

Select Committee for Policy Review

**Tuesday 4 September, 2018 at 5.30 pm
in Committee Room 1,
Oldbury Council House**

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Members to declare any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.
3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February, 2018 as a correct record.
4. Sandwell's Housing Strategy Statement.

Date of next meeting – 2 October, 2018

J Britton
Chief Executive
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillor Worsey (Chair);
Councillors Ali, Cherrington, Edwards, Dr Jaron, Rollins and Sandars.

**Agenda prepared by Alex Goddard
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Apologies

To receive any apologies from members.

Declarations of Interest

Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

Minutes of the Select Committee for Policy Review

20th February, 2018 at 5.00 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Worsey (Chair);
Councillors Hickey and Sandars.

Apology: Councillors Cherrington, Edwards and Gill.

3/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd January, 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

4/18 **Digital Inclusion in Sandwell**

The Select Committee received a presentation on the work to increase digital inclusion in the borough. This formed one element of a Digital Strategy that was being developed for Sandwell.

Improving digital inclusion for the residents of the borough would:-

- support national, regional and local priorities;
- reduce unemployment through increasing access to education, training and job opportunities;
- reduce social isolation through increasing access to online services such as social media;
- improve household finances through increasing access to services and information to help people save money.

According to the digital exclusion heatmap which had been developed by a group of organisations including the Local Government Association, residents of Sandwell were rated as having a medium likelihood of being digitally excluded. This was based on eight measures; four digital and four social. These measures were:-

Select Committee for Policy Review – 20th February, 2018

- infrastructure;
- access;
- basic digital skills;
- using the basic digital skills;
- age;
- education;
- income;
- health.

Sandwell compared favourably to its Black Country neighbours for infrastructure and access. Although the score for basic digital skills in Sandwell was comparable to the national average, the proportion of residents using their basic digital skills was low. The Council was working with the third sector to understand the reasons for this – it could be due to affordability of technology that was the barrier.

It was reported that Sandwell had the youngest population within the Black Country, however it also had the highest proportion without level 1 qualifications. Income in Sandwell was considerably lower than the national average, but was in line with other Black Country authority areas. Sandwell residents were more likely to have a long-term illness or disability than elsewhere in the Black Country.

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

- The Cabinet Member for Core Council Services was steering the development of a Digital Strategy, including the measures to increase digital inclusion in Sandwell.
- Sandwell's broadband infrastructure was amongst the best in the country.
- The basic digital skills had been identified by Go ON UK, a charity that worked to encourage people to go online. The skills were: managing information, communicating, transacting, problem-solving and creating.
- A workshop event had been held with over 70 third sector representatives in attendance. An action plan arising from that workshop was being developed.
- iSandwell had been launched which was a collaborative project

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**Select Committee for Policy Review –
20th February, 2018**

between the Council, community organisations and residents. Its aim was to encourage the use of digital across Sandwell.

- A key element of iSandwell was the development of Digital Champions from amongst the residents of the borough. These Champions would work in existing community settings providing advice and support to residents and local organisations to help them develop their digital skills. Recruitment was ongoing, but eight Champions had already been recruited.
- The roll-out of Universal Credit across Sandwell meant that applicants for benefits would need to submit applications online, further increasing the importance of digital skills.
- The Digital Strategy formed one of the key areas of activity within the Resources Directorate Business Plan.
- There was a Google Digital Garage located in Birmingham which had been working with Sandwell. Funding for the Garage was currently scheduled to cease at the end of March, 2018, however if Google chose to continue its funding the Council would continue to work with the Garage.
- The Skills and Productivity Commission of the West Midlands Combined Authority would be looking at the steps beyond basic digital skills.
- There was a West Midlands Combined Authority Digital Board, with a range of working groups supporting it. Members felt it was important to ensure that Sandwell's needs and the opportunities in the borough needed to be represented.
- Funding opportunities for voluntary sector organisations had been impacted upon by the uncertainties surrounding Brexit.

The Select Committee thanked officers for attending the meeting.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Executive Director – Resources consider how best to resource the development of the Digital Strategy;

**Select Committee for Policy Review –
20th February, 2018**


- (2) that the possibility of ensuring representation for Sandwell on the West Midlands Combined Authority Digital Board be explored.

(Meeting ended at 6.08 pm)

Contact Officer: Alex Goddard Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3178
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REPORT TO SELECT COMMITTEE FOR POLICY REVIEW

04 September 2018

Subject:	Sandwell's Housing Strategy Statement
Director:	Director – Housing and Communities
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Exempt Information Ref:	The information contained in this report is not exempt from publication.
Contact Officer(s):	Alex Goddard, Scrutiny Officer alexander_goddard@sandwell.gov.uk Neville Rowe, Housing Strategy and Research Manager neville_rowe@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Select Committee for Policy Review:

1. consider and comment upon the information presented at the meeting.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 At its meeting on 3 January 2018 the Select Committee for Policy Review used the completed policy assessment framework to determine key policy areas that it felt could be usefully supported by the Select Committee at this stage. One of the items identified for further consideration was the Housing Strategy Statement.
- 1.2 Officers will attend the meeting to provide an overview and current update on the Housing Strategy Statement.

2 IMPLICATION FOR THE COUNCIL'S AMBITION

- 2.1 The work of the Select Committee for Policy Review is strongly centred around Vision 2030, with the intended outcome of ensuring the authority's key strategies and policies support and reinforce the ambitions for Sandwell. The Housing Strategy Statement itself directly supports the following ambitions:

Ambition 7 – We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes;

Ambition 8 – Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The report was requested by the Select Committee for Policy Review.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Officers will attend the meeting to update the Select Committee on the current status of Sandwell's Housing Strategy Statement.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 Consultation on Council strategies and policies is undertaken during the review process as each document is refreshed.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 If the Council does not take the opportunity to ensure its key strategies and policies reflect the Vision and other recent developments then the ambitions set out in the Vision could be undermined through a lack of strategic support.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Any financial or resource-related implications of a Housing Strategy Statement will be investigated and reported when the document is submitted to the Cabinet.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The legal and regulatory implications of a Housing Strategy Statement will be considered and reported when it is submitted for approval to the Cabinet. It is not a statutory requirement for a local authority to have a Housing Strategy.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 When a Housing Policy is submitted to the Cabinet it will be the subject of an equality impact assessment to ensure that there is no adverse effect on any disadvantaged or vulnerable groups.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 Robust assessments will be carried out throughout the preparation of the Housing Strategy Statement to ensure compliance with all relevant legislation, codes and guidance relating to aspects of information governance.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 Any crime and disorder or risk matters will be assessed throughout the preparation of a Housing Strategy Statement.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 12.1 The work of the Select Committee will assist the Council to build a refreshed, relevant and sustainable suite of key policies and strategies, one of which is a Housing Strategy Statement.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 Any health and wellbeing implications will be assessed during preparation of a Housing Strategy Statement.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 When the Housing Strategy Statement has an impact on any Council managed property or land this will be investigated and included in the relevant report.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 To provide the Select Committee with an update on Sandwell's Housing Strategy Statement.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

17 APPENDICES

None.

Alan Caddick
Director – Housing and Communities