

Minutes of Council

**Tuesday 18 January 2022 at 6.00 pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street at
Oldbury, B69 3DB**

Present: Deputy Mayor, Councillor R Jones (in the Chair);

Councillors Abrahams, Ahmed, Akhter, Akpoteni, Allen, Anandou, Ashman, H Bhullar, Bostan, Carmichael, Chambers, Chapman, Chidley, Crompton, Fenton, Fisher, Gavan, E A Giles, L Giles, E M Giles, G Gill, M Gill, W Gill, Hackett, Hadley, Hartwell, Henlan, Hinchliff, Hughes, Z Hussain, Jones, Jones, Kalari, Kaur, Kausar, Khatun, Mabena, McVittie, Melia, Millard, Millar, Moore, Owen, Padda, I Padda, Piper, Randhawa, Rollins, Rouf, Simms, S Singh, V Smith, Taylor, J Webb and Williams

Officers: Kim Bromley-Derry – Interim Chief Executive; Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer; Suky Suthi-Nagra – Democratic Services Manager; Stephnie Hancock – Senior Democratic Services Officer; Matt Powis – Senior Democratic Services Officer; Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer and Kennedy Brown, Sergeant at Arms.

1/22 Minute Silence

The Council observed a minute silence to mark the passing of Honorary Alderman and former long serving councillor Gurcharan Singh Sidhu.



Alderman Sidhu represented Greets Green and Lyng ward for 32 years between 1986 and 2018 before retiring due to ill health. He was Mayor of Sandwell in 2007-2008.

Members paid tribute to Gurcharan Singh Sidhu and joined the Deputy Mayor in extending their condolences to his family.

2/22

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akhtar, Ali, Allcock, Costigan, Davies, Dhallu, S Gill, M Hussain, Jalil, Phillips, Shackleton, Shaeen, K Singh and Tagger.

3/22

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

4/22

Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 7 December 2021 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Deputy Mayor.

5/22

Urgent Business

There were no additional items of business to consider.

6/22

Mayor's Announcements

Details of Mayoral and Deputy Mayoral engagements since the last meeting of the Council had been circulated to members.

7/22

Petitions

No petitions were received under Standing Order No. 5.

8/22

Written Questions

Questions received under Standing Order No. 6 were asked of the relevant members and responses provided.

9/22

External Audit Report - Value For Money Governance Review and Improvement Plan

The Interim Chief Executive made an announcement in relation to the ministerial statement which had been issued by Kemi Badenoch MP (Minister of State for Equalities and Levelling Up Communities) and the letter from the Deputy Director of Local Government Stewardship (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities), seeking representations regarding the proposed intervention measures at Sandwell Council following the publishing of the Grant Thornton report containing 45 recommendations.

Officers from the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton, presented the Value For Money Governance Review and Improvement Plan and outlined the key findings.

In response to questions it was highlighted:-

- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had looked in detail at the Wragge Report and the Council had also spent a number of years looking into these matters that happened almost a decade ago and this was one of reasons that had triggered the review;
- the level of partnership working had not been as strong as it could have been over recent years, and action was required to rectify this;
- scrutiny played an important role and strong scrutiny in delivering agreed areas and holding the executive to account would be welcomed;
- while it is important to celebrate success, success had not been delivered across the board and it was not appropriate to focus on particular areas – a corporate grip was required;
- the use of Council policies and procedures had not operated and had not fully protected the Council either in terms of procurement or service delivery;
- the report does reflect a number of positive steps and actions that have been taken in terms of member development over the

past year, the report does however, have a number of recommendations to take that forward.

- the Commonwealth Games was an important programme and a clear plan was in place;
- the timescales were considered to be comfortable and would be monitored, holding Cabinet and officers to account;
- the waste review being undertaken by scrutiny was welcomed;
- training did not have to be face-to-face but be via a number of different media that could ensure members were appropriately trained;
- it had been recognised that officers had been impacted by issues identified and appropriate support would be provided.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 11, Councillor Abrahams moved the following amendment, which was duly seconded:-

“This Council calls upon the Chief Executive to respond to the letter from the Secretary of State regarding the Grant Thornton audit report accepting the recommendation that commissioners are appointed to assist Sandwell Council with the development and implantation of an improvement plan and assist with any other business of the Council as necessary to ensure best value for the people of Sandwell”.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 12, Councillor Abrahams called for a named vote. The required support to the request was achieved and the amendment was put to a named vote as follows:-

For:

Councillors Abrahams, Anandou, Chambers, Chapman, Fisher, W Gill, Henlan, Kalari, S Singh, and Williams.

Against:

Councillors Ahmed, Akhter, Akpoteni, Allen, Ashman, Bhullar, Bostan, Carmichael, Chidley, Crompton, Fenton, Gavan, E M Giles, E A Giles, L Giles, G Gill, M Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hinchliff, Hughes, Z Hussain, O Jones, S Jones, Kaur, Kausar, Khatun, Mabena, McVittie, Melia, Millar, Millard, Moore, Owen, C S Padda, I Padda, Piper, Randhawa, Rollins, Rouf, Simms, Taylor and Webb.

Abstentions:

Councillor Hadley.

The original recommendations were put to the vote and, having been carried, it was

Resolved that the Improvement Plan to address the recommendations made by Grant Thornton and the proposed reporting mechanisms to ensure progress is managed effectively be approved.

10/22

Council Tax Base 2022-23

Council considered the proposed Council Tax base for 2022-2023.

Resolved:-

(1) that the Council Tax Base for 2022/2023 be set at 74,858.45;

(2) that the Section 151 Officer be authorised to adjust the Council Tax Base as required following approval of the 2022-2023 Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

11/22

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022-23

Council considered the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022-2023.

Resolved that the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23 be approved.

12/22

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update Report

The Sandwell Equalities Commission had been established to support the celebration and promotion of the rich and diverse backgrounds and cultures of its employees and residents across all six towns. The Board was meeting and engaging with the Disability Staff Network, LGBT+ Staff Network and Ethnicity Equality Impact Network.

Work had been undertaken to establish an excellence and inclusion calendar, a review of the equality policy and working

towards the commitment to becoming a recognised Borough of Sanctuary.

Resolved that the draft work programme of the Equalities Commission Board be endorsed.

13/22

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020-21

Council received the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2020-21.

The Annual Report highlighted the work of the Corporate Parenting Board during the academic year September 2020 to August 2021. The report included feedback from young people presented to Corporate Parenting Board throughout the year in Young People's reports from Voices of Sandwell Board and Care Leavers Forum.

14/22

Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2020-21

Council received the Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2020-21.

The report provided evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies and recognised the increased challenges brought about by the global Covid pandemic and the impact this has had and continued to have on the entire population; particularly on all agencies working to safeguard vulnerable children and families. Despite the very difficult year, SCSP had been able to evidence the delivery of the core functions, including training; monitoring outcomes for children and families from early help to looked-after children and care leavers; a record of decisions and actions taken by the partners during the year to implement the recommendations of any local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, including any resulting in improvements; and the ways in which partners have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision.

15/22

Appointments to Committees, Boards and Other Bodies

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

16/22 To receive the minutes and recommendations of Cabinet

The minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 18 and 24 November and 15 December 2021 were received.

17/22 To receive the minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

The minutes of the meetings of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held on 1 December 2021 were received.

18/22 To receive the minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 18 November and 21 December 2021 were received.

19/22 To receive the minutes of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

The minutes of the meetings of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee held on 16 December 2021 were received.

The Council considered the recommendations of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee on the following matters of strategic significance:-

20/22a Admission Agreements to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme

Council considered recommendations in relation to Admission Agreements to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Resolved that:-

(1) the Chief Executive/Director of Finance be given the delegated authority to sign the Admission Agreements relating to the transfer of catering staff from Old Park Primary School to Mellors Catering Services, and Whitecrest Primary School to

Aspens Services Limited, and for the Director of Legal Services to make arrangements for the necessary documents to be signed or executed under deed of seal (as required);

(2) where the future pension liability/guarantee is below £250,000 that the Chief Executive/Director of Finance be given the delegated authority to sign all future Pension Admission Agreements below this limit, and for the Director of Legal Services to make arrangements for the necessary documents to be signed or executed under deed of seal (as required) to give effect to relevant organisations becoming admitted bodies;

(3) where the pension liability/guarantee is greater than £250,000 that a separate report is presented to seek approval for the Chief Executive/Director of Finance to be given the delegated authority to sign the Pension Admission Agreement and for the Director of Legal Services to make arrangements for the necessary documents to be signed or executed under deed of seal (as required) to give effect to relevant organisations becoming admitted bodies.

21/22b Review of Polling Places and Polling Stations 2021/22

Council considered the recommendations in relation to the review of polling stations and polling stations 2021/22.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 11, Councillor Piper moved the following amendment to the recommendations, which was duly seconded:-

“That the polling station at Bearwood Road School be moved to the Baptist Church on Rawlings Road instead of Thimble Mill Library”.

The amendment was put to the vote and

Resolved:-

(1) that, subject to the polling station at Bearwood Road School being moved to the Baptist Church on Rawlings Road instead of Thimblemill Library, the changes to specific Polling Places and Polling Stations as set out in the Appendix to the report be approved;

(2) in connection with (1) above, the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to implement the approved changes detailed in the Appendix to the report;

(3) subject to any required changes with a Polling Place or Polling Station within the Borough prior to elections in 2022 (and beyond), the Returning Officer (or in their absence/unavailability, the Deputy Returning Officer) be authorised to change any Polling Place(s) and/or Polling Station(s), following consultation with relevant Ward Members and the Chair of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee, as considered necessary to enable the efficient and effective running of elections.

22/22

Notice of Motion

The Council received the following motions under Standing Order No. 7.

22/22a

Road Safety

It was moved by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Kalari: -

“This council supports proposing a strict limit to the amount of vehicle collisions that can occur on any one road before launching an investigation in regard to implementing road safety or speed calming measures. This council requests that the cabinet member for environment uses his office to initiate this proposal.

Approximately 800 road accidents occur in Sandwell annually. The majority of causes being identified as either speeding, congestion or poor pedestrian safety. Residents across the borough have conveyed severe disappointment, anger and disgust at the current policy regarding taking action to prevent these collisions and in some cases, fatalities. They feel that the council are taking a reactive approach and not a proactive approach to prevent fatalities from road accidents.

It is unacceptable to wait for a life to be exchanged in order to highlight the dangers of a road, which we most often are already aware of. There are innumerable roads and streets which have been, and continue to be brought forward by our residents to be made safe for them and their families.

Unfortunately they're left with nothing but disappointment as neither police, nor us as a council have been willing to implement measures to make them safe until it suffers a fatality. We must put people's lives before our budgeting priorities. We cannot justify the loss of a single life in the name of money."

In accordance with Standing Order No.7, Councillor Bostan moved the following amendment to the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Piper:-

"This council considers road safety to be of the highest importance for the health and well-being of our residents and it is with regard to this that the implementation of road safety and speed calming measures are introduced.

Approximately 800 road accidents occur in Sandwell annually which is a 55% reduction since the year 2000, during the same period, accidents resulting in people being killed or seriously injured have reduced by 52% and accidents with child casualties have reduced by a significant 72% testament to the excellent work of this Labour council's highways authority. The majority of causes of accidents have been identified as either speeding, congestion or poor pedestrian safety.

Despite significant progress in our road safety provision, this council recognises there is room for improvement and accepts residents across the borough have requested that the Strategic Road Safety Plan is updated in order to address the growing challenges Sandwell faces including an increasing number of vehicles on the road, climate change, adaptations to public transport and other such imperatives.

This council as an authority that is always listening to and guided by its residents, calls upon the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee to conduct a review into the current Strategic Road Safety Plan in order to make recommendations for the consideration of Cabinet".

The amendment, having been moved and seconded, was put to the vote and approved. The substantive motion was put to the vote and, having been carried, it was RESOLVED accordingly.

Meeting ended at 8.31 pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk