

# Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board Agenda

Thursday 28 January 2021 at 5.45pm

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**This agenda gives notice of items to be considered in private as required by Regulations 5 (4) and (5) of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.**

- 1. Apologies**  
To receive any apologies for absence.
- 2. Minutes**  
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020 as a correct record.
- 3. Declarations of Interest**
  - (a) To receive any declarations of interest from members relating to any item on the agenda, in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Conduct and/or S106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
  - (b) To receive any declarations of the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.
- 4. Additional Items of Business**  
To determine whether there are any additional items of business arising which should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

## **Public Items**

### **5. Enquiries to the Council (relating to Board's Terms of Reference)**

To consider and discuss information on enquiries the Council receives from members of the public and councillors in relation to matters within the terms of reference for this Scrutiny Board.

### **6. Housing Repairs Update**

To provide an update on housing repairs carried out by the Council, including the impact that COVID-19 restrictions have had.

## **David Stevens Chief Executive**

Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
Oldbury  
West Midlands

### **Distribution:**

Councillors Moore (Chair);  
Councillor P M Hughes (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Akhter, Bawa, Bostan, Edwards, M Gill, S Jones, Padda  
and Sandars.

Co-opted Member:-  
Mr J Cash

Contact: [democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)

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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**

**Thursday 17 December 2020 at 5.45pm**

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

**Officers:** Sean Russell (Customer Feedback Coordinator).

### **31/20 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P M Hughes and Sandars.

### **32/20 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interests made at the meeting.

### **33/20 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

### **34/20 Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to be considered at the meeting.



## Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

The Scrutiny Board received a presentation on the Council's work to date in relation to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The Code provided the future framework for complaint handling by Local authorities and social landlords and aimed to introduce greater consistency across landlords' complaint procedures as well as make it easier for tenants to make complaints about their landlords.

The Council, as a landlord, was required to self-assess against the Code and publish its findings by the end of December 2020. To do this, work had been carried out including the establishment of a working group and virtual meetings with Sandwell Community Information Participation service (SCIPS) to get residents' feedback and ideas.

It was confirmed that no policies or procedures were being amended, but that elements were being brought together in one place, which would make things easier for residents.

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

- The Board highlighted the importance of learning from complaints and enquiries it received, not just for housing, but all of its services.
- The Tenant Review Panel had not been consulted on the self-assessment, but the Chair of the Panel invited further aspects of this work to be brought to that group for consultation and discussion.
- The feedback received from residents through SCIPS had been included in the self-assessment and the refreshed Customer Feedback Guide.
- Due to the restrictions in place throughout 2020 due to COVID-19 it had not been possible to engage as widely as would have been the case in normal circumstances. The Council was committed to engaging with as wide a range of groups and communities as possible and it was hoped that when restrictions were lifted engagement could be strengthened.

- The Customer Feedback Guide included a section on how to get an advocate to help those residents who would benefit from such a service. It was acknowledged that the Guide needed to be in formats that were accessible, including in Braille. The Guide would also be checked to ensure compliance with the principles of Plain English prior to being published.
- Previously there had been two different systems for logging customer feedback, this would be changed to a single system making it more streamlined and efficient.
- MySandwell did not currently have the facility for people, including councillors, to log complaints.
- It was acknowledged that Sandwell had high levels of digital poverty and it was confirmed that there was no intention for complaints to be transferred to only be dealt with online.
- Councillors requested clarification over wording around Data Protection within the Guide.

**Resolved** that the Executive Director - Neighbourhoods:-

- (1) consult and engage with the Tenant Review Panel on the Customer Feedback Guide and associated processes;
- (2) consult widely with a wide range of community groups, including those which may be digitally excluded across Sandwell on the Customer Feedback Guide and associated processes;
- (3) seek clarification on the wording relating to Data Protection within the Customer Feedback Guide and provide this to the Scrutiny Board;
- (4) submit a further report on customer feedback, enquiries and timeliness of responses to a future meeting of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.

36/20

## **Festive Wishes**

The Chair thanked officers and members for their support and hard work during the year and wished all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

In return, the Board thanked the Chair for how he had chaired meetings throughout 2020.

Meeting ended at 6.38pm

[Click here to watch a recording of the meeting](#)

## **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.

# Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**28 January 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Council Enquiries – relating to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board Terms of Reference
<b>Director:</b>	Director – Housing and Communities Alan Caddick
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Democratic Services Officer Alex Goddard <a href="mailto:alexander_goddard@sandwell.gov.uk">alexander_goddard@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board considers the information presented to the meeting and determines if there are any recommendations it wishes to make.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Board has requested information on enquiries the Council receives from members of the public and councillors in relation to matters within the terms of reference for this Scrutiny Board.
- 2.2 Members will have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the information that is presented to determine any potential recommendations the Scrutiny Board may wish to make.



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	People live well and age well - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	Strong resilient communities - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	A strong and inclusive economy - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective
	A connected and accessible Sandwell - the Council receives enquiries about a wide range of matters, some of which will relate to this objective

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Officers will present to the meeting information relating to enquiries the Council receives from members of the public and councillors in relation to matters within the terms of reference for this Scrutiny Board. The terms of reference are attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The information requested has is shown in three separate tables; Councillor Enquiries, MP enquiries and general enquires. The data demonstrates the volume of responses between 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020 and the subsequent response times.



#### 4.3 Councillor Enquiry information:

Member enquiries and responsive rates (% figures in brackets)

Total No. Cllr. Enquiries	0-10 days response	11-15 days response	16-20 days response	21 days + response
2029	1963 (97%)	12 (0.5%)	7 (0.5%)	47 (2%)

#### 4.4 MP enquiry information:

MP enquiries and responsive rates (% figures in brackets)

Total No. MP Enquiries	0-10 days response	11-15 days response	16-20 days response	21 days + response
361	209 (58%)	21 (6%)	16 (4%)	115 (32%)

#### 4.5 General Public enquiry information:

Public enquires and responsive rates (% figures in brackets)

Total No. Public Enquiries	0-10 days response	11-15 days response	16-20 days response	21 days + response
142,908	140,208 (98%)	900 (0.6%)	450 (0.3%)	1350 (1%)

4.6 During the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a significant increase in the number of enquiries being received and dealt with by the council. Throughout the pandemic we have continued to deal with enquiries even with reduced resources where employees were redeployed into covid-19 priorities such as the food hub.

Cllr. enquiries were up by 13.7% in 2020 compared with 2019 and MP enquiries were up by 16.8% over the same reporting period.

4.7 It is our priority to deal with customer enquiries and feedback and we are continually looking at ways to improve. This includes:



- A Service Redesign Project Group has been set up with officers from both Neighbourhoods and the Contact Centre to initially look at all tenancy management enquiries. The group initially looked at 58 processes. The processes were reviewed to reduce duplication, double-handling and simplify the customer journey and improve the customer experience.
- Work has commenced on digitising many of the services and including them on MySandwell. The first phase of work has seen 34 forms are now accessible online. Further processes will come online over the next 12 months.
- A review of our existing processes against the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice has highlighted our compliance.
- We are currently reviewing our customer feedback ICT system to provide more detailed information, performance analysis and trend data to allow us to understand customer feedback and identify not only resolutions but preventative interventions.
- A working group is currently working on ‘avoidable contacts’ looking across housing management at the types of contacts that should be dealt with at first point of contact. Although in its infancy this work will identify actions such as additional training, improved processes and increased digitisation of services.
- The contact centre regularly meets with services including repairs, housing options, Serco and Children’s Services to identify service failure and resolutions and enable customer service to improve.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 If the Scrutiny Board doesn’t consider the information at the meeting on this matter then the opportunity to identify any recommendations would be lost.



## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Enquiries are investigated and responded to by the Council within existing resources. The customer feedback team consists of 2 Customer Feedback Managers and 4 customer service officers dealing with all council feedback except Adult Services.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Enquiries, including those raised by councillors, are a way of the Council being held to account by the public and their elected representatives.
<b>Risk:</b>	There are no direct risk implications arising from this report.
<b>Equality:</b>	There are no direct equality implications arising from this report. Members of the public can raise enquiries in a range of methods to best suit their needs.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	There are no direct implications for health and wellbeing from this report.
<b>Social Value</b>	This report contains no social value implications.

## 7. Appendices

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board – Terms of Reference – Appendix 1

## 8. Background Papers

None



# Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**28 January 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Housing Repairs Update
<b>Director:</b>	Director – Housing and Communities Alan Caddick
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Democratic Services Officer Alex Goddard <a href="mailto:alexander_goddard@sandwell.gov.uk">alexander_goddard@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board considers the information presented to the meeting and determines if there are any recommendations it wishes to make.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Board has requested an update on housing repairs carried out by the Council, including the impact that COVID-19 restrictions have had.
- 2.2 Members will have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the information that is presented to determine any potential recommendations the Scrutiny Board may wish to make.



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people - housing is critical to ensuring children and young people who live in the Council's properties have a safe environment to start their lives
	People live well and age well – our housing provides our tenants with safe homes to live
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods – housing repairs ensure the Council's housing stock is of the right quality

### 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Officers will present to the meeting an update on the housing repair service, including an overview of the impact that COVID-19 restrictions have had.

### 5 Alternative Options

5.1 If the Scrutiny Board doesn't consider the information at the meeting on this matter then the opportunity to identify any recommendations would be lost.



## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The Housing Repairs service is delivered within existing resources
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	As a landlord, the Council is responsible for ensuring its homes are fit for tenants to live in
<b>Risk:</b>	There are no direct risk implications arising from this report.
<b>Equality:</b>	There are no direct equality implications arising from this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	There are no direct implications for health and wellbeing from this report.
<b>Social Value</b>	This report contains no social value implications.

## 7. Appendices

None

## 8. Background Papers

None

