoring Officer.

19/20 **Minute Silence**

The Council stood in silent tribute to mark the passing of Alderman and former serving councillor Geoff Taylor and Councillor Bob Lloyd.

Geoff Taylor had served on the Council for two periods, 1974 – 1984 and 2000 to 2004 and held several positions, including Cabinet Advisor, Chair of the Education Staffing Committee and Vice-Chair of the Oldbury Town Committee.

Mr Taylor was also supported by his wife Brenda as Consort during the 1999-2000 municipal year when Brenda served as Deputy Mayor.

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Councillor Bob Lloyd was committed to the people of Wednesbury and Tipton and known for his work within the voluntary sector within these areas, particularly health, housing and the highly-successful LitterWatch team. Councillor Lloyd was first elected to represent Wednesbury South ward in May 2014 and became Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economic Growth in May 2019, being a driving force behind the priorities, particularly supporting the improvement of our high streets.

Members paid tribute to both Geoff Taylor and Councillor Lloyd and joined the Mayor in extending their condolences to their families.

20/20 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carmichael, Costigan, Downing, E A Giles, L Giles, Horton, P M Hughes, P Hughes, M Y Hussain, Kausar, Lewis, Moore, Rollins, Sandars, Taylor and Webb.

21/20 **Minutes**

The minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary meetings held on 14th January 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22/20 **Mayor's Announcements**

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

23/20 **Petitions Under Standing Order No. 5**

No petitions were received under Standing Order No. 5.

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24/20 **Questions Under Standing Order No. 6**

No questions were received under Standing Order No. 6.

25/20 **Sandwell Council Corporate Plan – ‘Big Plans for a Great Place for the People of Sandwell 2020-2025’**

Council considered the Corporate Plan, the Sandwell Plan: Big Plans for a Great Place, which set out what the Council would do to deliver Vision 2030, and Sandwell’s 10 ambitions, over the next five years.

Over the last two years the Council had invested time and resources working with local people and partners to create a shared vision of our borough for 2030. The driving theme of the Sandwell Plan was One Council: One Team, this reflected the culture change that would be delivered through strong leadership in an open, honest and transparent environment.

To deliver the Plan, the Council would use resources and influence to meet the strategic outcomes by adapting the business structure to ensure that the two elements supported one another. Current council structures had to evolve to meet the demands that Big Plans for a Great Place placed upon it.

Resolved:

- (1) that the Corporate Plan, Big Plans for a Great Place, for the people of Sandwell, be approved;
- (2) that the Chief Executive continues to work with the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board to address the points identified in relation to measure of success and different versions of the Plan for different audiences.

Sandwell's Inclusive Economy Deal

Council considered Sandwell's Inclusive Economy. The deal, the first of its kind in the country, was an informal agreement between the Council and everyone who lived or worked here, to work together to create a better Sandwell and deliver wealth for all.

The difference between Sandwell's deal and those of other authorities was the clear focus on the economy of Sandwell by developing joint interventions which would have a positive impact on the local economy and ensuring wealth creation was kept and shared within the borough. The deal-based approach guaranteed that it was developed and owned by communities, businesses, anchor institutions, the voluntary and community sector as well as the Council. The insight and commitment of Sandwell's residents, businesses, voluntary and community sector and anchor institutions had been essential to the development and ongoing delivery of the deal.

There were three distinct deals within the Sandwell Inclusive Economy Deal; Resident, Business and Voluntary and Community Sector. The primary focus of this new approach was to make Sandwell a better place to live, work and do business – improving individual and community wellbeing, living standards and employment opportunities while also encouraging sustained investment to benefit residents and businesses across our six towns. These deals would aim to offer better living standards, greater employment opportunities and ensure new investments reached all residents and businesses.

Sandwell's Inclusive Economy Deal provided a unique opportunity to showcase and promote Sandwell on a local, regional and national platform.

The future governance of the implementation of the deal was critical and it was proposed that an Inclusive Economy and Community Wealth Board be established, chaired by the Leader of the Council, supported by the Cabinet Member for Inclusive Growth, the lead member for Community Wealth, the Director - Regeneration and Growth and representatives from service areas across the council. Importantly, it was proposed that the board included representatives for business, voluntary sector and key institutions across the borough.

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Resolved:

- (1) that Sandwell's Inclusive Economy Deal be approved;
- (2) that a Council led Inclusive Economy and Community Wealth Board be established to act as the guardian of the programme to deliver the community wealth building commitments, Chaired by the Leader of the Council and including the Cabinet Member for Inclusive Growth, the lead member for Community Wealth, the Director - Regeneration and Growth, representatives from service areas across the Council and representatives for business, voluntary sector and key institutions across the borough.

27/20

Council Finances 2020-21 to 2022-23

Council considered the Council Finances for the period 2020-21 to 2022-23.

The final Local Government Finance Settlement was received on 6th February 2020.

The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy set out how the Council would structure and manage its finances now and in the future in response to this settlement. It also detailed the assumptions and calculations behind the Council's estimated budget position for 2020/21 onwards.

The report to Cabinet on 19th February 2020 provided Members with detailed budgets alongside the Corporate Plan, based on these provisional budgets, for each service area for approval and was referred to Budget and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board for consideration.

Council Tax

The proposed Council Tax increase of 3.99% (2% Adult Social Care precept) was within the referendum threshold.

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The Council, on 14th January 2020, gave approval to set the tax base for 2020/21 at 74,280.91. The anticipated surplus on the Collection Fund at the end of 2019/20 was £0.249m.

Both the West Midlands Fire and Rescue and Police and Crime Commissioner precepts had been confirmed and the overall Council Tax increase would be 4.16% which resulted in a total Band D rate of £1,681.77.

Balances and Reserves

The estimated General Fund reserve balance as at 31st March 2020 was £64.107m.

After consideration of the Council's strategic risks, the forecast level of free balances at the end of 2019-20 was unlikely to reduce from the level of £12.105m which were held at the end of 2018-19. This was equivalent to 4.84% of the Council's net expenditure budget for 2020/21 and was within the prudent parameters set by the Section 151 Officer.

Specific reserves and provisions had been reviewed during the budget process and found to be sufficient to meet existing known liabilities. They would continue to be thoroughly reviewed as part of the 2019-20 closedown of accounts process.

Treasury Management Strategy Statement

The Council was also required to approve its Treasury Management and Investment Strategies and its Minimum Revenue Provision policy prior to the beginning of the financial year.

Capital Strategy

The level of resources committed by the Council for capital investment was significant. In the period 2019-20 to 2023-24, total resources were expected to be around £482m. The effective use of these resources was vital in achieving the Vision 2030 ambitions.

The Council had a strategic approach to ensure funds were invested in capital projects that supported the longer-term objectives of the Council and its partners and provided value for money service provision.

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Housing Revenue Account

The Housing Revenue Account budget was included with the Corporate Plan presented to Cabinet on 19th February 2020 and was a ringfenced account which operated fully within its own resource, meeting expenditure from income obtained from tenants' rents.

Following a four year period of reducing rents by 1% per annum, as imposed by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, new guidance was issued enabling tenants' rents to be increased by a value no greater than CPI +1%. In order to fund future investment in the Housing stock and to ensure delivery of service to tenants, Cabinet approved a three year rent increase on 8th January 2020 of 2% per annum.

A 30-year plan business plan was maintained to ensure that any future planned investment in the Housing stock remained affordable. The current 10-year investment strategy, as approved by Cabinet on 18th October 2017, would be reviewed during financial year 2020/21 to ensure that it remained relevant to the changing demands of tenants and government policies.

In moving the recommendations, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Core Services wished to place on record his thanks to everyone involved in bringing the budget together.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Core Services stated:-

- austerity had not ended, there was £180m less each year which continued to have a big impact;
- Sandwell continued to have one of the lowest Council Taxes in the country;
- the LGA was clear on the position, it was important for members to continue to meet with local MPs and to lobby them to ensure that Sandwell did not lose funding.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, and Standing Order 12, the decision relating to Council Finances 2020-21 to 2022-23 was put to a named vote as follows:-

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For:

Councillors Ahmed, Akhtar, Akhter, Ali, Allcock, Allen, Ashman, Bawa, Bostan, Chidley, Crompton, S Davies, Y Davies, Dhallu, Edwards, E M Giles, G Gill, M Gill, Hackett, Hadley, Hartwell, Hevican, M Hussain, Z Hussain, Dr Jaron, Jarvis, I Jones, O Jones, R Jones, S Jones, Khatun, Mabena, McVittie, Melia, Millar, Millard, Padda, Phillips, Piper, Preece, Rouf, Shaeen, Simms, Singh, Tagger, Tranter, Trow, Underhill and Worsey.

Against:

Councillors Cherrington, Gavan and White.

Abstentions:

None.

Resolved:

- (1) that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as detailed in Appendix A to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (2) that the expenditure level for 2020/21, as detailed in Appendix B1 and B2 to the report now submitted, and the resultant Council Tax, as detailed in Appendix C to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (3) that the provisional budgets for 2020/21 to 2022/23, as detailed in Appendix B3 to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (4) that the revised financial position and the forecast reserves position for the end of 2019/20 be noted;
- (5) that the supporting information on the robustness of the budget process and adequacy of the Council's reserves, as detailed in Appendix D to the report now submitted, be noted;
- (6) that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Strategy, as detailed in Appendix E to the report now submitted, be approved;

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- (7) that the Capital Programme 2019/20 to 2023/24, as detailed in Appendix F to the report now submitted, and the Capital Strategy, detailed in Appendix G to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (8) that the Council note that, at its meeting on 14th January 2020 approved the amount of 74,280.91 as its Council Tax base for the year 2019/20 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;
- (9) that the following amounts calculated by the Council for the year 2020/21, in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, be approved:-
- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| (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 | £1,076,397,664 |
| (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; | £968,140,217 |
| (c) Being the amount by which the aggregate at 9(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 9(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year; | £108,257,447 |

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(d) Being the amount at 9(c) above, all divided by the amount at 8 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;

£1,457.41

(e) Valuation Bands: Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 9(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;

£

A	971.60
B	1,133.54
C	1,295.47
D	1,457.41
E	1,781.27
F	2,105.14
G	2,429.01
H	2,914.81

(10) that Council note, for the year 2020/21, 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:-

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Valuation Bands	West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority (£)	Police & Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands (£)
A	41.20	108.37
B	48.07	126.43
C	54.93	144.49
D	61.81	162.55
E	75.54	198.67
F	89.27	234.79
G	103.01	270.92
H	123.61	325.10

(11) that, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 8(e) and 9 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, sets the following amounts as the Council Tax for the year 2020/21 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Valuation Band	£
A	1,121.17
B	1,308.04
C	1,494.89
D	1,681.77
E	2,055.48
F	2,429.20
G	2,802.94
H	3,363.52

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- (12) that the Chief Finance Officer takes any necessary action to collect revenues and disburse monies from the relevant accounts;
- (13) that the requirements of any relevant legislation, to consider reports as a consequence of the approval of the Council's Finances 2020/21 report, be dispensed with on the grounds that in the opinion of the Council the items are urgent;
- (14) that the Chief Finance Officer agrees the contract sum for the Children's Trust for 2020/21.

28/20 **Pay Policy 2020 and Gender Pay Gap Reporting**

Council considered the Pay Policy Statement and Gender Pay Gap data.

Each year the Council was required by the Localism Act 2011, to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement setting out its policies relating to the remuneration of its chief officers, the remuneration of its lowest-paid employees and the relationship between the pay of chief officers and that of other employees.

The Council's previous Annual Pay Policy statements (1 February 2015 to 31 January 2018) had informed interested parties that pay ratio between the lowest paid (full time equivalent) employee and the Chief Executive was 1:10. This ratio narrowed on 1 February 2018 to 1:9 and has now narrowed again on 1 February 2020 to 1:8.

The Council was also required by the Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, to prepare and publish its Gender Pay Gap data. These provisions formed part of a range of transparency obligations placed upon local authorities.

The Council's mean Gender Pay Gap figure for 2020 had narrowed from 7.1% to 6.4% over the last 12 months. In addition, the median Gender Pay Gap figure had widened in the last year from 12.6% to 14.4%, as a result of not including employees who had moved to Sandwell Children's Trust on 1st April 2018.

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Resolved:

- (1) that the Pay Policy Statement 2020 be approved;
- (2) that the Gender Pay Gap data be approved.

29/20 **West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

Council received an update on the work of the Fire Authority from 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.

30/20 **Transport for West Midlands**

Council received an update on the work of the Transport Authority from Councillor Akhter, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of Transport for West Midlands.

In response to questions regarding:-

- the possibility of extending the Metro to a 24 hour service, particularly in connection with the Commonwealth Games;
- parking at Tipton railway station, the restrictions applied at the privately owned car parks and the investment promised by Transport for West Midlands;
- the Sprint route and consultation with ward members;

the lead member for transport confirmed she would refer the matters back to Transport for West Midlands for comment.

31/20 **West Midlands Police and Crime Panel**

Council received an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel from Councillor R Jones, the Council's substitute representative on the Panel.

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32/20 **West Midlands Combined Authority**

Council received an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Combined Authority from the Leader of the Council.

33/20 **Scrutiny Boards Update**

Council considered an overview of the work of the Council's Scrutiny Boards and the minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board meeting held on 19th February 2020.

34/20 **Appointment of Independent Person pursuant to the Localism Act 2011**

Council considered the appointment of an additional Independent Person, pursuant to the Localism Act 2011.

In accordance with the Act, arrangements must be put in place for the appointment by the Council of at least one Independent Person whose views must be sought and taken into account by the Council before deciding how to deal with a complaint and before it makes a decision on an allegation against an elected member that it had decided to investigate.

The Council had decided to have three Independent Persons. There were currently two vacancies. The position had been advertised openly for several weeks and one candidate was interviewed on 28th February 2020 by a Member Panel, consisting of the Vice Chair of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee, Councillor Hevican (a member of the Committee) and the Leader of the Council. The interview panel unanimously determined that the candidate was a suitable appointment to the role.

Mr Richard Phillips had been offered the position, subject to Council approval. Mr Phillips was a solicitor at Wolverhampton MBC with over seven years' experience advising at a senior level.

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The recent passing of the Chair of Healthwatch Sandwell and former Independent Person for the Council, John Clothier, was brought to the attention of Council. Members noted the service Mr Clothier had provided both to the Council and the borough as a whole.

Resolved that Mr Richard Phillips be appointed as an Independent Person pursuant to the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 for a four year period ending 10 March 2024.

35/20 **Appointment to Outside Bodies**

Council considered appointments to Other Bodies.

Consideration of the appointment of a Trustee to Margaret Westwood Memorial Charity was deferred to a future meeting.

Resolved that the Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economic Growth be nominated to Black Country LEP Place Making Advisory Board for the remainder of the municipal year.

36/20 **Minutes and Policy/Strategic Recommendations of the Cabinet**

The Council received the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 8th and 22nd January and 5th, 19th and 26th February 2020.

37/20 **Minutes of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee**

Council received the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 7th February 2020.

38/20 Notice of Motion

The followed motion was moved by Councillor Ali and seconded by Councillor Shaeen:-

“This Council recognises the pressing urgency of tackling climate change. The consequences of global temperature rising above 1.5°C are so severe that preventing this from happening must be humanity’s number one priority.

Climate change requires urgent action by all levels of government who have a duty to limit the negative impacts of environmental change.

Towns and cities are uniquely placed to lead society in reducing carbon emissions. Sandwell Council’s draft Climate Change Strategy commits the Council to achieving carbon neutrality across the Borough by 2041 with the Council achieving this target for its own buildings by no later than 2030.

This Council declares a climate emergency.

In making this declaration, we commit to:

- Climate change as priority focus for the Council;
- Working collectively with our partners and citizens toward achievement of our carbon zero goal through the implementation, appropriate resourcing and monitoring progress of the Council’s Climate Change Strategy.”

The motion was unanimously agreed.

(The meeting ended at 8.00pm)

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