

Minutes of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**27th July, 2017 at 5.00pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Edis (Chair);
Councillor Goult (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Allcock, Ashman, Phillips, R Price,
Underhill and White.

Apologies: Councillors Hadley and Hevican.

In Attendance: A Ali (Interim Director – Neighbourhoods).

1/17 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the following meetings be noted:-

- (1) former Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board held on 10 April, 2017;
- (2) former Community Safety, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Board held on 12 April, 2017;
- (3) former Housing Scrutiny Board held on 26 April, 2017.

2/17 Director's Presentation of Key Issues and Priorities

The Interim Director – Neighbourhoods attended the meeting and presented to the Board on the services within the Neighbourhoods Directorate, which included:-

- Housing services;
- Community services;
- Community safety;
- Libraries, museums and culture;
- Parks and leisure;
- Customer services.

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The presentation set out the key issues facing the services within the Directorate and the focus over the next 6 months and for the longer term.

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

- The Service Manager level posts within the Directorate were almost all now filled; interviews for the remaining post were imminent.
- The Government's 1% rent reductions for council tenants had impacted on business planning and investment possibilities. The Council had carefully planned for the reduction in income to minimise its impact.
- Rowley Regis and Oldbury had already had Universal Credit introduced. This would be rolled out to the other towns of Sandwell. Other parts of the country had already been converted to Universal Credit and it was reported that other councils had experienced increases in arrears following its introduction.
- Age restrictions on council-owned housing were being reviewed and would be brought to the Board for consideration.
- Although there would always be a need for face to face contact for certain members of the community, the move to a 'digital by default' method of contact was reflective of changes in how people prefer to access services (for example banking, shopping, entertainment). It was acknowledged that cost of equipment and access to the internet could be a barrier for some people, as could a lack of the necessary digital skills.
- A third of the Council's apprenticeships were hosted by the Neighbourhoods Directorate. With an ageing workforce it was important for experienced members of staff to be able to share their knowledge and experience; workplace apprenticeships provided such an opportunity.
- In 2016 abandon rates for calls to the Council's contact centre were up to 35%, since a service redesign took place and training programmes for staff were introduced, this had reduced to approximately 5-8%.

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- Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, London, the Council had reviewed the panelling used on its blocks of flatted accommodation. At its meeting on 26th July, the Cabinet had received a report on replacement aluminium panels on four such blocks.

The Board thanked the Director for attending the meeting.

3/17 Work Programme 2017/18

The Board was asked to consider its work programme for 2017/2018 and the establishment of any working groups as a vehicle to deliver the work programme.

Following a review of the Council's governance structure, at its meeting on 16th May, 2017 the Council had established four scrutiny boards and a scrutiny management board - Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board - to deliver Sandwell's scrutiny function. The Council had also appointed two vice-chairs to each scrutiny board, who would take the lead on a topic from within their respective Board's terms of reference, reporting back to the Board on the findings of that work.

As well as reflecting the Council's 2030 Vision, work programmes were to reflect local needs and priorities. Suggestions had therefore been sought from the public and partners via the Council's social media platforms and newsletters and the Board noted the suggestions received in respect of its terms of reference. Some of these suggestions would be included within reviews undertaken by either the Board or by the two Vice-Chair led working groups.

In addition, at its meeting on 7th July, 2017, the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, during its consideration of the Financial Outturns for 2016/17 asked the Board to review the Council's approach to generating income from the museums and libraries services. Members felt that this review should also include wider leisure and culture facilities.

Resolved, that, subject to the approval of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board:-

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- (1) a Housing Scrutiny Working Group be established comprising Councillors Hevican (Vice-Chair), Ashman, Phillips, R Price and Underhill, with the co-opted member from the Tenant Review Panel, to undertake a review of private rented housing in Sandwell;
- (2) a Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Working Group be established comprising Councillor Goult (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Allcock, Bawa, Edis, Hadley and White to undertake reviews of anti-social behaviour with vehicles and 101 responses;
- (3) the following items be placed on the Board's work programme for consideration in 2017/2018:-
 - (a) Review of income generation opportunities of the borough's leisure and culture facilities;
 - (b) Meeting with the Chair of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Local Police and Crime Board;
 - (c) Universal Credit – impact on the borough and how the Council supports vulnerable people;
 - (d) The Council's response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

(Meeting ended at 6.35pm)

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