

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

**21<sup>st</sup> November, 2019 at 5.45 pm  
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Moore (Chair);  
Councillors Bostan and M Gill;  
Mr J Cash (Co-opted member).

**Apologies:** Councillors Edwards, P M Hughes, Padda and  
Sandars.

**In attendance:** Councillor Hadley (Cabinet Member for Homes);  
Alan Caddick (Director – Housing and  
Communities);  
Mark Satchwell (Service Manager - Registration).

15/19 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October,  
2019 be approved as a correct record.

16/19 **Discussion with Cabinet Member for Homes**

The Scrutiny Board received a presentation from the Cabinet  
Member for Homes on current and future key areas of work within  
her portfolio.

The Homes portfolio included:-

- Strategic Housing Policy;
- Social Housing;
- Private rented sector rented accommodation;
- Homelessness.

Key areas of work currently being undertaken within the portfolio  
included:-

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- the development of strategies including Housing Strategy and Rough Sleeping Strategy;
- review of the Housing Allocations Policy;
- review of the Tenancy Agreement for Council tenancies;
- Council House New Build Programme – over 300 new units completed, with another 300 plus units to be developed;
- considering options for building new homes using modern methods of construction (known as off-site manufacture);
- the development of a new housing delivery vehicle option;
- continuing improvement programmes to the Council's existing housing stock;
- major refurbishment of Alfred Gunn House, Oldbury;
- review of the Housing Management Service;
- implementation of mandatory House in Multiple Occupation licensing in West Bromwich;
- co-ordination of the consultation approach for Select Licensing for the Private Rented Sector;
- on-going work to review the Council's approach to the use of Temporary Accommodation;
- Housing First pilot; implemented by Accord Housing on behalf of the Council.

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

- following the Grenfell Tower fire, the Council had inspected all of its high-rise tower blocks. Four blocks were found to have decorative elements that needed to be removed, this work had been done with elements replaced with alternative materials;
- the Council would need to consider the findings and recommendations of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (known as the Hackitt Review). This would require engagement with tenants, which the Tenant Review Panel could assist with;
- the Housing First pilot was funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority. In Sandwell the funding was for 55 tenancies over a period of three years. These tenancies included support elements to enable tenancies to be maintained successfully;

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- one fifth of new council housing built in England in 2018-19 was built by Sandwell. Over 300 new units had been completed, with over 300 more units to be developed;
- age restrictions on certain Council housing units would be considered as part of the Housing Allocations Review, which was scheduled for consideration by the Board at a future meeting;
- the Council had various mechanisms and tools available to it to deal with long-term empty properties. The Board requested that further information on this matter when it considers Private Sector Housing related topics at a future meeting.

The representative of the Tenant Review Panel extended an invitation to the Cabinet Member for Homes to attend a meeting of the Panel.

The Scrutiny Board thanked the Cabinet Member for attending the meeting.

**Resolved** that a report on Private Sector Housing be brought to a future meeting of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board, with the relevant Cabinet Member(s) to be invited to participate in the discussion.

### **17/19 Impact of burials of non-Sandwell residents in the borough**

Further to Minute No. 2/19 (21<sup>st</sup> February, 2019) the Service Manager – Registration provided the Board with a report on the burial of non-Sandwell residents in Sandwell cemeteries, including analysis of the impact that would be caused if the fees were changed.

It was reported that in 2018 17% of all burials in Sandwell were of non-residents of the borough. There were many reasons for people to choose to bury their deceased loved ones in Sandwell, including local connections and family tradition.

Currently the surcharge applied to burials of non-residents was 15%. This had been set to ensure that Sandwell was competitive when compared locally. Changing the level of surcharge applied could impact on numbers of burials in the borough, which would weaken

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the ability of the Council to predict demand for burial spaces and the associated income.

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

- income generated from people choosing to use Sandwell's burial and cremation services allowed for those services to be invested in, including options to deliver solutions to burial capacity issues in both West Bromwich and Rowley Regis which were currently being explored;
- nationally there was a decline in the number of families choosing burial, however due to a variety of cultural or religious factors the demand for burial was unlikely to ever subside completely;

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Director – Law and Governance be recommended to consider retaining a 15% surcharge for burials of non-residents in order to maintain certainty in terms of current burial capacity and income generated;
- (2) that the thanks of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board be placed on record for the work of Registration and Bereavement Services.

(Meeting ended at 7.01 pm)

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