



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

**Safer Neighbourhoods
and Active Communities
Scrutiny Board**

**Thursday 21 February, 2019 at 5.30pm
in Committee Room 1
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Agenda

(Open to Public and Press)

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Members to declare:-
 - (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
 - (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.
3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 4 October, 2018 as a correct record.
4. Provision for New Burials in Sandwell.
5. Review of the Housing Allocations Policy.

Date of next meeting – 28 March, 2019

J Britton
Chief Executive

Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillors Ahmed (Chair);
Councillors Crompton and Hevican (Vice-Chairs);
Councillors Allcock, Chidley, Hadley, M Y Hussain, M Hussain, S Jones,
Phillips and White.

Co-opted Member:-

Mr J Cash

**Agenda prepared by Alex Goddard
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Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Apologies for Absence

The Board will receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Board.

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Declaration of Interests

Members to declare:-

- (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.

**Minutes of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities
Scrutiny Board**

**4th October, 2018 at 5.30pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Ahmed (Chair);
Councillors Crompton and Hevican (Vice-Chairs);
Councillors Allcock, Chidley, Hadley, M Y Hussain, M
Hussain and White.

Apologies: Councillor Phillips.

In attendance: Stephen Gabriel (Service Manager, Housing
Management);
Wendy Peniket (Neighbourhood Manager Housing
Choice).
Neville Rowe (Housing Strategy and Research
Manager).

10/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd August, 2018
be approved as a correct record.

11/18 **Housing Allocations and Temporary Accommodation for the
Homeless**

Officers from the Neighbourhoods directorate attended the meeting and
presented to the Scrutiny Board information on housing allocations and
temporary accommodation for the homeless in Sandwell.

The current Housing Allocations Policy came into effect in April 2013.
Key amendments at that time included the introduction of a five-year
residency test and several changes to ensure better use of the Council's
housing stock including extending Band One priority to all households
that were under-occupying a house and giving greater priority to
overcrowded households and households with children in flats.

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Since 2013 numbers of applicants on the housing register had fallen by almost two-thirds to 3280, and numbers of existing tenants requesting a transfer had fallen by a third to 2990. Currently, the majority of households on the register had children.

Two-thirds of lettings of Council-owned properties in 2017/18 had been to households in Bands 1-4; the remaining third were to households in Band 5, which was for households in general need.

A number of challenges impacting upon housing allocations were discussed including:-

- Affordability within the Private Rented Sector was becoming a significant issue as there was a weekly affordability gap of between £16-18 for properties of all sizes.
- The five-year residency test could also cause some households to be excluded from the housing register because the test itself, or their inability to provide proof even when they had been resident within Sandwell for the required length of time.
- There was a mismatch between the customer base for Council housing and the levels of age restrictions on certain types of accommodation.

It was reported that nationally there had been an increase in the use of Temporary Accommodation between 2011 and 2017 and this was reflected within Sandwell. The main contributory factor was thought to be the rise in the loss of Assured Short-hold Tenancies. This was compounded by the impact of welfare reforms introduced by the Government including the Housing Benefit cap for large families and the freezing of the Local Housing Allowance rate during a time of increasing private rent levels.

The top five reasons for placing in Temporary Accommodation were:-

1. Loss of an assured short-hold tenancy;
2. Loss of National Asylum Support Service accommodation;
3. Family exclusion;
4. Relationship breakdown (with violence);
5. Relationship breakdown (without violence).

The Council used a range of units to provide Temporary Accommodation:-

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- 25 self-contained units in the Private Rented Sector;
- 48 units at Bed and Breakfasts/Hotels;
- 6 private sector Houses in Multiple Occupation;
- 11 of the Council's own-stock (with an additional 9 in the pipeline).

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

- The Council had a target of processing applications to join the housing register within 10 days of receiving all the required information, including proof to satisfy the five-year residency test.
- Members noted that some people found it difficult to provide adequate evidence to satisfy the five-year residency test, despite having lived in the borough for many years.
- The Council had put in place measures to help Council tenants affected by the underoccupancy penalty when it was first introduced. These measures included offering higher priority banding for moving to a small Council property. It was acknowledged that some people did not wish to move and were willing to accept the penalty.
- Two bedroom properties and larger family homes were areas of identified need within the Council-owned stock.
- More tenants paid their Council Tax by Direct Debit than their rent. Members felt that there was a need to encourage tenants to pay by Direct Debit, especially at the time of first taking up their tenancies.
- The Council considered converting lofts to help alleviate overcrowding in its housing stock on a case by case basis. The Board felt that this approach could be utilised to help meet the need for larger family homes in a cost-effective way.
- In order to help improve support offered to Care Leavers it was felt that earlier registration for housing could be carried out, which would facilitate a smoother transition to an independent, sustainable tenancy.
- Joint assessments by both housing professionals and social workers could create efficiencies and improve processes.

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- Local Lettings Plans for age-restrictions on properties needed to be reviewed in more detail to ensure they remained appropriate and necessary in order for Council-owned housing stock to be utilised in the most effective way.
- While the Council made use of some of its own properties to provide Temporary Accommodation, members felt this could be increased to help alleviate costs associated with securing externally provided properties and also help make positive, effective use of properties that may otherwise be difficult to let.
- The Housing Allocations Policy was to be reviewed and the Board asked for it to be brought to a future meeting for discussion.

The Scrutiny Board thanked officers for attending the meeting and providing detailed information and points for discussion.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director – Housing and Communities provide the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board with the following:-
 - (a) details of the housing priority banding arrangements;
 - (b) detailed information the Council's housing stock by type;
 - (c) details of numbers of households given priority for having children in flatted accommodation;
 - (d) overview of other key Council housing related statistics.
- (2) that Cabinet be requested to consider the following recommendations:-
 - (a) That, to help minimise instances of arrears and to assist people on Universal Credit to manage their finances effectively:
 - (i) consideration be given to introducing appropriate incentivisation for new tenants to set up Direct Debits to pay their rent at the time of taking up a Council tenancy;

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- (ii) Council tenants who pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit be encouraged to also pay their rent by the same method;
 - (b) That Sandwell Children's Trust be requested to:-
 - (i) work with the Council's Housing and Communities Directorate to register looked after young people for Council housing at the age of 16 in order to facilitate a smoother transition to becoming care leavers and to secure independent, sustainable tenancies;
 - (ii) consider co-locating a social worker within the Housing Solutions Team to allow for joint assessments with housing professionals to take place;
 - (c) That a review of all Local Lettings Plans for age-restrictions be carried out to ensure they remain appropriate and necessary in order for Council-owned housing stock to be utilised in the most effective way;
 - (d) That the use of some of the Council-owned housing stock as Temporary Accommodation be increased to make effective use of properties and to reduce costs related to securing externally-provided Temporary Accommodation.
- (3) that the Director – Prevention and Protection provides councillors with lists of accredited landlords in Sandwell to assist them in their local ward representative role;
 - (4) that the Housing Allocations Policy review be brought to a future meeting of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board, including an overview of options relating to the existing residency test such as the application of the test to only certain stock types and the introduction of a sixth housing priority band;
 - (5) that a report on Council housing-related anti-social behaviour be submitted to a future meeting of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.

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4th October, 2018**

(Meeting ended at 7.29pm)

<p>Contact Officer: Alex Goddard Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3178</p>

REPORT TO SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ACTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY BOARD

21 February 2019

Subject:	Provision for New Burials in Sandwell
Cabinet Portfolio:	Councillor Syeda Khatun – Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities
Director:	Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer - Surjit Tour
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	 
Contact Officer(s):	Mark Satchwell Service Manager – Registration Mark_Satchwell@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That, the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board:

1. consider if there is a need for future burial space in Sandwell.
2. identifies any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 As with many Burial Authorities, the space for new burials in some of Sandwell's towns is running out. Therefore, Sandwell needs to consider what actions if any, are necessary to ensure the needs of the bereaved in Sandwell can continue to be met.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 16 October 2018 the Council considered a proposal to depart from the Site Local Development Plan at Powke Lane, Rowley Regis which sought approval for a cemetery and associated works. Council resolved that the matter to consider the need for a suitable burial site in Sandwell be referred to the relevant Cabinet Member and Scrutiny Board.

- 1.3 Any recommendations arising from the consideration of this report will be reported to the Cabinet.

2 IMPLICATION FOR THE COUNCIL'S AMBITION

- 2.1 Making recommendations will support the council's ambition that Sandwell towns will be successful centres of the community and places where people choose to bring up their families.
- 2.2 It will also support our ambition for Sandwell to have a national reputation for getting things done.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Operating as both a Burial and a Cremation authority, the Council through its Registration Service provides several essential services for the hygienic disposal of the dead.
- 3.2 Latest statistics for England and Wales suggest approximately 80% of bereaved families are now choosing cremation, the remaining 20% chose burial.
- 3.3 Whilst each year there continues to be a decline in the number of bereaved families choosing burial for their loved one, cultural or religious beliefs and choices made through generations, suggest it is unlikely the demand for burial will ever subside completely.
- 3.4 There are currently two crematoria and eight operational cemeteries in Sandwell. Only five of these cemeteries can accommodate new burials.
- 3.5 Based on historic grave data, two of those cemeteries have adequate space for just a few more years before they will no longer be able to accommodate new burials.
- 3.6 There is therefore a need to consider if Sandwell needs to adopt a policy position in respect of future burial space to ensure the needs of all bereaved families in Sandwell can continue to be met.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The eight operational cemeteries in Sandwell which are managed by its Registration Services are;

- Fallings Heath Cemetery, Beebee Road, Wednesbury, WS10 9RX
- Heath Lane Cemetery, Walsall Road, West Bromwich, B71 3HR
- Oldbury Cemetery, St Pauls Road, Smethwick, B66 1QT
- Powke Lane Cemetery, Powke Lane, Rowley Regis, B65 0AG
- Tipton Cemetery, Alexandra Road, Tipton, DY4 7NP
- Thimblemill Cemetery, Thimblemill Road, Smethwick, B67 6LS
- Uplands Cemetery, Manor Road, Smethwick, B67 6SJ
- Wood Green Cemetery, Wood Green Road, Wednesbury, WS10 9QS.

- 4.2 Only five of these sites, Heath Lane, Tipton, Thimblemill, Fallings Heath and Powke Lane cemeteries are currently able to accommodate new burials.
- 4.3 When historic burial data and the number of graves available at each site are considered, it is possible to anticipate when each site will no longer be able to accommodate new burials.
- 4.4 However, if each cemetery were to close to new burials and families were to choose to use other cemeteries in the borough, this will likely see grave space at each of the remaining cemeteries used up far more quickly.
- 4.5 To date and based on current provision, the anticipated burial capacity in Sandwell can be found in the table below.

Cemetery	Approximate number of adult grave spaces available	Average number of adult burials into new graves per annum over the last 3 years.	Capacity (years)
Fallings Heath	7000	21	333
Heath Lane	510	49	10
Powke Lane	230	43	5
Thimblemill	1800	90	20
Tipton	1240	26	48
Boroughwide Total	10780	229	47

- 4.6 Bereaved families who choose burial can be quite parochial in the choices and tend to follow similar arrangements generation after generation when choosing a final resting place for their loved one. It would be fair to

suggest many cemeteries in Sandwell have significant numbers of burials from the same family.

- 4.7 To support bereaved families with their choices, for a number of years the pre-purchase of graves has been made available across each of Sandwell's cemeteries with the capacity of new burials.
- 4.8 With the impending capacity issues in both Rowley Regis and West Bromwich, the pre-purchase of graves at Powke Lane and Heath Lane Cemeteries is no longer being made available.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 It is presently unknown what priority residents place on bereavement related services when competing demands for open space use and potential development are considered.
- 5.2 When identifying a new site for cemetery provision there are statutory and non-statutory consultees who will need to be satisfied that a proposed site is suitable for this type of development.
- 5.3 Although not exhaustive they include; The Environment Agency, Wildlife Trust, Canals and Rivers Trust, Highways departments, Water Authorities and residents.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS - The future of burial space in Sandwell

6.1 Identify new sites for cemetery development

- 6.1.1 Historically, Sandwell through its Registration Service has been able to offer burial services locally in each of its six towns. The exception to this being Thimblemill cemetery which services both Oldbury and Smethwick.
- 6.1.2 Thimblemill cemetery was opened in 2008 and was developed in response to capacity for new burials at Oldbury and Uplands cemeteries which are closed to new burials.
- 6.1.3 Its location to both Uplands and Oldbury cemeteries has helped mitigate the impact on the resources needed to operate services from this site.
- 6.1.4 With capacity issues, immanent in both Rowley Regis and West Bromwich, Sandwell could seek to develop new sites in a similar way.
- 6.1.5 For Rowley Regis, a site has been identified near to the existing cemetery in Powke Lane as being suitable for cemetery development. In a similar

way, two potential sites near to Sandwell Valley Crematorium are being explored as a potential new cemetery in West Bromwich.

- 6.1.6 Following significant investment at both its crematoria recently, these options would create the opportunity to maximise the use of existing facilities such as the chapels, toilets, catering services (SVC), staff and the necessary equipment already allocated at these sites.
- 6.1.7 Alternatively, a more central site in the borough could be developed to serve the needs of several of Sandwell's six towns. This would depart from the current local provision and likely mean greater financial investment will be necessary, in addition significantly more costs to manage the site from an operational perspective would be likely.
- 6.1.8 Sandwell could also consider developing a new cemetery outside of the borough in a neighbouring authority. Without agreement from the land owner, this option would likely require the purchase of land before suitability for cemetery development is established. The purchase of land not owned by Sandwell would also likely see an overall increase in costs associated with any such development.
- 6.1.9 Identifying new sites will ensure the needs of bereaved families can continue to be met in a similar way to they are now and will add capacity for future burial provision.

6.2 Undeveloped land allocations within the borough

- 6.2.1 The development of new cemeteries in the borough would likely be competing with current or potential alternative use of undeveloped sites across the borough.
- 6.2.2 There are a number of sites allocated within the adopted Local Plan for alternative uses such as housing and employment. However, the Black Country is currently struggling to meet the housing targets identified within the Joint Core Strategy due to a dip in housing completions with issues of multiple constraints and the finance required to bring them forward.
- 6.2.3 In addition to this, there needs to be a balance with regards the availability of employment land to meet the needs of the growing economy. The gap between anticipated need and existing and future supply currently stands at around 300 ha of land required within the Black Country.
- 6.2.4 There is therefore a need to ensure that any existing allocations for housing and employment are retained, and that any other sites that offer

development opportunities on brownfield land for these uses are pursued to meet the targets for the Black Country Core Strategy.

6.2.5 A new site for cemetery provision will therefore, need to be identified that does not impede the development on those sites more suited to housing and employment uses. This may mean looking at alternative sites such as open space and the Green Belt where a cemetery use would be more acceptable in retaining the openness of the green space and where any effects of development can be appropriately managed and mitigation measures put in place.

6.3 **Do nothing.**

6.3.1 In the event re-use of graves or new sites for cemetery provision are not identified, bereaved families in Sandwell who choose burial will need to consider what options are available to them.

6.3.2 As space at some sites runs out, each cemetery in Sandwell in turn will close to new burials, bereaved families' options for burial in the borough will diminish.

6.3.3 Their options will likely be limited to that of cremation for their loved one, they choose another cemetery in the borough or they pay additional out of borough fees in neighbouring burial authorities. This could see the costs of burial to these families either double or in some instances treble.

6.3.4 Again, although we cannot be certain of the choices these families will make, historically families who choose burial can be quite parochial in the choices they make and tend to follow similar arrangements generation after generation when choosing a final resting place for their loved one.

6.3.5 In the absence of a local option, bereaved families in Sandwell whose choice of burial as an end of life option will be required to seek alternative end of life options for their loved one that they would normally would not need to consider.

6.4 **Re-use of Graves**

6.4.1 There is currently no primary legislation which enables Burial Authorities to consider the re-use of graves when future burial space is needed. The disturbance of human remains to facilitate the re-use of graves requires the Secretary of State's permission. This is with the exception in London. However, even in London the re-use of graves is not extensively used.

6.4.2 The reuse of graves refers to the disturbance of human remains and re-interment at a greater depth within the same grave.

- 6.4.3 Should the re-use of graves become a lawful option in the rest of the UK, the creation of new burial space would need to be completed ensuring it is carried out with due attention to reverence, respect and dignity to those deceased persons whose remains are affected and in consultation with their families.
- 6.4.4 Only graves in which the last interment took place over 75 years ago would likely be selected for re-use. Graves would only be re-used where the full history of previous use exists within the cemetery records and registers, with the rights of registered owners of exclusive rights of burial needing to be considered.
- 6.4.5 Excavation down to the last interment would be necessary to ensure that all remains present are exhumed, collected and placed within a new container. Should multiple interments have taken place, further exhumations would take place to reveal, collect and re-containerise remains individually.
- 6.4.6 Once all remains have been exhumed and re-containerised additional depth should be excavated and the containers placed back within the grave. The new depth and position of each container so replaced within the grave would then be entered in the cemetery records and registers.
- 6.4.7 If this option was to be considered for Sandwell and either a private bill was passed in both the Houses, Parliament and Lords or, primary legislation permitted for the re-use of graves, it would likely be of benefit in only some towns in Sandwell by creating additional space for new burials.
- 6.4.8 Of the eight operational cemeteries, only Tipton, Heath Lane, Oldbury and Woodgreen cemeteries could be considered now. With the large capacity for new burials at Fallings Heath cemetery, this in reality negates the need to consider Woodgreen.
- 6.4.9 Tipton, Heath Lane and Oldbury cemeteries are however of the age where a reasonable amount of internments took place over 75 years ago.
- 6.4.10 Despite legislation for London Boroughs for almost 10 years now enabling public burial authorities in London to reuse graves, very few have done so citing issues with the sensitivity, consultation and memorialisation.
- 6.4.11 For the rest of the UK, successive Governments for decades have suggested their position continues to be “under review”.

6.4.12 Whilst presently a potential private bill laid before both houses would be necessary for Sandwell to re-use graves, there is no guarantee of success that those bills would be passed. In addition, the costs associated with this approach are unclear.

6.4.13 For the re-use of graves in Churchyards to be considered, any remains would need to be re-interred in consecrated ground. Under Church law a faculty (permission) only is required with each diocese setting its own 'best practice' guidelines on churchyard management.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS.

7.1 Expenditure associated with Registration related services is funded by the fees and charges that are applied to the services it provides. These charges are reviewed and approved annually by Council.

7.2 Burial and cremation fees in Sandwell are amongst the lowest nationally and the lowest locally which encourages families from across Birmingham and the Black Country to use Sandwell's bereavement related services.

7.3 For the financial year 2017/2018 the total income derived from Registration related services was £ £4,724,274, with income from burial related services being £1,566,850.

7.4 In the event bereaved families in Sandwell were to use services provided by other Burial Authorities locally to them, this would likely impact significantly on the income Sandwell receives for these type of services.

7.5 This impact would need to be assessed and mitigated against and would likely mean a reduction in expenditure would be necessary, potentially impacting significantly on the resources available to provide other burial and cremation related services.

7.6 In addition, bereaved families in Sandwell who use another Burial Authority would have to pay out of borough fees and charges. These families would likely need to pay between 100% to 300% more for similar services depending on which Burial Authority they use.

7.7 The development of a site as a new cemetery requires significant capital investment to ensure the facilities to be provided meets the needs of bereaved families. In addition, the management and operational costs also need to be considered.

- 7.8 Outline costs for example of the recent proposed development on Powke Lane Open Space at Rowley Regis as a new cemetery were estimated to be near £1.78million.
- 7.9 As with previous developments and modernisation projects for Registration Services, funding of similar projects has been facilitated by an increase in fees and charges.
- 7.10 In this instance, an increase in fees and charges of 3.25% above inflation would generate the necessary income to offset the capital investment to develop and operate this site as new cemetery.
- 7.11 Presently the re-use of graves is prohibited nationally except for in London boroughs only. A Private bill laid before Parliament and the House of Lords would be necessary to adopt this approach in Sandwell.
- 7.12 Although the estimated costs associated to move this approach forward are unknown, it is likely the external legal expertise will need to be secured.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Council is permitted to charge fees relating to Registration Services by virtue of the Cremation Act 1902, the Cremation Regulations 2016, the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 and the Local Government Act 2003. Whilst the Council has discretion over many of the fees, a number relating to the registration of births, marriages and deaths are set by statute.
- 8.2 Buried human remains may not be disturbed without specific authority. Section 25 of the Burial Act 1857 makes it an offence to remove buried human remains without a licence from the Secretary of State or, in relation to ground consecrated according to the rites of the Church of England, a faculty (permission from the Church)
- 8.3 Sandwell has no legal obligation to act as Burial Authority.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 Whilst we cannot predict to what level the number of families who choose an alternative end of life option such as cremation to that of burial in the future, it is unlikely the demand for burial space will subside completely.

9.2 We can say this with a degree of certainty with certain community groups from different religious backgrounds such as Muslims, Jewish or those of the Catholic faith historically choosing burial as predominantly their only end of life option.

9.3 In the event, burial space wasn't available in Sandwell, these groups of people in particular will at some point be adversely affected compared to other community groups who choose cremation as an end of life option.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 The proposals in this report do not relate to changes in the management of personal data, and therefore have no impact on data protection

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 There is no specific impact on crime and disorder as a result of these proposals.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS.

12.1 There is no other sustainability impact other than those outlined in 6.1 ,6.2 or 6.3.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE).

13.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications associated within this report.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND.

14.1 The development of new cemeteries in the borough would likely be competing with current or potential alternative use of undeveloped sites across the borough.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 As with many Burial Authorities, Sandwell needs to consider its position in respect of future burial space.

15.2 Given the leading time necessary to potentially develop new cemeteries in the borough or to achieve the necessary legislative provision to re-use graves, Sandwell needs to ascertain now the importance it places on provision of burial space for bereaved families in the borough.

15.3 In the event a position on this matter cannot be determined (do nothing), bereaved families will eventually be required to consider alternative arrangements for their loved ones, in particular those families in West Bromwich and Rowley Regis.

16 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 None.

17 **APPENDICES:**

None.

Surjit Tour
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

REPORT TO SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ACTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY BOARD

21 February 2019

Subject:	Review of the Housing Allocations Policy
Cabinet Portfolio:	Councillor Kerrie Carmichael - Cabinet Member for Housing
Director:	Director - Housing and Communities - Alan Caddick
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Neville Rowe neville_rowe@sandwell.gov.uk 0121 569 5190

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board:

1. Consider and comment upon the information presented on housing allocations together with a series of recommendations;
2. Make recommendations on taking forward the revised policy options.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 At its meeting on 4 October, 2018 the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board considered a presentation given by officers concerning temporary accommodation for homeless persons together with options being considered as part of a review of the current housing allocations policy. The Scrutiny Board has requested to consider these options in greater detail at its meeting on 31 January.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 Housing allocations contribute to a number of ambitions within Vision 2030:-

Ambition 1 – Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.

Ambition 2 – Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.

Ambition 5 – Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.

Ambition 10 – Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people’s lives and communities.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The current Housing Allocations Policy came into force in April 2013. The key amendments made in 2013 to the current policy were the implementation of a five-year residency test to gain access to the housing register together with a series of amendments that enabled the best use of the existing housing stock. These latter amendments included giving greater priority to households living in a flat with children aged 16 or under and to households living in accommodation that is either overcrowded or under-occupied, together with restricting access to 3 and 4 bedroom houses to households with children under 16 years.
- 3.2 On the whole, the policy has performed well, with a good distribution of households accessing accommodation according to their respective priority bands. However, since the introduction of the current policy the housing register has changed in that applicants (as opposed to existing tenants) now make-up roughly half of the register such that around a third of relets are now attributed to existing tenants that by nature generate a further void.
- 3.3 In addition, for many years the flatted stock has been dominated by age restrictions and currently 70% of the applicant base is now below the age of 40, and by default half of the flatted stock is now excluded from the applicant base on account of applicant age. This has resulted in issues regarding access at a time of a rising affordability gap together with concerns around equality of access and the ability of the Council to fulfil its statutory responsibilities.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

4.1 Officers will present further information to the meeting on the current policy amendments being considered, however, the main elements of the policy review aim to focus on a series of amendments related to:

1. the increasing affordability gap for residents seeking rented accommodation
2. the current stock/customer base mismatch
3. the Homelessness Reduction Act
4. looked after children and other vulnerable persons

4.2 Members of the Scrutiny Board have also received information on lettings following the October meeting.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

5.1 Consultation has already commenced with local TMOs and the Tenant Review Panel as well as a programme of lead offer consultation. A further programme of consultation is planned.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.

6.1 If the Scrutiny Board does not consider the information presented to it then potential recommendations and actions to improve services would be missed.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no specific strategic resources implications arising from this report.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The allocation of council housing stock is governed by Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). This Act was amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Localism Act 2011 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 No equality impact assessment is required for this report.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 No data protection impact assessment is required for this report.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 There are no crime and disorder impacts associated with this report and no risk assessment is required.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

12.1 There are no specific sustainability issues associated with this report.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

13.1 Housing is key to improving wellbeing and health outcomes for our residents.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 Allocation of council housing ensures effective and efficient use of the authority's housing stock.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The Board is invited to consider the information presented to it and determine if there are more specific areas of interest that it would like to review in further detail.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 None.

17 APPENDICES:

None.

Alan Caddick
Director – Housing and Communities