

## Agenda Council

**You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, to be held on Tuesday, 31 January 2023 at 6.00 pm for the purpose of transacting the following business:-**

**The Mayor of Sandwell, Councillor Richard Jones**

- |          |   |                |
|----------|---|----------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Apologies for Absence</b>  | <b>9 - 10</b>  |
|          | To receive apologies for absence (if any).  |                |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Declarations of Interest</b>   | <b>11 - 12</b> |
|          | Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting.   |                |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Minutes</b>  | <b>13 - 30</b> |
|          | To confirm as a correct record, the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary meetings of Council held on 13 December 2022. |                |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Urgent Business</b>  | <b>31 - 32</b> |
|          | To consider any urgent business (with prior approval by the Mayor).   |                |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Mayor's Announcements</b>  | <b>33 - 34</b> |
|          | To receive announcements from the Mayor.  |                |



6      **Petitions**      35 - 36

To receive petitions under Standing Order No. 8.

7      **Written Questions**      37 - 38

To consider written questions under Standing Order No. 9 to:-

- (a) the Mayor;
- (b) the Leader of the Council;
- (c) any other member of the Cabinet;
- (d) any person appointed to preside at a committee, sub-committee or panel;
- (e) the members of the Council nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985, on the discharge of the functions of the following Joint Authorities:-
  - (i) West Midlands Combined Authority (the Leader);
  - (ii) West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (Councillor Jalil);
  - (iii) Transport for the West Midlands (Councillor Webb);
- (f) a nominated member appointed by the Council to the Board of Sandwell Leisure Trust;
- (g) a member of the Council who is, as a result of action taken by or on behalf of the Council, a member or director of any company.

8      **Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2021/2022**      39 - 88

To receive the annual report of the Sandwell

Children's Safeguarding Partnership.

- |    |   |           |
|----|---|-----------|
| 9  | <b>Council Tax Base 2023/24</b>   | 89 - 92   |
|    | To approve the Council Tax Base for 2023/24.  |           |
| 10 | <b>Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2022/23</b>  | 93 - 118  |
|    | To approve the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2022/23 and revised Minimum Revenue Provision Policy.                  |           |
| 11 | <b>Proposed departure from the Development Plan at Brook Road, Oldbury</b>  | 119 - 124 |
|    | To consider a departure from the Local Development Plan.  |           |
| 12 | <b>Proposed departure from the Development Plan at London Street, Smethwick</b>   | 125 - 130 |
|    | To consider a departure from the Local Development Plan.  |           |
| 13 | <b>Revisions to Appointments to Committees and Boards</b>   | 131 - 134 |
|    | To approve any revisions to the appointments to Committees, Boards and other bodies.                                      |           |
| 14 | <b>To receive the minutes of Cabinet</b>  | 135 - 168 |
|    | To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 7 and 21 December 2022.                                      |           |
| 15 | <b>To receive the minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board</b>                                       | 169 - 182 |
|    | To receive the minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held on 6 December 2022 and 12 January 2023. |           |
| 16 | <b>To receive the minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee</b>   | 183 - 192 |

To receive the minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 15 November 2022.

## 17 **Notice of Motions**

To consider the following motions received under Standing Order No. 12:-

### 17.1 Motion against the Governments anti-strike legislation

**Proposer: Councillor Piper**

**Seconder: Councillor Smith**

This council expresses concern about the government's anti-strike, anti-trade union legislation aimed at forcing people to go to work against their will after they have organised and democratically voted for legitimate industrial action. Many people who live in Sandwell actually work in Sandwell and have joined unions across a range of professions that are potentially impacted by the governments proposed legislation changes. These professions work across Health, Fire and Rescue, transport and education sectors. Our residents in these professions voted to have their voice heard, on such matters as pay, working conditions, safe working practices and fire and rehire.

The government's proposed law would give a Secretary of State the power to define "minimum service levels" in certain sectors such as those in health, fire and rescue, education and transport where Sandwell people work. This would mean that Sandwell workers would be required to maintain that level during a strike or forfeit employment rights, including legal protection against unfair dismissal leaving them insecure in their job, and fearing the consequence of any action taken. Workers should have a freedom of choice and yet this right will be



restricted in this legislation.

The government should ensure proper negotiation and not put Sandwell workers at risk of losing their right of collective bargaining in the workplace.

Sandwell Council resolves:

- To carry on listening and to keep an open dialogue with all unions to continue to understand the issues that Sandwell workers face
- And requests that the leader writes to all of the Sandwell MP's and request that they listen to the right honourable John Spellar who has recently expressed concern about the Governments actions and ask that they all lobby government to work with all unions and not against them.

17.2 To Preserve and Protect the Thimblemill Baths Building

**Proposer: Councillor Kalari**

**Seconded: Councillor Anandou**

“That Council requests the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism to consider preserving and protecting the Thimblemill Baths building by

- (i) not allowing the building to go into disrepair after the resources are moved to the new aquatics centre;
- (ii) (ii) securing funding for renovations as needed and put the facility into community use.”

17.3 More Funding for Road Safety Measures

**Proposer: Councillor Anandou**

**Seconded: Councillor Kalari**

“The Council takes road safety seriously and supports the importance of road safety measures to protect road users and pedestrians. Council therefore requests that the Cabinet Member for Environment Services reviews:

- (i) the adequacy of road safety/traffic calming measures particularly at accident spots across the Borough, such as Oldbury Town, Wolverhampton Road/ Queensway Junction, the Perryhill Road/ Castle Road junction and Castle Road/Hadzor road junction; and
- (ii) how funding is prioritised/allocated within Highways team to enable these measures to be implemented more quickly.”

## 18 **Decisions of the Ethical Standards Sub Committee**

To receive the decision of the Ethical Standards Sub Committee held on 16 December 2022:-

“That Cllr Melia makes an apology at the next full meeting of the Council and also sends a written apology to the complainant in a form agreed with the Chair of the Sub Committee, within 28 days”;



**Kim Bromley-Derry CBE DL**  
**Managing Director Commissioner**  
Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
Oldbury  
West Midlands

**Distribution**

All Members of the Council

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## **Apologies**

To receive any apologies from members

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## **Declarations of Interest**

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

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## Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting of Council

**Tuesday 12 December 2022 at 6.00pm  
in the Council Chamber – Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** His Worshipful The Mayor, Councillor R Jones;  
Deputy Mayor, Councillor Taylor;

Councillors Abrahams, Ahmed, Akhtar, Allcock, Anandou, Bhullar, Carmichael, Chapman, Costigan, Davies, Dhariwal, Dunn, Fenton, Fisher, Gavan, E A Giles, J Giles, M Gill, S Gill, W Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hinchliff, A Hussain, Z Hussain, Jalil, O Jones, S Jones, Kalari, Kaur, Lewis, Mayo, McVittie, Millar, Millard, Owen, Padda, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Randhawa, Rollins, Shaeen, Simms, N Singh, Smith, Trumpeter, Uddin, Wilkes and Williams.

**Officers:** Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer; Elaine Newsome – Services Manager – Democracy; Stephnie Hancock – Deputy Democratic Services Manager; Trisha Newton – Deputy Democratic Services Manager; Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer; John Swann – Democratic Services Officer; Kennedy Brown – Sergeant at Arms.

### 139/22 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen, Akpoteni, Ashman, Bostan, Chidley, Choudhry, Crompton, Dhallu, E M Giles, L Giles, G Gill, Hughes, Kausar, Khatun, Mabena, and Moore.

### 140/22 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.



Council received the recommendations of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee, of 24 November 2022, in relation to a nomination for Honorary Alderwoman (see Minute No. 14/22 of the Committee).

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the office of Honorary Alderwomen of the Borough be conferred upon Dr Ann Jaron;
- (2) that the Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Mayor and Leader of the Council, be authorised to make the appropriate arrangements to implement the decision set out in (1) above.

Meeting ended at 6:08pm

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



# Minutes of Council

**Tuesday 13 December 2022 6.12pm  
in the Council Chamber – Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** His Worshipful The Mayor, Councillor R Jones;  
Deputy Mayor, Councillor Taylor;

Councillors Abrahams, Ahmed, Akhtar, Akpoteni, Allcock, Anandou, Bhullar, Carmichael, Chapman, Costigan, Davies, Dhariwal, Dunn, Fenton, Fisher, Gavan, E A Giles, J Giles, M Gill, S Gill, W Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hinchliff, Hughes, A Hussain, Z Hussain, Jalil, O Jones, S Jones, Kalari, Kaur, Lewis, Mayo, McVittie, Millar, Millard, Owen, Padda, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Randhawa, Rollins, Shaeen, Simms, N Singh, Smith, Trumpeter, Uddin, Wilkes and Williams.

**Officers:** Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer; Elaine Newsome – Services Manager – Democracy; Stephnie Hancock – Deputy Democratic Services Manager; Trisha Newton – Deputy Democratic Services Manager; Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer; John Swann – Democratic Services Officer; Kennedy Brown – Sergeant at Arms.

## 142/22 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen, Ashman, Bostan, Chidley, Choudhry, Crompton, Dhallu, E M Giles, L Giles, G Gill, Kausar, Khatun, Mabena and Moore.



## 143/22      **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor M Gill declared an interest in the matter referred to at Minute No. 152/22 Proposed departure from the Development Plan at 57 Leabrook Road, Wednesbury, as the site was near to where he lived.

## 144/22      **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Council and ordinary Council held on 8 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 145/22      **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

## 146/22      **Minute Silence**

The Council observed a minute silence to mark the passing of long serving councillor, Ann Shackleton.

Councillor Shackleton had represented the Cradley Heath and Old Hill ward for 18 years. She had been Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board since 2020 and had previously been the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care from 2016- 2019. She had also served as the Deputy Mayor over the 2011- 2012 municipal year.

Before becoming a councillor, she had been the headteacher of Corbett Primary School in Smethwick.

Members paid tribute to Councillor Shackleton and expressed their thanks for all the hard work and dedication she had put into Sandwell throughout her life.

The Mayor led members in extending condolences to her family and friends.



## 147/22 **Mayor's Announcements**

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

The Mayor noted the success of the Remembrance Day and Sunday events across the Borough and thanked the volunteers from the Royal British Legion for their support.

The Mayor and the Deputy Lieutenant had attended for the first time since the Covid-19 Pandemic citizenship ceremonies, where for the first time those receiving citizenship honoured His Majesty King Charles III.

As the festive season approached the Mayor highlighted the Christmas events across the Borough.

## 148/22 **Petitions**

No petitions were received under Standing Order No. 5.

## 149/22 **Written Questions**

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

## 150/22 **Sandwell Council Improvement Plan**

On 22 March 2022, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced an intervention package and a set of Directions to ensure the Sandwell Council was able to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. The Directions had been in-part influenced by the Grant Thornton report following their Value for Money Governance Review of December 2021.



A single Improvement Plan had been agreed by Council on 7 June 2022. Under the Statutory Directions, the Council was required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months. The next report was due for submission in December 2022.

Cabinet considered the progress of the Improvement Plan on a quarterly basis and had received their next quarterly progress report on 7 December.

Significant progress had been made in delivering the actions contained within the Improvement Plan. The Council had invited Grant Thornton, the LGA and CIPFA to conduct follow-up reviews in Autumn 2022. The findings from the LGA had been received. The findings from Grant Thornton and CIPFA had yet to be published.

Once the findings from all three external reviews had been received, the Council's response would be considered, along with any additional recommendations from the Secretary of State.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Improvement Plan Progress Reports and the accompanying letter be submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to form the Council's six-monthly update on progress against the Improvement Plan;
- (2) that Council note the significant progress made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan;
- (3) that Council note the findings from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Follow-up visit and that the Council's response to the findings will be made in conjunction with the forthcoming findings from the Grant Thornton and CIPFA follow-up reviews, along with any additional recommendations from the Secretary of State.



## **Governance Review - Proposed Changes to the Council's Constitution**

The Council had commenced a review of the Council's governance arrangements following the Grant Thornton Governance Review, LGA Corporate Peer Review and CIPFA Review. These reviews had identified a number of key governance issues that were required to be addressed.

The reviews specifically identified the requirement to address underlying constitutional and procedural deficiencies that directly and indirectly undermined or hindered the Council's governance arrangements, decision making ability and key working relationships.

An Officer Governance Review Project Team had been established to help coordinate and oversee the delivery of the Governance Review.

Demonstrating progress in respect of the Governance Review was a key area of focus for the Secretary of State and ensuring necessary changes to the Council's Constitution are delivered at pace considered critical to the Council's improvement.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that approval be given to the proposed revisions to the Constitution including:
  - Articles 1 to 5, 8 to 12
  - Part 4 Financial Procedure Rules
  - Part 4 Budget and Policy Framework
- (2) that the Director of Law & Governance/Monitoring Officer, be authorised to make all necessary consequential changes to the Constitution to give effect to the approved changes.





## **Proposed departure from the Development Plan at Leabrook Road, Wednesbury**

At its meeting on 11 May 2021, Planning Committee gave approval to planning application DC/20/63920, which sought approval for retention of use as motor car sales, 1.8m high galvanised security fencing and galvanised roller shutter door subject to the departure from the development plan, being considered and ratified by Council.

Whilst the proposal formed part of a wider housing allocation, namely land between Lea Avenue/Leabrook Road and Willowsworth Road/Leabrook Road, at present, the area included established commercial uses and hence re-development of the application site would have been inappropriate in isolation. The proposal in all other respects was acceptable in appearance and the use was complimentary to existing commercial uses serving Leabrook Road. It was considered on balance, that the proposal was acceptable and a departure from the Development Plan be allowed on this occasion.

**Resolved** that approval be given to an exception to the development plan in respect of planning application DC/21/65279 for retention of use as motor car sales, 1.8m high galvanised security fencing and galvanised roller shutter door at 57 Leabrook Road, Wednesbury.

(Councillor M Gill left the room during consideration of this matter)





## Performance Champions - Progress Report

The Safer Communities Performance Champion delivered a bi-annual update on the role of Performance Champions.

The Performance Champions had spent their first six months undertaking a range of tasks which included:

- building working relationships – with Cabinet members, officers, community groups and organisations, businesses, partner organisations, partnership groups;
- understanding the challenges- through these relationships, building a picture of the issues surrounding their topic area;
- understanding the context – what are members aiming to achieve in regard to that topic, what are the resource limits, what are the key messages to be taken to the community and partners;
- capturing what was working well and not so well – whether there was a gap between perception and reality. Capturing the successes that can be celebrated together;
- capturing and feedback intelligence gathered – make sure that all the intelligence gathered is captured and fed back to the Lead.

## Constitution and Political Balance of Committees and Boards

Council considered the political balance of the committees, boards and other fora for the remainder of 2022-23.

**Resolved** that the political balance of the committees, boards and other fora for the remainder of 2022-23 be approved.

## To receive the minutes of Cabinet

The minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 16 November 2022 were received.



## 156/22(a) **Review of Garden Waste Collection**

The recommendation in relation to the Review of Garden Waste Collection was moved by Councillor Carmichael and seconded by Councillor Piper:-

“That the Council be recommended to approve the fee for the collection of Garden Waste of £35 for 2023 (or part)”.

In accordance with Standing Order No.13 (8)(a), Councillor Fisher moved the following amendment to the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor W Gill:-

“That the Council continues with the current free of charge service”.

In accordance with Standing Order No.14(3), Councillor Dunn called for a named vote on the amendment. The required support to the request was achieved and the motion as amended was put to a named vote as follows:-

For:

Councillor Abrahams, Anandou, Chapman, Dunn, Fisher, W Gill, Kalari, Trumpeter, Wilkes and Williams.

Against:

Councillors Ahmed, Akhtar, Akpoteni, Allcock, Bhullar, Carmichael, Costigan, Dhariwal, Fenton, Gavan, E A Giles, J Giles, M Gill, S Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hinchliff, Hughes, A Hussain, Z Hussain, Jalil, O Jones, R Jones, S Jones, Kaur, Lewis, Mayo, McVittie, Millar, Millard, Owen, Padda, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Randhawa, Rollins, Shaeen, Simms, N Singh, Smith, Taylor and Uddin.

Abstain:

None.



Having been defeated, the original recommendation was put to the vote and it was

**Resolved** that the fee for the collection of Garden Waste of £35 for 2023 (or part) be approved.

**157/22 To receive the minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board**

The minutes of the meetings of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held on 29 November 2022 were received.

**158/22 To receive the minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 29 September 2022 were received.

**159/22 To receive the minutes of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee held on 24 November 2022 were received.

**159/22(a) Review of Polling Places and Polling Stations 2022/23**

The Council considered the review of polling places and polling stations 2022/23.

The Elections Team had undertaken a review of polling places following the May 2022 elections. Although not statutory, it was considered good practice to undertake a review after an election year.



When reviewing polling places, it had been necessary to review their appropriate efficacy. The perspective of the electorate had to be considered in any change, such as, the accessibility of the site, its suitability, parking arrangements and disabled access. If alternative sites could not be found in the vicinity, then the site would not be changed.

The changes recommended took into account the commitment made following the 2021 review to reduce the number of schools and temporary huts used as polling stations.

**Resolved that:-**

- (1) the proposed changes to specific Polling Places and Polling Stations as set out in Appendix 1 be approved;
- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer be authorised to implement the approved changes detailed in Appendix 1;
- (3) subject to any required changes with a Polling Place or Polling Station within the Borough prior to elections in 2023 (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 Chairperson of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee, as considered necessary to enable the efficient and effective running of elections.

160/22

**To receive the minutes of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee held on 1 November 2022 were received.



## 161/22 Notice of Motions

The Council proceeded to consider motions received under Standing Order No. 7.

### 161/22(a) Opt-out HIV Testing

The Council was advised that the motion had been withdrawn.

### 161/22(b) Housing Safety

It was moved by Councillor W Gill and seconded by Councillor Fisher: -

That this Council places on record that we are deeply saddened by the death of Awaab Ishak and is committed to ensuring that lessons are learnt to ensure that such a tragedy cannot happen again.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- Recognises the duties it has in the Housing Act 2004 to improve the housing quality for both social and private tenants.
- Commit to ensuring that all people in the Borough do not live in poor quality housing.
- Use the powers it has to ensure that all accommodation in Sandwell, whether private or social, is of high safety and quality standards.
- Commit to carry out a review of housing conditions in Sandwell and supply the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities with an assessment of damp and mould issues affecting privately rented properties.
- Assess action that may need to be taken in relation to damp and mould issues affecting privately rented properties in the Borough and supply the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities with this assessment.
- Welcome the government's plans to enable a rigorous new regime that holds all landlords to account for the decency of their homes and the service they provide.



- Prioritise enforcement of housing standards and ensure that there is a strong and up-to-date plan to ensure there is adequate enforcement capacity to drive up standards in the private rented.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried and it was **RESOLVED** accordingly.

## 161/22(c) **Safe working, transport and enforcement**

It was moved by Councillor Hartwell and seconded by Councillor Hinchliff:-

Shift work is widespread in many industries particularly hospitality, as well as health and care workers, and many National Health Service workers – all are expected to work or have a degree of late night working.

Late night working increases at this time of year (December). For those who work in retail, these workers are often women or students who work part time or to avoid child care costs.

Many workers of all genders and ages are increasingly worried of attack but especially women who are afraid of attack and sexual assault/harassment.

We would like to acknowledge the tremendous job that our local officers do to protect the residents of Sandwell but there are many weaknesses with enforcement of the law against sexual assault and harassment - this is appalling and together with the reduction of officers over the last decade which is an absolute disgrace makes this a difficult combination for women to feel safe.

This council call upon the Leader to write to the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority and ask him to provide assurances on the following:

- To make sure improvement to late night and off-peak transport by making sure time schedules are relevant, kept to and that cancellations are at a minimum with just reason.
- Because of the Cost of Living Crisis, ensure fares are kept to a minimum at an affordable level so as not to exclude the low paid such as nurses.





- Not to cut services in areas where it is known that late working is absolute or possible such as retail or hospitals
- Ensure all drivers and other public transport workers are trained to be aware of what Sexual Harassment is and know what to do in the event that it happens.
- Liaise with Trade Unions as necessary to prevent strike action that would stop transport

And to write to Simon Foster – the Police and Crime Commissioner:

- Requesting that he makes representations to the government on strengthening the law regarding sexual harassment, and to lobby the government for more officers to strengthen enforcement in Sandwell to prevent any rise in harassment.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried and it was **RESOLVED** accordingly.

#### 161/22(d) **Cost of Living Emergency**

It was moved by Councillor Carmichael and seconded by Councillor Piper: -

In April 2022 this Labour administration brought a motion to this council regarding the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Since then, we have had a further TWO budgets and seen inflation rise to the highest it has been in forty years. This council now finds itself looking at discretionary services as part of its budget cuts.

This council thanks our officers for all the additional work already done to support residents in this crisis and to also note that we know that the council is doing all it can to protect our vulnerable residents including.

- Signposting of benefits and other support
- Exploring all ways to ensure that grants received go to the most vulnerable
- Providing extra funding to food banks, school voucher scheme, Ukraine hosts



- Setting up a Cost of Living Webpage and the recent set-up of a cost-of-living WhatsApp service
- Setting up Sandwell's warm spaces and supplying grants to organisations

This council believes that there is still more that will need to be done to help out our residents and this council resolves to:

- Escalate our established Cost of Living Crisis status and declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' this highlighting the massively difficult situations many residents are facing
- Continue to explore ways in the councils' budget to ensure our most vulnerable receive help, even though we recognise the governments cuts over the last decade.
- Convene a cost-of-living summit in this council and invite partners, businesses, organisations, trade unions, MPs to help this council address the situation.

In accordance with Standing Order No.13 (8)(a), Councillor Fisher moved the following amendment to the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor W Gill:-

In April 2022 this Labour administration brought a motion to this council regarding the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Since then, we have had a further TWO budgets and seen inflation rise to the highest it has been in forty years. This council now finds itself looking at discretionary services as part of its budget cuts.

This council thanks our officers for all the additional work already done to support residents in this crisis and to also note that we know that the council is doing all it can to protect our vulnerable residents including.

- Signposting of benefits and other support
- Exploring all ways to ensure that grants received go to the most vulnerable
- Providing extra funding to food banks, school voucher scheme, Ukraine hosts
- Setting up a Cost of Living Webpage and the recent set-up of a cost-of-living WhatsApp service
- Setting up Sandwell's warm spaces and supplying grants to organisations





This council believes that there is still more that will need to be done to help out our residents and this council resolves to:

- Escalate our established Cost of Living Crisis status and declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' this highlighting the massively difficult situations many residents are facing
- Continue to explore ways in the councils' budget to ensure our most vulnerable receive help, even though we recognise the governments cuts over the last decade and we recognise the adverse impact that the Council's own budget and fiscal policy can have on residents due to the financial burden placed upon all of Sandwell's residents by this Council.
- Convene a cost-of-living summit in this council and invite partners, businesses, organisations, trade unions, MPs to help this council address the situation.

We appreciate whole-heartedly the impacts its having but in terms of support, whilst it is important we work with government it shouldn't prevent the council looking closer to home.

Council Piper introduced an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Carmichael that an addition be added to the amended motion, that the final paragraph state:

"We appreciate whole-heartedly the impacts its having but in terms of support, whilst it is important we work with Conservative government for the last 12 years it shouldn't prevent the council looking closer to home".

The request was made that the addition be introduced into the proposed amendment but this was rejected.

The amended motion was put to the vote and, having been defeated, the Council returned to the substantive motion.

The motion was carried, and it was RESOLVED accordingly.

Meeting ended at 8.42pm

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



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## **Urgent Business**

To consider any urgent business (with prior approval by the Mayor).

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## **EVENTS ATTENDED SINCE 13<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2022**

- Citizenship Ceremony x 3
- Festive Hot Drinks Trolley, SCVO West Bromwich
- Places of Welcome x 10
- Visit from AGE UK
- Christmas Community Event - Friar Park Millennium Centre
- Ormiston Forge Academy Prize Giving Evening
- Visit to St Philip's Catholic Primary School
- Connexions - New Year New Start
- Visit - Central Café
- Holocaust Memorial Day

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## **Petitions**

To receive any petitions under Standing Order No. 5 (strategic policy issues or which are of a Borough-wide significance if they are relevant to some matter to which the Council has functions and responsibilities, or which affects the Borough, or part of it, or its citizens or a number of them).

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## Report to Council

**31 January 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Written Questions
<b>Director:</b>	Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

The following written questions have been received:-

### **7(a) From Councillor Anandou to the Cabinet Member for Environment Services**

Over 5 petitions have been submitted in the last decade, the last one from me 2 years ago to install a safe pedestrian crossing at or near the Perryhill Road/Castle Road junction, Old Warley – two school children were hit by a car in separate accidents in the last 18 months, with several accidents on a regular basis and the area remains a hazard situated at the cross roads to 3 schools, although a lollypop lady and a slow sign was implemented after much pressure, the accidents haven't stopped yet, hence may I ask the cabinet member when will a pedestrian crossing will be put in place at or near the junction so that pedestrians can cross the area safely?



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## Report to Council

**31 January 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2021/2022
<b>Director:</b>	Michael Jarrett Director of Children and Education
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Director of Children and Education Michael Jarrett michael_jarrett@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the 2021/2022 Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) Annual Report and make any recommendations as necessary.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2018 introduced new flexible arrangements for safeguarding children. The agencies and organisations from each local authority area named in legislation to lead the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA) have collectively agreed to be known as Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP), have formalised and published the MASA for the area which came into effect as of April 2019. The SCSP MASA, have a fundamental purpose, to support and enable all local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:
- Children are safeguarded, and their welfare promoted;
  - Partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children;



- Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively;
- There is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats;
- Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice;
- Information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

2.2 The SCSP is made up of the leading Statutory agencies known as:

- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC)
- West Midlands Police (WMP)
- NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) (former CCG)
- Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) for the provision of Children Social Care;

Including representatives from other organisations listed in legislation as 'Relevant Partners, and in Sandwell, includes:

- Sandwell Community and Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)
- Education
- Other attendees as regular representatives of the SCSP include:
  - The Independent Chair
  - Independent Scrutineer – as named in Statutory guidance
  - Professional Advisors,
  - Local Council Member,
  - Lay-Person, and
  - Business Support - as required via Statutory guidance

2.3 To bring transparency for children, families and all practitioners about the activity undertaken, the safeguarding partners must publish a report at least once in every 12-month period. The report must set out what they have done as a result of the arrangements, including on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements.

2.4 The attached annual report published by SCSP outlines the activities undertaken in line with the requirements during 2021/22 and provides an





overview of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in Sandwell during that period.

## 2.5 The report provides:

- evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training, on outcomes for children and families from Early Help:  
<https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?azid> to Looked after children:  
<https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?azid> and care leavers
- an analysis of any areas where there has been little or no evidence of progress on agreed priorities
- record of decisions and actions taken by the partners in the reporting period (or planned to be taken) to implement the recommendations of any local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, including any resulting improvements
- ways in which the SCSP have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision.
- a reflection from the independent scrutineer on the effectiveness and delivery against our MASA, and how our arrangements are working for children and families as well as for practitioners, and how well as safeguarding partners we are providing strong leadership.

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

The work of SCSP, and the annual report itself, provides a transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of the local safeguarding arrangements. This enables a holistic view in respect of the Council's Vision 2030 and in particular:

	Best start in life for children and young people Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.
	Strong resilient communities 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.



	Sandwell has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's live and communities.
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## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The SCSP Annual Report for 2021/22 demonstrates the inter-agency activities to safeguard and promote the welfare of Sandwell's children.
- 4.2 The Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) established on 1 April 2019 are the local strategic body with shared and equal duties to ensure joined-up arrangements are developed, and effective for all agencies to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in Sandwell.
- 4.3 The local Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) was developed and published following full consultation with relevant agencies, children and young people and is widely shared to ensure safeguarding children in Sandwell is everyone's responsibility and all children have the opportunities to achieve their best outcomes and for children and families to receive services at the right time according to their individual needs and in a co-ordinated way.
- 4.4 In compliance with the requirements for LSP, the SCSP published MASA details which included the plans for independent scrutiny of arrangements and this annual report demonstrates the areas and themes scrutinised by the recruited independent scrutineer and the effectiveness of our MASA.
- 4.5 The SCSP met on a bi-monthly basis, having 6 prescheduled meetings for the reporting year 21/22, as well as convening a further 6 meetings, including extra-ordinary meetings to receive exception reports, emerging issues from a national perspective and arising and recovering from Covid 19 Pandemic, as well as its annual development event.

The SCSP also have within its refined structure direct links to other strategic partnerships/boards whose work is expected to include support /connectivity to children and families. This includes other public boards including Health and wellbeing boards, Adult Safeguarding Boards, the SCT Improvement Board, Community Safety Partnership, the Local Youth Justice Board linking to Violence Reduction Unit, Domestic





Abuse Strategic Partnership, Corporate Parenting Board, and the Children and Families Strategic Partnership.

- 4.6 In addition to the mandated 'core functions to be delivered via all local safeguarding children's partnerships, the SCSP have agreed and added the following as themed areas as 'Key Priorities' for 2021 – 2022 these are:

- **Neglect,**
- **Exploitation, and**
- **Early Help – (from autumn 2021)** In 2021, following a challenge between partners in Sandwell, it became apparent that the threshold for statutory social care was not clearly understood or duly applied across the partnership, this was evident in the high numbers of inappropriate Multi-Agency Referral Forms (MARF) being received at the 'front-door' with little or no evidence of activities (Early Help) or support offered prior to seeking statutory interventions.

**A further 2 themes areas following the outcome of learning from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LSCPR) were heightened for increased focus, attention and improvement, these being:**

The visibility and voice of Father's, Men/Partners/significant others in our work with children,  
Increase our knowledge, understanding, confidence and cultural competence to work with children and families across the diverse communities in Sandwell.

- 4.7 Under previous arrangements for Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCB) the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) was under the auspices of the former SSCB, this was also relocated to local authorities Public Health and CCG's in the revised Working Together 2018 publication. These arrangements are now in place with the formation of a Black Country CDOP, with representation from the SCSP.
- 4.8 The Partnership has been widely consulted on the annual report which was ratified by the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership on 8 December 2022 and shared with other strategic boards to inform work happening locally to support children and families. This includes; Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB), Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB), Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP), Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) Improvement Boards and Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board Meeting (SSPPCB)



The annual report is published on the SCSP website and a copy was sent to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, Department for Education (DfE), Police & Crime Commissioner and the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care within seven days of being published.

- 4.9 Areas for development or assurance relevant to each agency, are set out in the Annual Report. The delivery of these actions continues to be monitored, together with the impact on outcomes.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. The formulation of the annual report was met from existing resources.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	In accordance with Working Together 2018, a copy of the report has been sent to the Chief Executive of Sandwell MBC, Chief Executive of Sandwell Children's Trust, Leader of the Council, Chair of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board, Chair of the Health and Well-being Board and Police and Crime Commissioner and the NHS Integrated Care Board. The report is also made publicly available on each of the Safeguarding Partners respective websites.
<b>Risk:</b>	There are no risk implications arising from this report.
<b>Equality:</b>	The SCSP annual report is the responsibility of the SCSP and is a summary and assessment of the work of all partners in meeting the safeguarding agenda. This report is for information only and the actions contained within the Board's plan will have their own Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) as required.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Ensuring that partners work together to keep children safe underpins their right to enjoy health and wellbeing. Sharing intelligence and data about the prevalence of safeguarding concerns provides opportunities to intervene earlier to protect children from harm. Understanding the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has been a priority for the Health and Well-being Board.





<b>Social Value:</b>	<p>As a partnership our vision is for all children to be safe at home and in their communities, where they are loved, cared for and have the stability to grow healthily and to achieve their ambition'. The values which underpin the work of the SCSP are captured in the statements below:</p> <p>We will put children at the heart of what we do  Together we will make Sandwell safer for children  We will always listen, learn and improve We will have respect for each other and recognise and respond positively to difference. We will be positive about the future, and have aspirations for Sandwell's children, be solution focused, committed and innovative.</p>
<b>Climate Change:</b>	There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.

## 6 Appendices

2021/22 Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report

## 7. Background Papers

None.



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# Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership

## Working Together to Safeguard Children 2021 -2022 Annual Report

**Demonstrating the inter-agency activities to safeguard and promote the welfare of Sandwell's children.**



Version Control			
Number	Date	By Who	Reason
V1	Oct 2020	Holly Bramley & Gillian Ming	Annual Compliance Report
V.2	Oct. 2021	Holly Bramley & Gillian Ming	Annual Compliance Report
V.3	Dec 2022	Gillian Ming	Annual Compliance Report



**Foreword: Lesley Hagger, Independent Chair, Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership.**

Welcome to the Annual Report of Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership covering the period between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

The Partnership is very proud that the framework for this report has been led by young people. This involved young people meeting with members of the Partnership and asking them various questions about their role in keeping children safe in Sandwell. Whilst the young people had undertaken some intensive sessions to prepare their questions, the members of the Partnership were not aware of what they would be asked, and the responses that you will see in the embedded video clips were not rehearsed. On behalf of the Partnership, I would like to thank the young people that were involved for their insightful questions and for holding us to account for their wellbeing and safety. Thanks also go to Sandwell SHAPE for supporting the young people through the process.

This Annual Report reflects a period when Sandwell, along with the rest of the world, was emerging from the Coronavirus pandemic. Ensuring the safety of children during the pandemic became more complicated and complex, and emerging from the pandemic highlighted how difficult life had been for many young people. Partners in Sandwell continued to work together effectively in sometimes seemingly impossible circumstances but with a determination to ensure that children and young people were a priority for all agencies. This, combined with our learning from tragic national child safeguarding cases, has led to the inclusion of children's 'voices' as a feature of all sub-committee meetings, so partners can hear and respond to what children are telling us, and embed this into their individual and organisational learning and understanding.

Intelligence and data from this period influenced the Partnership to include a third key priority for 'early help' alongside the key priorities for neglect and exploitation. Our annual conference, in June 2021, focused on our 'neglect' priority. This also reflected themes from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews which highlighted the need for increased visibility and focus on males involved in children's lives, and on our cultural competence when working with Sandwell's diverse communities.

During the year, the Partnership reinstated its 'Chair Consultation Forum' as the executive group to support the delivery of the decisions made by the Partnership and drive innovation and pace in the dissemination of learning and practice developments. An increased focus on understanding what difference the Partnership is making and using the work of the Independent Scrutineer to examine effectiveness and to highlight good practice as well as development needs has helped the Partnership to have a greater focus on understanding the impact of its collective work.

Keeping children safe is truly everyone's responsibility and the Partnership would like to extend its thanks to each person, organisation, community, and business that worked hard to keep children safe and to respond to their needs during 2021/22. The Partnership has set out clear actions for 2022/23, recognising that these are part of that wider safeguarding environment in Sandwell and looking forward to continuing to be held to account by children, young people, families and the wider community for their delivery.

Lesley Hagger  
Independent Chair, SCSP

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## 1. Introduction

The [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) and [Working Together 2018](#) introduced new flexible arrangements for safeguarding children. The agencies and organisations from each local authority area named in legislation to lead the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA) have collectively agreed to be known as Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP), have formalised and published the MASA for the area which came into effect as of April 2019.

The SCSP MASA, have a fundamental purpose, to support and enable all local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:

- Children are safeguarded, and their welfare promoted;
- Partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children;
- Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively;
- There is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats;
- Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice;
- Information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

### **Who are the members of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership – (SCSP)**

The SCSP is made up of the leading Statutory agencies known as:

- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC)
- West Midlands Police (WMP)
- NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) (former CCG)
- Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) for the provision of Children Social Care; as well representatives from other organisations listed in legislation as 'Relevant Partners'\*, and in Sandwell, includes:
- Sandwell Community and Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)
- Education
- Other attendees as regular representatives of the SCSP include:
  - The Independent Chair
  - Independent Scrutineer – as named in Statutory guidance
  - Professional Advisors,
  - Local Council Member,
  - Lay-Person, and
  - Business Support - as required via Statutory guidance

\* Relevant agencies are those organisations and agencies whose involvement the safeguarding partners consider is required to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children. The SCSP expect organisations and agencies who are not named to cooperate with the MASA and collaborate with the safeguarding partners particularly as they may have duties under section 10 and/or section 11 of the Children Act 2004. A list of relevant agencies is set out in: [The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency \(England\) Regulations 2018](#)

As well as publishing the MASA, the SCSP have shared the local MASA with all partners, relevant agencies, and others expected to work within the formalised safeguarding arrangements for the area.

Mandated to local safeguarding structures, is the role of an 'Independent Scrutineer', this role exists to provide assurance in judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. In Sandwell, this role quality assures our arrangements and the processes in place for responding to serious child safeguarding incidents.

This independent role in Sandwell is aligned to our wider quality assurance processes and provides objective scrutiny, acts as a constructive critical friend and promotes reflection to drive continuous improvement.



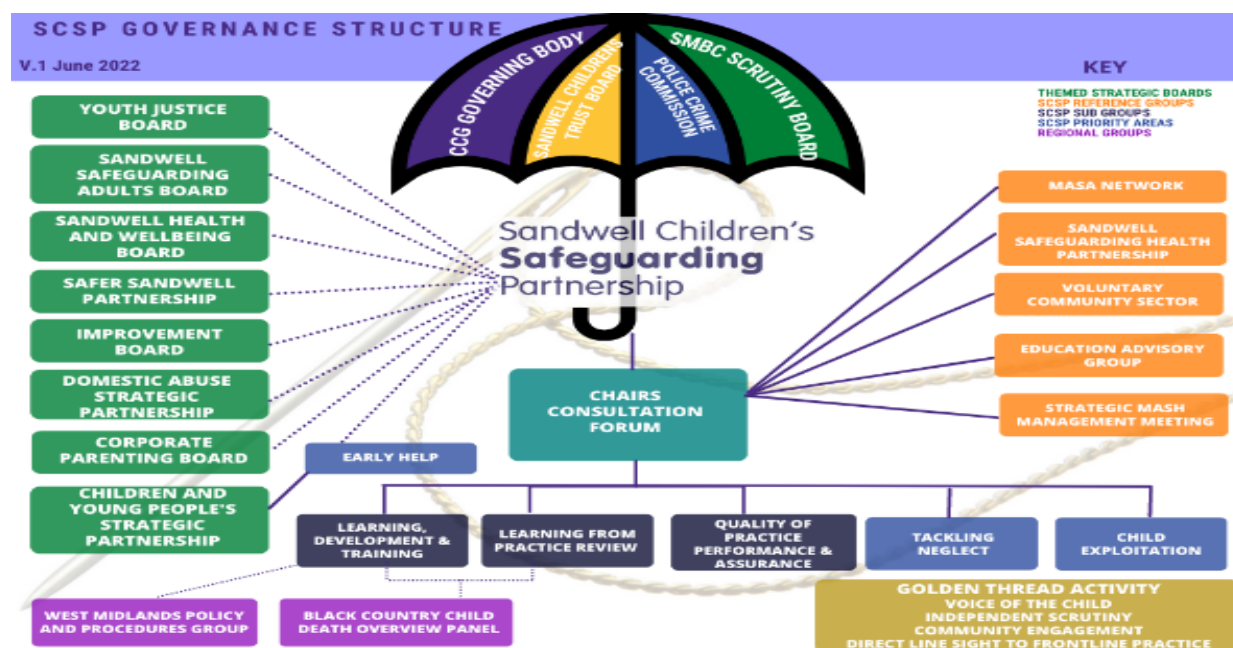
This annual report for 21-22 will focus on the activities planned and delivered over the 12month period as a result of the MASA, including reporting the approaches taken in response to serious safeguarding incidents as well as undertaking local child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice.

In addition, this annual report will include:

- evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training, on outcomes for children and families from Early Help:  
<https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?azid=E> to Looked after children:  
<https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?azid=L> and care leavers
- an analysis of any areas where there has been little or no evidence of progress on agreed priorities
- record of decisions and actions taken by the partners in the reporting period (or planned to be taken) to implement the recommendations of any local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, including any resulting improvements
- ways in which the SCSP have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision.
- a reflection from the independent scrutineer on the effectiveness and delivery against our MASA, and how our arrangements are working for children and families as well as for practitioners, and how well as safeguarding partners we are providing strong leadership.

More information about the formalised arrangements underpinning the work of Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership can be found on the SCSP website.

The SCSP reviewed and refined the structure below at its Development Day in January 2022 to ensure full and effective delivery of its 'core functions, priorities and have a line of sight to other local 'Boards' with connecting strands to our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.



The SCSP meet on a bi-monthly basis, having 6 preschedule meetings for the reporting year 21/22, as well as convening a further 6 meetings, including extra-ordinary meetings to receive exception reports, emerging issues from a national perspective and arising and recovering from Covid 19 Pandemic, as well as its annual development event.

The SCSP also have within its refined structure direct links to other strategic partnerships/boards whose work is expected to include support /connectivity to children and families. This includes other public boards including Health and wellbeing boards, Adult Safeguarding Boards, the SCT Improvement Board, Community Safety Partnership, the Local Youth Justice Board linking to Violence Reduction Unit, Domestic

Abuse Strategic Partnership, Corporate Parenting Board, and the Children and Families Strategic Partnership.

Across Sandwell, the Safeguarding Partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements. With lead representatives of seniority from each statutory agency being accountable for any actions or decisions taken on behalf of their agency.

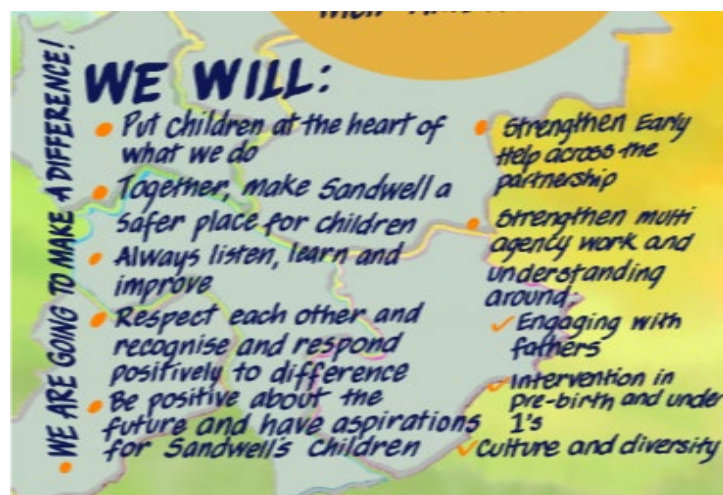
The representatives, or those with delegate authority to must be able to:

- speak with authority for the safeguarding partner they represent
- take decisions on behalf of their organisation or agency and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters
- hold their own organisation or agency to account on how effectively they participate and implement the local arrangements.

The SCSP have collectively agreed the following a set of values culminated in a mission statement which underpins its existence, commitment, and ambitions:

In addition to the mandated 'core functions to be delivered via all local safeguarding children's partnerships, the SCSP have agreed and added the following as themed areas as 'Key Priorities' for 2021 – 2022 these are:

- **Neglect,**
- **Exploitation, and**
- **Early Help – (from autumn 2021)** In 2021, following a challenge between partners in Sandwell, it became apparent that the threshold for statutory social care was not clearly understand or duly applied across the partnership, this was evident in the high numbers of inappropriate Multi-Agency Referral Forms (MARF) being received at the 'front-door' with little or no evidence of activities (Early Help) or support offered prior to seeking statutory interventions.

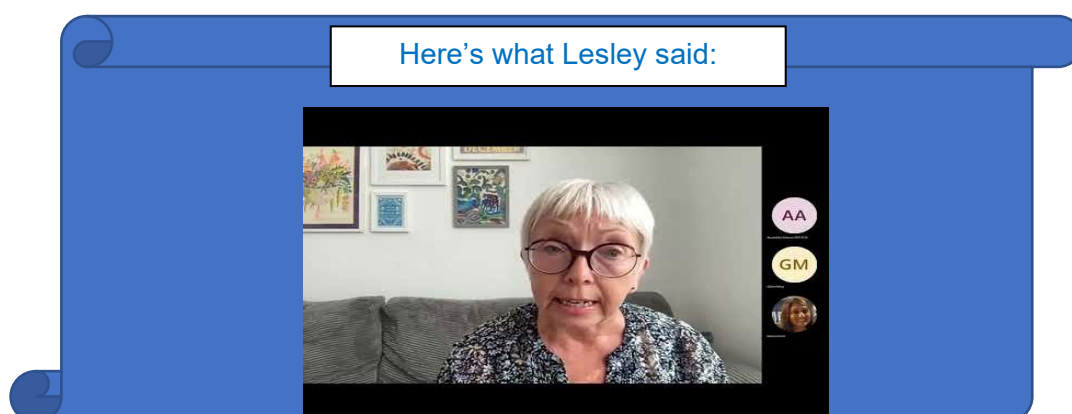


**A further 2 themes areas following the outcome of learning from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LSCPR) were heightened for increased focus, attention and improvement, these being:**

- The visibility and voice of Father's, Men/Partners/significant others in our work with children,
- Increase our knowledge, understanding, confidence and cultural competence to work with children and families across the diverse communities in Sandwell,

As well as activities against the 'core' functions as defined by legislation, statutory guidance, and illustrated in the SCSP structure chart, the priority areas and elevated themes are the focus for this year's annual report.

Heading in to the next section a reminder from Lesley Hagger the SCSP Independent Chair responding to a question posed by a young person who asked 'why does the SCSP exist' -





## 2. An Overview of Sandwell's the Child Population – Accessing and receiving Multi-Agency Help and Support during 21/22:

Page 59



39,626 Total Contacts, with  
4454 Referrals



625 Strengthening  
Families  
367 Multi-Agency Early  
Help



844 Children in Care



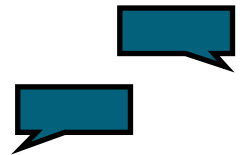
55 Children at  
risk of  
Exploitation\*



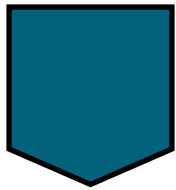
558 Children in Need



862 re-referrals



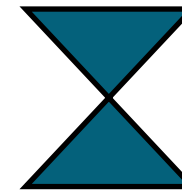
212 LADO Referrals



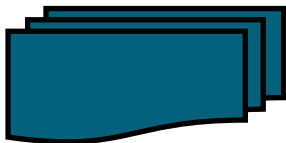
61 Children Police



409 Children on CP



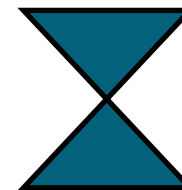
77% Assessments in



5179 Domestic  
Abuse contacts



365 young people  
seen in A&E



83% ICPC's in timescale



748 Children  
reported Missing

## **2. Understanding the Local context and the needs of the child population:**

With 327,378 residents, Sandwell has the third largest population in the West Midlands Combined Authority area and is the 34th biggest local authority in Great Britain. It is predicted to grow faster than the West Midlands and the national average.

Sandwell is a metropolitan borough with six towns; Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich and is one of seven local authorities that make up the West Midlands conurbation, it located at the centre of the West Midlands deprived urban area, to the west of Birmingham and shares its borders with Birmingham, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Walsall.

Sandwell is a Borough that has for many years faced significant challenges, having high and widespread deprivation with increasing pressures and demands for health and social care services. The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 has exaggerated this and 2 years on, we continue to adapt to a changing landscape in relation to demand for services, impact on children, families, availability and resilience of the workforce.

Sandwell has a young and diverse population with more than 40% residents under the age of 30, compared to around 30% across the UK. Almost 40% of residents are from ethnic groups, making us more diverse than the regional and UK average of 18.8% and 14% respectively.

### **The needs of children and young people accessing services and support from 'Early Help, through to statutory social work interventions to help and protect during 21/22:**

#### **Education Attainment in Sandwell**

With a third of the children in Sandwell being below school age and, although children do make progress when they are in school, this early underachievement has an impact throughout their school lives where attainment at both KS2 and KS4 are below the national average.

However, Sandwell performs below the national average on many indicators relating to children and young people.

- KS1 – at the end of 2022, Sandwell performed 6% below the National average for reading at 61%. Writing came in at 7% below the National average at 51%, Maths was 5% below the National average at 63%.
- KS2 – at the end of 2022, Sandwell performed 2% below National average for reading at 72%. Writing came in at 3% below the National average at 66%, Maths was 5% below the National average at 66%.
- KS4 – at the end of 2022, Sandwell performed 3% below National average for 9-4 English, and 9% below National average for 9-4 Maths.

Obesity in Sandwell's young people is measured at Reception Age (4 years old) and in Year 6 (10 years old).

12.8% of Reception age children in Sandwell are considered as obese or severely obese in comparison to the West Midlands average of 11.2%, whereas 28.5% of Year 6 aged young people are considered either obese or severely obese in comparison to the West Midlands average of 23.9%.

Towards the end of the reporting year, Sandwell received confirmation of being one of the 55 councils identified as an 'Education Investment Area' and one of 24 council's as a 'Priority Investment Area'. This sees the formation of Sandwell Partnership Board devising an action plan to be submitted to the DfE for ministerial approval in the coming financial year and will identify strategic priorities to focus on across the education sector.

In regard to teenage pregnancies, the latest data available indicates that there was 18 young people in Sandwell under the age of 16 years old that was pregnant. As at March 2022 none of the children and young people in care in Sandwell under the age of 16 years old were pregnant.

### **Contacts and Referrals:**

- 30,626 contacts were received over the financial year and on average 85.1% of these were completed within one working day.
- 9,805 of those contacts were received from Police, making up 32% of the total, with Education contacting 5,010 times at 16.4% of the total.
- 5,510 (18%) of the 30,626 contacts had an outcome of action for Sandwell Childrens Trust.
- 4,454 referrals were received by SCT, with 1,147 of those from Education (25.8%) and 1,380 from Police (30.9%). This is an average of 372 referrals per month.
- 4,151 of the 4,454 referrals went to single assessment, with a conversion rate of 93.2%.

### **Domestic Abuse Contacts**

- 5,179 Domestic Abuse contacts were received by SCT totalling 16.9% of the contacts received. This is a slightly lower position to the previous end of year position at 20.6%.
- Of the 5,179 DA contacts received, 5,167 of those were from Police (99.8%). Over half of the contacts that are made to SCT from Police are in relation to Domestic Abuse (53%).

### **A&E Admittance of Young People:**

- 80 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell for Alcohol misuse.
- 187 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell for Overdose.
- 49 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell for Self-Harm
- 49 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell as a Victim of Assault

### **Missing Children and Episodes**

- 748 individual young people had a missing episode within the 2021-2022 year. There was 1240 missing episodes in total, meaning that on average children went missing for 1.6 episodes each. Given the number of Children and Young People in Sandwell, there was on average 62 children missing each month at an average rate of 13 children in every 10,000 going missing for a period of time.
- 91.2% of children that went missing received a "return home interview" to discuss why they went missing, where they had been and to advise of the risks of going missing. 88% of these were completed within 72hrs of the young person returning home.

### **Child Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation**

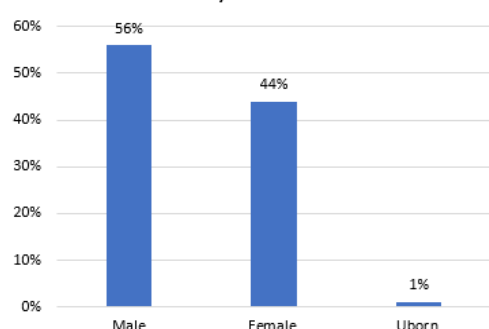
- \*55 children were assessed as being at risk of Child Exploitation by the end of March 2022.
- None were assessed as "low risk", 34 (62%) were assessed as "medium risk" and 20 (36%) were assessed as "high risk".
- Of the 55 children at risk of Child Exploitation, 26 were assessed as at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (47.3%). 20 of the 26 young people are female (77%).

## Strengthening Families and Multi-Agency Early Help

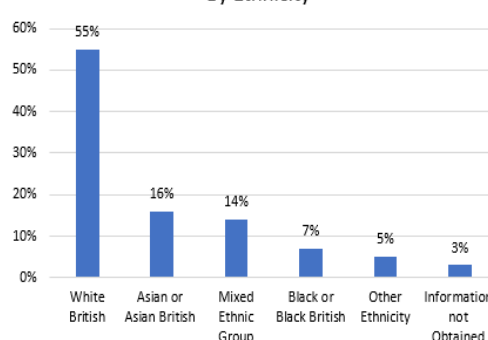
Contact to Referral/Met Threshold for EH	Q1 2021 - 2022	Q2 2021 - 2022	Q3 2021 - 2022	Q4 2021 - 2022
Total Contacts	7629	7409	7801	7641
Met Threshold for EH	2618	2140	2318	2405
% Met Threshold for EH	34.3%	28.9%	29.7%	31.5%

- At the end of 2021-2022 there were 992 young people open to Multi Agency Early Help and Strengthening Families Service.
- 56% of those were Male, 44% Female & 1% Unborn.
- 56% were White British, 16% Asian or Asian British, 14% from a Mixed Ethnic Group, 7% Black or Black British, 5% were from Other Ethnic Backgrounds, and 3% Information not Obtained.
- 19% were between the ages of 0-4, 43% between 5-11, 34% between 12-16 and 4% were 17 years+.
- Of the young people open to Strengthening Families as at 31 March 2022, 88% had a Team Around the Family (TAF) Meeting within the last 12 weeks. 91% had a family visit within the last two weeks.

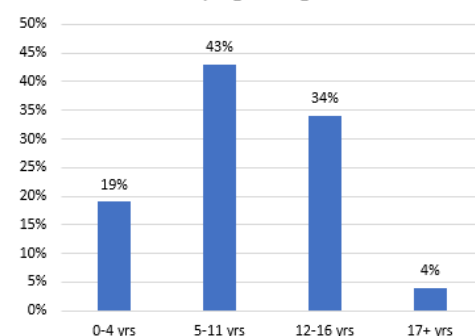
By Gender



By Ethnicity



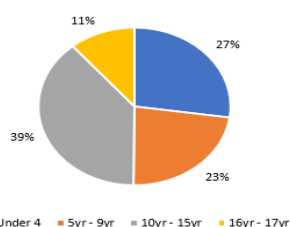
By Age Range



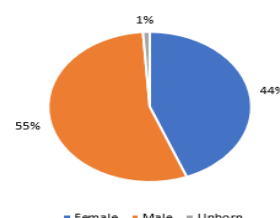
## Children in Need

- At the end of March 2022 there was 558 young people on a Child in Need Plan. This is a rate of 67 young people in every 10,000 in Sandwell, that's around 2 full classrooms of children.
- 21.5% of the young people on a Child in Need Plan have been so for 9 months or longer.
- 306 (55%) are male, 246 (44%) are female, with 6 (1%) unborn.
- 59 young people (11%) are identified as having a disability.
- 52% were White British, 17% from a Mixed ethnic origin, 16% were Asian or Asian British, 11% were Black or Black British, 4% were from Other Ethnic backgrounds.
- 152 of the 558 are under 4 years old—27%.
- 128 of the 558 are between 5 years old and 9 years old—23%.

Age Groups of Children in Need 2021-2022



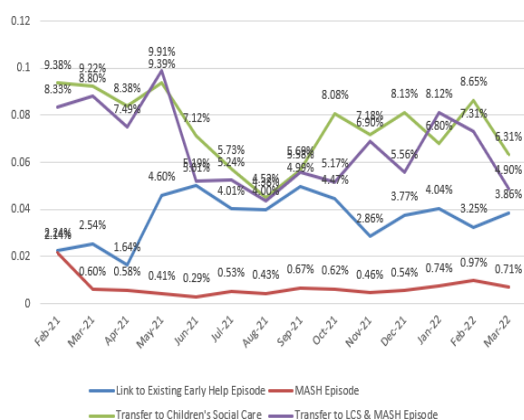
Total Gender of Children in Need 2021-2022



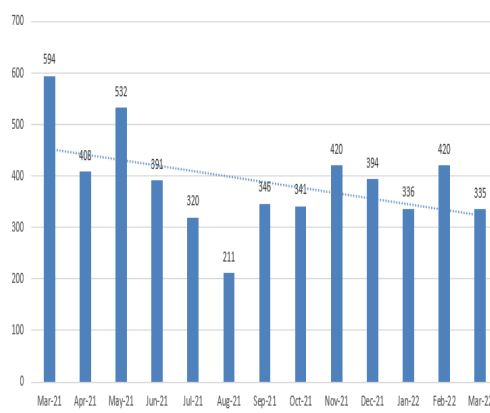
Re-

- 862 (19.3%) of the 4,454 referrals received over the 2021-2022 financial year were re-referrals. This is below the West Midlands average—20.4%, the Statistical Neighbour average—20.8% and the England average—22.7%.

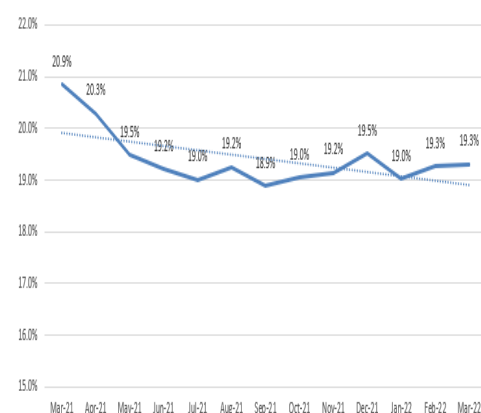
Contact Outcome - Action for SCT



Number of Referrals



Re-referral % in last 12 months



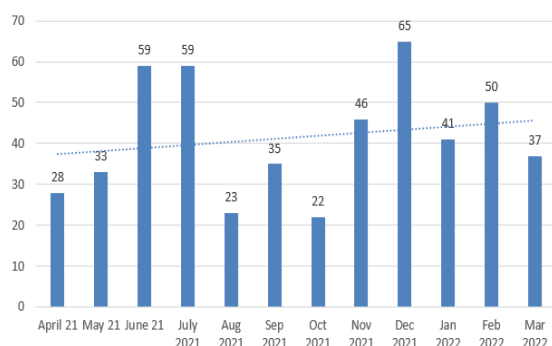
## Police Protection:

- Police issued 42 Protection orders over 2021-2022 that involved 61 young people.

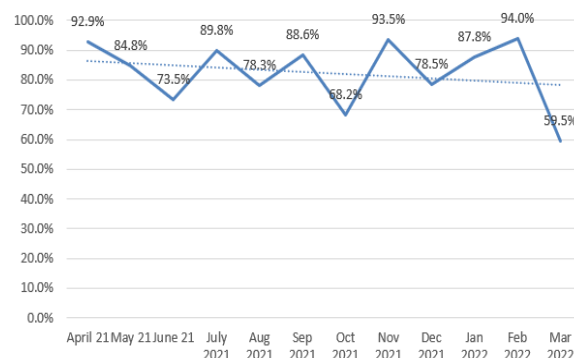
## Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC)

- 489 ICPCs were held in the year 2021-2022 and on average 83% of these were held within 15 working days of the Strategy Discussion. This is below the West Midlands average (85%), on par with the England average (83%) and above the Statistical Neighbour average (80.5%).
- 87% of ICPCs that are held by SCT result in a Child Protection Plan

Number of Initial Child Protection Conferences



% within 15 working days of Strategy Meeting



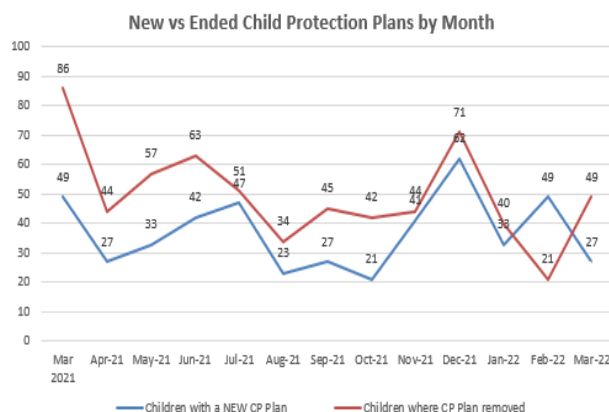
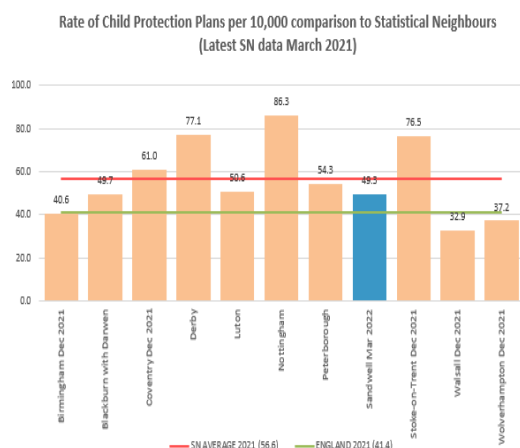
## Single Assessments

- 5,036 Single Assessments were completed by SCT over the course of the 2021-2022 year. 3,866 of these were completed within 45 working days (76.8%). This is an average of 51 assessments for every 10,000 young people in Sandwell.
- 4,136 NEW assessments were completed, with 3,277 of these completed within 45 working days (79%).
- 3,634 initial visits as part of the assessment were completed within the 5 working days from the assessment commencing (72%).

- Over the year, 3327 of the 5,036 assessments (66%) concluded that there was either no further action required, that it could be stepped down to Early Help, or a referral was made to another agency that was not social services.

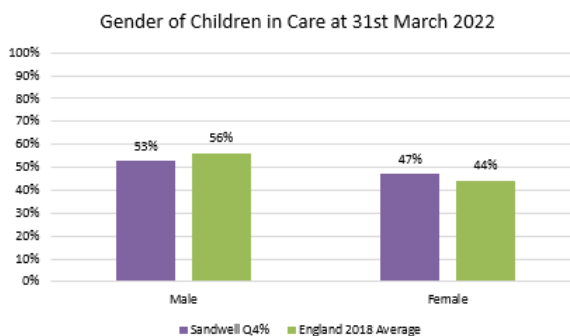
## Child Protection Plans:

- At the end of March 2022 there was 409 young people on a Child Protection Plan. This is a rate of 49 young people in every 10,000 in Sandwell. This is above the England average of 41.4 young people but below the Statistical Neighbour average of 56.6.
- Over the course of 2021-2022, 432 young people started a Child Protection Plan whilst 561 were removed from Child Protection Plans (deficit 129 young people).
- 72% of these young people have been on a Child Protection Plan for less than 9 months, with only 2.4% being on a plan for longer than 2 years (10 young people).
- 132 (32%) of these young people have previously been on a Child Protection Plan.
- On average 91% of the young people were visited within timescale (20 working days).
- Over the course of the year 93% of young people on Child Protection Plans had their plan updated within timescale (6 months).
- 49% of the young people are male whilst 48% are female. 3% are unborn.



## Children in Care

- At the end of the year 2021-2022 there was 844 Children in Care in Sandwell. That is 102 children in every 10,000 in Sandwell. This was about Statistical Neighbour average of 94 and above the England average of 67.
- 53% of those young people were male, with 47% female.
- 55% were White British, 25% from a Mixed ethnic origin, 9% were Asian or Asian British, 9% were Black or Black British, 2% were from Other Ethnic backgrounds.
- 61% were between the ages of 5 and 15 years old.
- 37% were in external foster placements, 16% internal foster placements, 18% placed with connected carers, 11% were placed at home with parents. The remaining 18% were in various other placement types.
- 79% of the children in care were assessed as at risk of Abuse or Neglect.
- 92% of children in care had their review health assessments completed within the past 12 months.
- On average, 91% of children in care aged 0-15 years old have their care planning



completed within timescale, with 92% of them having a single or multiple track plan of permanence at their first LAC review.

- 96% of children in care have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) completed.

## LADO Referrals:

In line with legislation Sandwell, through the LADO complies with the statutory duty and manages allegations for people in 'positions of trust'. The LADO is responsible for managing all child protection allegations made against staff and volunteers who work with children and young people in Sandwell. This includes Council/SCT staff, staff or partner agencies and volunteers. The table aside illustrates new referrals received by LADO by month during the report period.



## Private Fostering Arrangements:

At the end of 21/22, there are 9 children who are subject to private fostering arrangements in Sandwell. This is a reduction of 6 from the previous year's (20/21) report which highlighted 15 children who were subject to these arrangements. The reasons for this decrease in number is varied, for example children leaving these arrangements if they have become Looked After or moved back out of the Sandwell area.

## Child Deaths:

Sandwell is a member of the Black Country Death Overview Panel (BC CDOP) is an inter-agency forum for Child Death Reviews comprising of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

The BC CDOP is a multi-agency panel set up to conduct independent scrutiny on behalf of the local Child Death Review partners to review all deaths of children normally resident in the Black Country, to learn lessons and share findings for the prevention of child deaths.

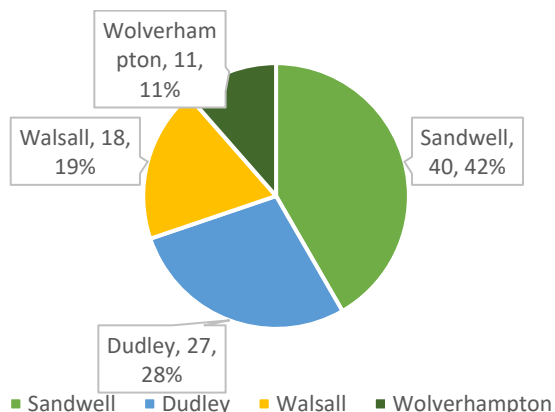
The Child Death Overview Panel review is intended to provide the final scrutiny over a child's death for the purpose of: -

- identifying any matters of concern affecting the safety and welfare of children relating to the death or deaths,
- to consider any actions or recommendations that can be taken based on a death, or a pattern of deaths to identify trends that require a multidisciplinary response.

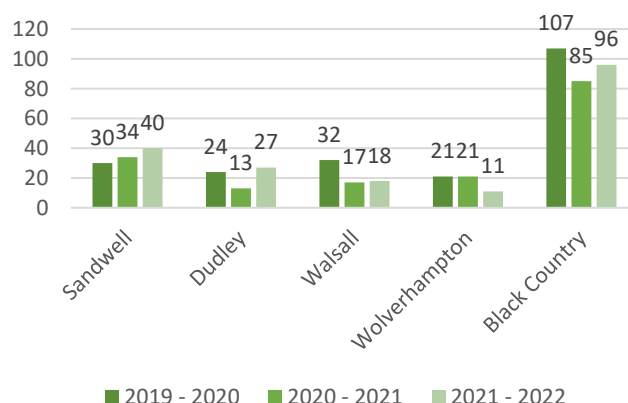
## Deaths Notified in 2021 – 2022

96 deaths in total were notified across the Black Country between April 2021 – March 2022

**Chart 1** below provides the breakdown for each Black Country area is as follows:



**Chart 2** below shows a 3-year comparison since April 2019



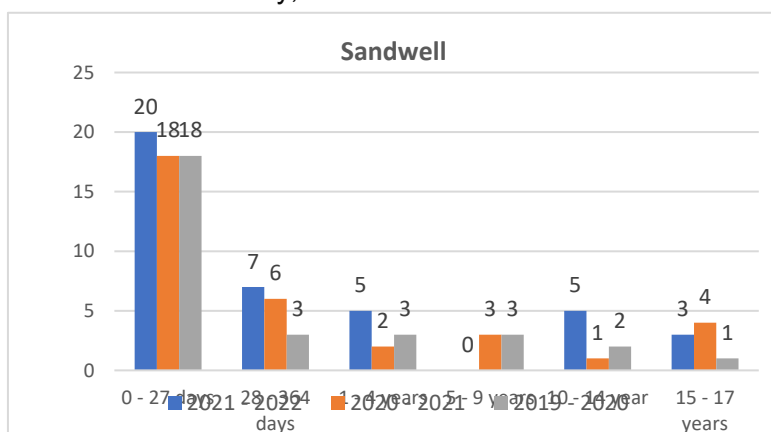
From chart 2 above, it is evident that Sandwell has seen an increase in Child Deaths year on year over the last 3 years, and in **Chart 3** below, by age, Sandwell child deaths have reduced in the 5 - 9 years and 15 - 17 years age groups. However, deaths have increased in all other age groups. The largest increase was in the 10 – 14 year age group

## Duties for Managing Unexpected Deaths in Children

An unexpected death of a child means, cases where a death (or collapse leading to death) of a child, which was not reasonably expected to occur 24 hours previously and in whom no pre-existing medical cause of death is apparent.

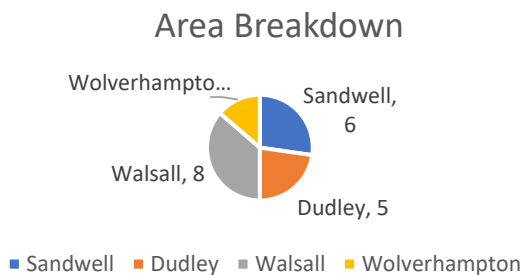
In such cases, there is a requirement to perform further investigations for all children who die where the cause is unknown. This process is referred to as a **Joint Agency Response**. A Joint Agency Response (JAR) is a coordinated multi-agency response which is triggered if a child's death: -

- is or could be due to external causes.
- is sudden and there is no immediately apparent cause (including SUDI/C).
- occurs in custody, or where the child was detained under the Mental Health Act,
  - in the case of a stillbirth where no healthcare professional was in attendance; or
  - where the initial circumstances raise any suspicions that the death may not have been natural – where abuse or neglect is known or suspected, in Sandwell, such deaths will also be referred to





SCT for a referral to Ofsted, DfE and National Safeguarding Practice Panel, and also to the SCSP for a Rapid Review via the relevant subgroup.



Figures in **Chart 4** (side) shows that out of the 96 deaths notified to the Black Country in 2021 – 2022, 22 were unexpected and required a Joint Agency Response (JAR), 6 of which were undertaken in Sandwell with 2 of the 6 referred for further scrutiny via Sandwell Learning from Practice Review subgroup.

For further information see the link to the Statutory and Operational Guidance and Working Arrangements for Child Death Overview Panels:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-death-review-statutory-and-operational-guidance-england> . This sets out the key features of a good Child Death Review (CDR) process to be followed by all organisations involved with the process of child death reviews as of 1st April 2019.

### 3. SCSP Subgroups & Priority Groups

The SCSP have three subgroups that leads of its 'core functions', and two groups with a mandate to drive forward the identified priority areas of business. Each subgroup has a nominated chair and representatives from across the multi-agencies. In addition, in May 2021 the partnership reinstated its 'Chair Consultation Forum, as the executive group to drive both the decisions made by the SCSP and also drive innovation and pace in the dissemination of learning and practice developments.

#### Learning from Safeguarding Practice Reviews (SLPR) Subgroup

The Sandwell Learning from Practice & Review (SLPR) group, oversee the functions defined for responding to serious safeguarding incidents. This group meets on a bi-monthly basis and calls agencies in to the meeting to report on progressing recommendations and actions assigned.

The SCSP have formal arrangements to identify and review all serious child safeguarding cases which raise issues of importance and learning which can improve services and support to children and families in Sandwell. In these cases, independent reviews are completed, published and learning disseminated to all agencies and organisation. Let's hear from the SLPR Subgroup DCI Dez Lambert as he describes what a CSPP is and why we do them:



- All serious incidents referred to the SCSP are reviewed against the qualifying criteria for a Rapid Review. Activities and compliance against this function for the reporting period are noted as:
- 2 Rapid Reviews during the year –
  - 1 progressed as thematic LCSPR facilitated via the 'Child Exploitation Board (CEB) due to the nature of the incident and the connectivity to exploitation;
  - 1 did not meet the threshold for further interrogation
- Published 4 LCSPRs from previous years, 2019/2020, each being delayed due to competing criminal proceedings;
- 4 further LCSPRs were ratified by SCSP during this period - all related incidents occurred in 2020 and at the height of the COVID pandemic.
- **National reviews: NAI in babies, JTAI**

**Key learning themes** taken from the LCSPRs during this period include recommendations that partners should:

- Ensure that the voice of the child or young person is heard, and their lived experience is captured appropriately by those working closely with them.
- Seek assurance about how agencies approach working with parents who have learning difficulties/disabilities.
- Improve communication between Adult and Children's Social Care services when a parent has, or is suspected to have, a mental health condition.
- Seek assurance about the quality of assessments and pre-birth procedures.
- Recognise and work within the appreciation of Sandwell being a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-language and multi-cultural borough, therefore all our policies, procedures, practice and services should positively acknowledge, reflect and respect this fact, and position ourselves towards being a more culturally appropriate partnership where all Practitioners are:
  - Knowledgeable about cultural differences and their impact on attitude and behaviours;
  - Sensitive, understanding, non-judgmental and respectful in dealing with people whose culture is different from your own;
  - Being flexible and skilful in responding and adapting to different cultural contexts and circumstances.
- Routinely capture the voice of fathers/significant male carers and whole family view needs to be visible in assessments and records by frontline practitioners. This ensures a rounded and holistic view of the entire family to enable practitioners to make effective and informed decisions when safeguarding the child or young person including decisions based on risk.
- Ensure that partners work closely with agencies from other authorities when there are cross-border concerns in any safeguarding enquiry.

- Seek assurance that staff and agencies are able to effectively manage risk and that assessments of any kind are live documents which should be updated and triangulated with any significant event.
- Learning identified through reviews reinforces the rationale for the priority areas and associating subthemes.

### Some of the improvement work arising from national and local serious incidents, and safeguarding practice reviews:

- Development of training for SCT on unregulated placements, and a briefing for all partners to be aware of the basics and know where to go for further support
- Special Guardianship Order policy has been revised and led to targeted support for special guardians as it was recognised they did not receive enough financial and emotional support. Dedicated post developed during the pandemic to support special guardians and links special guardians and connected carers for a seamless approach. Funding secured to recruit workers to give direct support.
- Identified gap in provision for perpetrators of domestic abuse which was raised as a risk to SCSP and is now a key area of focus for action
- Draft cultural competence framework devised as a result of learning from reviews to be launched in 2022 -23

### What did we learn from 'Practice Reviews during 21/22

#### Case 1: Learning from National & Local CSPR's:

Published January 2022 – Injury to a non-mobile baby also a sample case used to inform the National Review (*'The Myths about invisible men'*) published by the National Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in September 21:

##### What happened?

RS was a 4-month-old baby living with their parents and older sibling when they received potentially life changing non-accidental injuries.

The learning from this local review together with the findings from the National Review was shared at a local event 'Safeguarding Today' in February 2022, this introduced and launched the 'ICON' eLearning module (see meaning of ICON in image below) a programme that will help to keep crying babies safe by providing coping strategies, including:

##### What is Abusive Head Trauma (AHT) Also known as Shaken Baby Syndrome:

- Catastrophic injuries:
  - Brain injuries
  - Bleeding
  - behind the eyes
  - Bony injuries

Our goal for ICON is to communicate to parents/carers that they can expect crying, prepare for it and cope with it

Our aim is to reduce the incidence of AHT triggered by crying

##### Facts about AHT;

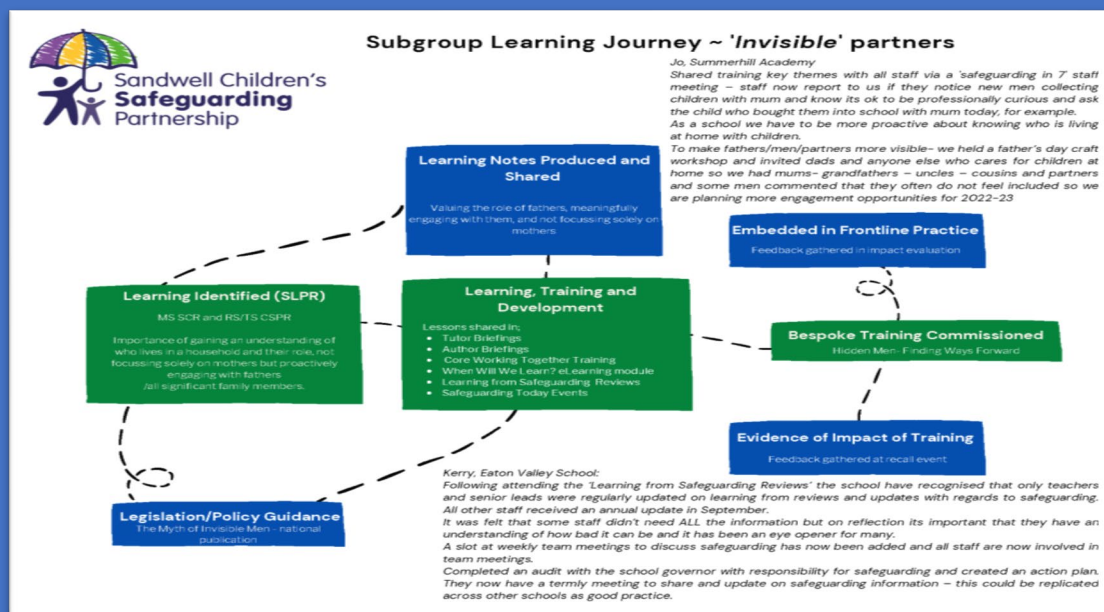
- AHT is the most common cause of death or long-term disability in babies
- 24 out of 100, 000 hospital admissions for babies are due to abusive head trauma
- 200 children are killed or hurt annually in the UK, these figures underestimate the real numbers involved



#### Case 2: Using feedback to shape, influence & improve how we work together

Direct feedback from parents of children who have died/been seriously injured has shaped reviews and learning: Father of WS told the reviewer: "... *"I was invisible to professionals who would direct all conversations towards mother, it was only when I insisted or initiated conversations that I was spoken to"*. He went on to say ... *"and this would always lead to some confrontations as it was thought I should either not be there or be silent and 'spoken' at when I am there*. The quote from father that really resonated with partners at all level and positions in Sandwell was his final statement; ***"Men don't matter, we're not there, looked past, not important"***. When it comes to children, and when we say something, it is suggested 'aggressive', it's like we can't win."

## Case 3: Showcasing our Learning Journey



### What difference did we make and where to next?

We made an impact by;  
Providing a diverse safeguarding workforce with information so that they can reflect on their practice, identify changes and help to prevent the need for future reviews. Acting on the wishes of family members affected by the incidents that resulted in a report by demonstrating our willingness to learn and prevent future incidents. Changing our processes so that we can get learning out of the Partnership more quickly to relevant agencies so that we can improve the pace of change.

### Independent Scrutineer's reflection on the SLPR rapid review process:

*Rapid Reviews are conducted well by the 4 statutory partners and there is careful consideration of the need for a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR). In one case, a decision was made to complete a CSPR and in another, partners appropriately determined that there would be no additional new learning obtained from conducting a CSPR.*

*Areas for consideration by statutory partners by statutory partners in relation to Rapid Reviews are:*

- *To what extent are the actions to address the learning set out in the Rapid Review?*
- *How is the implementation and impact of learning from Rapid Reviews reported to Executive leads and also how is it monitored?*

## **The Quality of Practice, Performance & Assurance (QPPA) Subgroup**

The core functions of the Quality of Practice, Performance and Assurance Subgroup (QPPA) is to assess the quality of the work we undertake to safeguard children and promote their welfare, by analysing and understanding the impact of both single and multi-agency work in terms of its effectiveness in helping to keep children safe.

The QPPA's remit include robust and constructive challenge to partners and escalate areas of risk where there are concerns about performance or the outcomes being achieved for children and families are evident through the quality assurance process, and data intelligence. This results in consistently reviewing the safeguarding systems, structures, processes and practice in place to improve outcomes and the experiences of children across Sandwell for its effectiveness.

The group is responsible for providing assurance that local practice is compliant with west midlands policies and procedures, legislation and guidance; and undertakes multi-agency audits, quality assures single agency audits and assesses the quality of agencies arrangements in relation to the Section 11 duties arising from the Children Act 2004, with similar monitoring processes across the providers of education in relation to Section 175 of Education Act 2002, and uses the SCSP quality assurance framework to monitor, challenge and hold partners to 'account' for the effectiveness of their intra safeguarding arrangements.

Ultimately, QPPA is accountable to provide evidenced based assurance to the SCSP of regular and effective monitoring of the multi-agency front-line practices. We identify where improvements are required in the services that children and families receive, including the effectiveness of early help.

To facilitate this core function, the Chair of this subgroup is also the 'Independent Scrutineer' for the SCSP and meets regularly with the Independent Chair, Safeguarding Partners, other subgroups Chairs and Business Manager of the SCSP.

### **Key achievements from 2021-22 work activities:**

- Through our MACFA: Identified gap in resources to support practice, and devised and published Core Groups: Best Practice Guidance on Effectiveness of Core Groups;
- From a DHR recommendation, produced a Local Multi Agency 'Was Not Brought Guidance';
- Created a Multi-Agency Case File Audit (MACFA) Guidance for Professionals to encourage inclusion a clear understanding of the expectations required of all partners;
- Explored varying approaches to undertake MACFA functions based on Signs of Safety and root cause analysis to clearly chart the journey of the child and show the impact of consistent relationship-based work on improving outcomes for children.
- Undertaken a full Section 11 – with 100% response rate from agencies returns.
- Sought assurance from education directorate in response to S175/157 self-assessments functions, identifying the need for 'Safeguarding Governors' to be aware/inclusive in the safeguarding requirements and responsibilities for schools.
- Developed outcomes based Multi -Agency Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).
- At the primary stages in establishing a multi-agency Performance dataset, which will be invaluable in improving the line of sight, scope of information available and provide us with the data and intelligence to assess the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families, including early help



- Highlighted need for practice improvement and resources in response to children who have experienced child sexual abuse, and the lack of availability of counselling – signpost to the 'Thrive' Board for action
- Joining the scrutineering activities to that of QPPA, has seen the need for the creation of a Perinatal Mental Health Support Pathway to be developed, this is underway via task and finish group;
- The recent introduction of a rotating agenda item of 'Single Agency Assurance Reports tabled at each meeting – in response to recommendations from former SCR's LCSPR's and MACFA work.

QPPA have within its portfolio, a duty to undertaken MACFA's each year. Each MACFA event considers the effectiveness of multi-agency practice across a random sample of cases (minimum 4) against a chosen theme. MACFA's themes during 21/22 are:

### Theme 1: Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health of Children and Young People

#### What did we want to know?

Access to and the effectiveness of services to support/address children's emotional & mental health concerns - The impact of COVID on children's wellbeing and the ease of access and range of support.

#### Strengths Identified:

- Evidence of improved outcomes in case sample;
- Schools provide high level of practical and emotional support for families;
- Range of support offered by specialist and voluntary services;
- Value of advocacy;
- Positive impact of COGs (Early Help).

#### Areas for Improvements:

- Clarity on EWMH pathway including services and thresholds;
- Level of support offered when crisis happens outside of standard hours;
- Access and availability of counselling and management of waiting lists;
- Review of school nursing pathway to minimise delay and ensure holistic approach;
- Robustness of response to children who are victims of sexual abuse.

#### Recommendations:

**1)** The SCSP to be assured that the mental health offer (including pathways, services, roles and responsibilities) at all tiers of the system is: clear and effectively promoted so that practitioners understand the eligibility criteria for accessing services, including to CAMHS, and can proactively identify the appropriate level of support for children and young people. This assurance should include monitoring of increased emotional health and wellbeing needs of children and young people which may have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2)** The SCSP to be assured that there is a range of commissioned services for children who have experienced trauma, including availability and responsiveness of counselling for children who have experienced sexual abuse, and that interventions are responsive according to the needs of the child.

#### Actions taken/progress made:

- Update the Multi Agency Threshold document to include guidance on emotional mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people,
- Health partners have completed an audit of children attending acute settings in mental health crisis services with findings presented to QPPA for assurance,
- Shared findings with 'Thrive Board' to undertake a further review and provide assurance of the EMWH offer including availability of counselling to victims of child sexual abuse

## Theme 2: Understanding & meeting the needs of Children with Disabilities (CWD)

What did we want to know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The effectiveness of support to CWD, the impact of intervention in: meeting their needs,</li> <li>capturing the voice, culture and identity as part of assessments, plans and direct work;</li> <li>How well do practitioners understand/consider the holistic needs of CWD</li> <li>Impact of COVID on timely access to support</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths Identified:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Passion/knowledge of staff;</li> <li>Positive impact of special schools and Early Years support;</li> <li>Case samples received face to face appointments during lockdown</li> <li>Community Nursing Team well sighted on needs and issues</li> </ul>	<b>Areas for Improvements:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of support and impact when panel decisions delayed;</li> <li>Trauma of families being passed between services and there is little or no change in circumstances</li> <li>Need for holistic whole family approach</li> <li>Clearer multi agency working</li> <li>Inappropriate unsafe housing</li> <li>Availability of childcare/transport</li> <li>Need for basic multi agency training on disabilities</li> </ul>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SCSP statutory partners to present the findings of this audit to the Children and Families Commissioning Partnership to highlight: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the lack of assurance in relation to the implementation of key learning arising from a local Child Safeguarding Practice Review completed in 2021;</li> <li>The experience of children with disabilities and their families in receiving the right support, at the right time and according to their specific needs</li> </ol> </li> <li>The Chair of the Children and Families Commissioning Partnership to formally respond to SCSP in respect of timeliness and availability of support services to children with disabilities;</li> <li>SCSP to gain assurance that a 'Think Family' approach to include considering the impact of the disability on wider family members and their individual needs (including fathers and siblings) is applied when working with children/families with disabilities.</li> </ol> <b>Actions taken/progress made?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The independent scrutineer presented the findings to the Children and Families Commissioning Partnership to highlight the lack of assurance following the audit, a recent LCSPR and the experience of CWD and their families in receiving/not receiving support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further work planned to understand barriers to engaging/assessing CWD and planned future updates to L&amp;D catalogue to reflect feedback</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

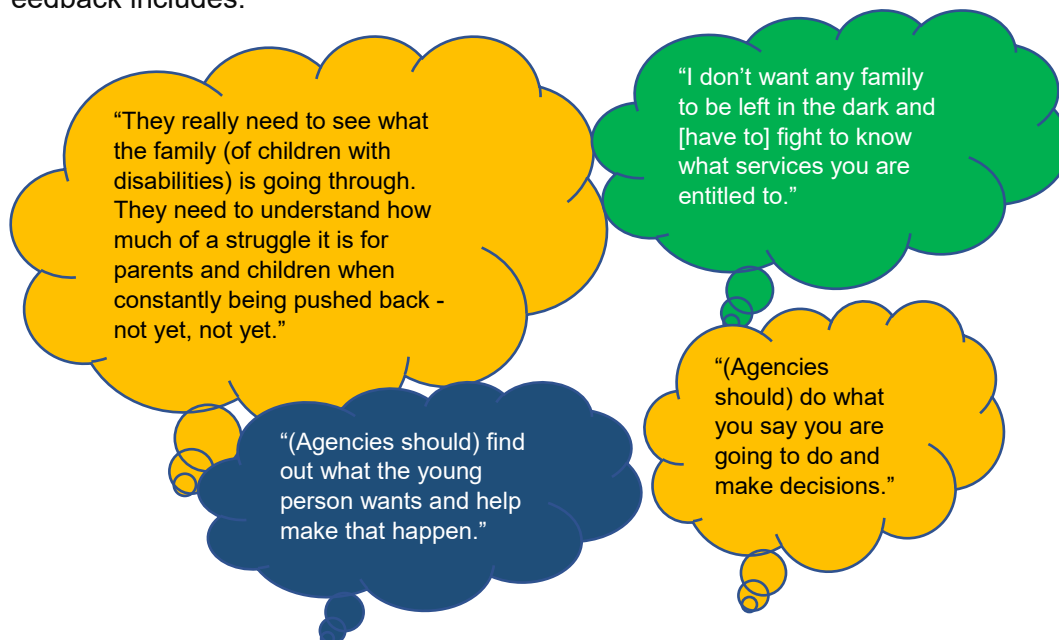
### Theme 3: Working with Children Missing from Education

What did we want to know	How multi agency statutory plans address educational issues and how well this is monitored and progressed
<b>STRENGTHS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of trusting working relationships</li> <li>• Tenacity and commitment of Horizons work</li> <li>• Evidence of appropriate use of National Referral Mechanism</li> </ul>	<b>AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of issues that begin to emerge in primary school on secondary attendance</li> <li>• Timely identification of a child needing EHCP</li> <li>• Oversight of EHCPs by private providers</li> <li>• Limited evidence of school nursing involvement if no physical health need</li> <li>• Need more vocational provision for CMFE</li> <li>• Improve the interface between CIN and MACE</li> </ul>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Safeguarding Partners to increase awareness across the workforce of the factors identified as impacting on children not attending education to aid practitioners to work collaboratively to meet the educational needs of this cohort of children;</li> <li>2) Safeguarding Partners to increase awareness amongst education settings of the significance of issues that emerge in primary school on secondary school attendance and explore best practice in transitions between primary and secondary education settings to ensure children receive consistent support;</li> <li>3) Safeguarding Partners to formally present the thematic learning in relation to the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Pathway to the THRIVE Board with a request for assurance about the issues raised;</li> <li>4) Safeguarding Partners to evaluate the work to date to improve the quality of multi-agency assessments and plans, including EHCPs linked to wider learning from Rapid Reviews and CSPRs, to identify what else is needed to support these critical areas of safeguarding practice;</li> <li>5) Sandwell Children's Trust to provide assurance that the timeframes for completion of CIN assessments and frequency of CIN reviews is routinely monitored;</li> <li>6) The SCSP to be assured that CIN and MACE processes work effectively together.</li> </ol> <b>Actions Taken/progress made:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and update L&amp;D offer to ensure practitioners know how to complete good quality assessments and planned training to increase awareness of early intervention when issues emerge in primary schools (also linked to learning from SC CSPR)</li> <li>• Single agency audit (SCT) on quality of assessments and plans</li> <li>• Golden thread of safeguarding assessments included in updated Multi Agency Threshold Document and aligned to all training courses</li> </ul>	



MACFA's reach during this period extended and invited children, parents and families to comment on their experiences of interventions, and the impact of services received. This added contribution enabled partners to really understand the child and family's lived experiences and what has worked/needs to change.

Feedback includes:



#### **QPPA work for 22/23 will include:**

- Development of full partnership dataset enabling challenge, transparency and accountability via a clear line of sight on data from all partners. This will enable identification of good practice, gaps and where to target focussed multi agency activities.
- Implementation plan to launch aligned to QAF and enable partners to own and have accountability for all quality assurance activities
- Strengthen impact evidence across all multi agency activities to show the difference made as a result of actions taken, i.e. as a result of MACFA recommendations. Ensuring recommendations/actions are outcome focussed
- Seamless approach to inclusion of child/family in MACFAs and continuing inclusion of voice of practitioners
- Build on links between subgroup areas and other key reports via an annual programme of presentations e.g. CEB workplan/data, LADO annual report etc
- Surveys (e.g.) to ensure practitioners are receiving/know where to access/are using published items e.g. Core Group guidance.

## The Learning & Development – L&D Subgroup

Supporting the SCSP in maintaining a skilled workforce to carry out the functions:

The L&D subgroup is responsible for the development and delivery of multi-agency safeguarding training across the children's workforce. The Subgroup undertakes a regular training needs analysis and evaluations of local training. It links with adult safeguarding training in relation to mental health, Prevent, Contextual Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse. The subgroup leads on Conferences and has a pool of practitioners who deliver most of our local safeguarding training.

The L&D group is Chaired by the MASH Education Officer, who also coordinates the safeguarding training for Education, provides support and oversees the operation of the DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead) forums for our schools.

The Learning and Development Subgroup is responsible for the identification, planning, delivery and evaluation of training to ensure all those coming into contact/working with children in Sandwell are competent and up to date with current legislation and procedures to help them safeguard and promote the welfare of children effectively.

The subgroup ensures that policies and procedures are in place relating to training people who work with children and young people or in services affecting the safety and welfare of children. The group oversees the provision and evaluation of safeguarding training across the children's workforce. It also ensures that our learning and development activity takes account of developments in national and regional policy and practice, as well as relevant research, and implement recommendations from national, regional and local reviews, including safeguarding practice reviews, MACFA's, DHR's and SAR's where there are relevance to learning and development.

### What we were most proud of in 21/22:

The SCSP Annual Conference in June 21 'Is Neglect being Neglected?'. Using evidence-intelligence to raise awareness on why neglect is a priority for SCSP, to provide relationship/strength-based approaches/strategies to tackle neglect together.

The conference was captured in visual minutes, as illustrated in the image below:



## Other achievements from L&D during 2021-22

- ✓ Produced Training Guidance & Expectation document;
- ✓ Reinstated and extended the SCSP Training Pool;
- ✓ Facilitated two 'Safeguarding Children Today Events';
- ✓ Overseen and support the GCP2 Training;
- ✓ Extended our suite of eLearning programmes;
- ✓ Published, and monitored the reach of the SCSP Multi-Agency Training Programme;
- ✓ Enabled 111 courses to 2365 delegates on the following topics
- ✓ Early stages of implementing an training evaluation process



The SCSP introduced its Multi-agency Was Not Brought Guidance devised in response to learning from a Domestic Homicide Review and linked to the 'Tackling Neglect work; Rethinking 'Did Not Attend' video has been embedded in training,



## Post Training Feedback from Delegates:

### Spotlight on the impact of 'Core Working Together' training

**CWT 18/01/2022:** *The training has completely refreshed/recharged my knowledge around Safeguarding and provided me with more emphasis on improving good practice going forward.*

*The training has enabled me to reflect on my practice.*

*One of the benefits, after I and my colleagues attended the training is that the college is reviewing cases a great deal more and on a wider basis, we have introduced weekly supervision by the DSL of our active cases and this is ensuring that safeguarding staff (including myself) are more confident in our judgements and we have a wider forum in which safeguarding staff can pose questions relating to cases within a safe environment.*

*I have personally found that my own recording of cases has improved greatly and has become more child centred in my approach. For example, I have recorded more on the impact on the child in my records including noting on what they want to happen next. This good practice is wider than myself and includes members of my team.*

*I do believe that I have become more confident to have faith in my own professional curiosity and this is something that I have expanded to all staff in my organisation by (I hope) giving them the confidence to follow their gut instinct. This is certainly something that I communicate in the staff training that I deliver.*

### Were there any barriers to implementing learning?

*None however being new to Sandwell more of an overview of the system and meetings, process etc would have been helpful. Greater understanding of how things are done in Sandwell. No introduction becoming a new DSL. Was not aware of the EH training available. New to Sandwell programme/training would have been useful.*

The above in respect of safeguarding induction for new staff was also identified as an area for improvement from the s11 activities undertaken by QPPA. L&D are currently undertaking work to address this issue and similar concerns raised that new staff need induction/introduction to training prior to attending the wider training offer as detailed in the SCSP Training Guidance and Expectations document.

### Next steps for the L&D

- A key aim for the year ahead in order to support the networking function of training we have agreed to return to in-person events as soon as it is possible to do so, in a way that is equitable to all colleagues (i.e. does not exclude those who may still need to practice caution with social contact).
- We will produce our training plan setting out how we will deliver both multi-agency training and learning and development opportunities. This will include a range of methods, including commissioning subject experts, in-house/partner subject experts and experts by experience. Practice development will use methods, such as action learning sets, competency framework, a range of resources and practice tools and we will seek to speed up the dissemination of learning from reviews, including the full range of practice reviews, MACFA's and regional, and national publications using accessible methods, such as 7 minute briefings, animations, commissioned creative pieces, videos and TED talks (using visual platforms).
- We will undertake a Training needs analysis
- Maintain our training pool
- Monitor the impact of training on practice with a focus on 'Early Help', working with men and significant others, and implement our cultural competence framework.



## The SCSP Priorities:

In addition to its 'core function, as covered to this point of the annual report, the SCSP and partner agencies have prioritised improvement in areas and on issues of greatest risk and concern to safeguarding as well as responding to emerging needs.

The themes below are identified as the strategic priority areas, each has formed the basis of some the partnership activities over the year.

The priority areas to follow are:

**Priority 1: Contextual Safeguarding – via the Child Exploitation Board (CEB)**

**Priority 2: Tackling Neglect - via Tackling Neglect Subgroup**

**Priority 3: Early Help – via Early Help Partnership.**

## The Child Exploitation Board – CEB

Traditionally, the focus of children's safeguarding has been on risks to children which exist within a family context such as abuse or neglect. However, Contextual Safeguarding recognises that children as they grow in age spend increasing amounts of time outside the family and in other 'contexts. These are often outside of the influence of families but as we now know and must consider, can/does have an effect on them.

These are referred to as 'Extra Familial Risks' and can include youth violence, gangs, involvement in crime and county lines/trafficking and child sexual exploitation. Children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation in peer groups, the wider community, or online as well as by adults.

The overall purpose of the CEB is to have the strategic oversight of what is done by partners in Sandwell, individually and collectively, to safeguard and protect children at risk from all forms of exploitation.

CEB is Chaired by the Head of Service from SCT having a remit for Sandwell Horizons (the local CE team and has a multi-agency membership consisting of key representatives from partner agencies across Sandwell.

**The fundamental work of this 'Board' is to develop Contextual Safeguarding Practice according to the following set of 6 principles:**

1. **Recognise and Respond:** understand recognise and respond to young people's experiences of harm beyond their families (extra familial risk)
2. **Assess and Intervene:** Develop effective tools to identify, assess and intervene when extra familial risk and harm are suspected
3. **Expand our Vision:** expand our vision of the child protection framework and referral pathways to incorporate extra familial risks & harm
4. **Work in Partnership:** engaging with individuals and all agencies to reduce harm and increase welfare
5. **Capable and Competent Systems:** Ensure our systems are capable and competent to work contextually, looking for opportunities to develop shared resources and systems, particularly in the Early Help and Preventative areas as relevant
6. **Monitor Outcomes:** Monitor outcomes of success in relation to contextual, as well as individual change.

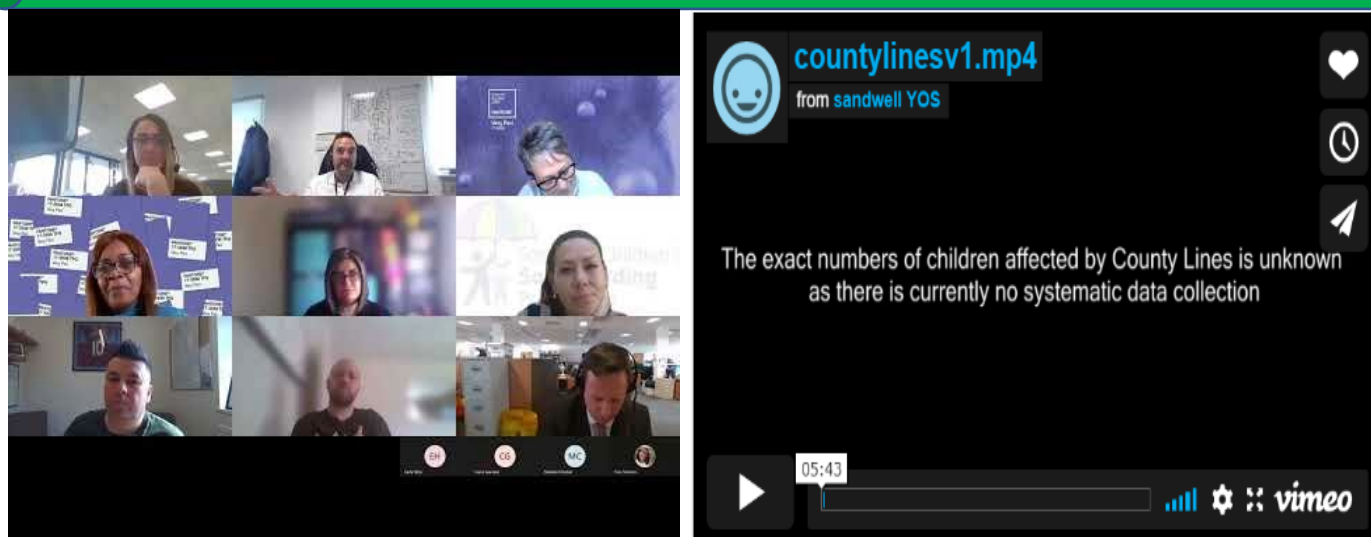
The planned work and activities of CEB for 21/22 was redefined mid-term in response to a serious safeguarding incident where the outcome of a Rapid Review determined that the line of enquiry to be explored by a Local Review aligns to existing/planned activities being undertaken to tackle criminal exploitation via this CEB group, and much of the work for the period, was by way of a focused systems-based analysis used as the format for producing a local 'thematic CSPR exploring:

- The disproportionality of cohorts involved in exploitation: this in particular needs to address how black children are seen and perceived by the youth justice and the safeguarding systems, particularly in the context of exploitation and gang activity
- A spotlight review of the cohort of children known to or at risk of exploitation linked to school exclusions, CME, and/or have an EHCP/SEND which will lead to raising awareness of more targeted interventions and strengthen processes.

The outcome and finding from the completed report present a number of recommendations for individual agencies, the SCSP and nationally for policy makers. The report once published will be available in the public domain, however in the meantime, actions are being progressed at a local level.

### Some of the work, activities and discussion items at the CEB during 21/22

1. A summary of the activities undertaken during 'County lines week,
2. A podcast was undertaken with a young person who shared his experience of County Lines which is a powerful example of using the child voice and has been shared at both the CEB and the YJPB and is being used for training material across the partnership



**Some of the activities, developments and progression by agencies across Sandwell as members of the CEB to enhance the wider understanding and response to 'Contextual Safeguarding'**

The Youth Forum has become integral to the YJS in ensuring the young people have a voice in service delivery. It has become more established over the last year and the young people have had an active role in designing the new YJS website. They have been consulted in relation to content, layout and pictures used in the website have given invaluable feedback from a youth perspective. We have even had our new YJS logo created by a young person, with them working alongside an established artist to create a design that encapsulated the YJS ethos of being a creative service. The young person who designed the logo when asked why she chose a butterfly stated that "It's because when we come into the YJS we are all like caterpillars but by the time we leave, because of all the support we get, we have become butterflies".



**Changes in terminology used;**

Sandwell Youth Justice Board Partnership is committed to the Child First principles. This was evidenced by the Boards decisions in August 2021 to change the name of the service from Sandwell Youth Offending Service to Sandwell Youth Justice Service in order to move away from the stigmatising language of "offending". This has led to the development of our "Getting to Know You" pack which is a 6-session relationship building tool which gets practitioners to understand the youth's lived experience through their eyes by completing creative sessions around identity, relationships, life story and, future dreams and aspirations.

No longer using '*hard to reach*' young people because someone is reaching them to exploit them so that's about us and our practice not the young person being hard to reach'

Think 'Victim' not 'Perpetrator'

Here's what *Louise (Chair of CEB)* have to say about the use of language



Plans for 22- 23 will see CEB maintaining abreast of our current work, following through the lifespan of the existing workplan ending in March 23

In addition, will continue to monitor the actions and recommendations from the thematic LSCPR overseen by this 'Board'

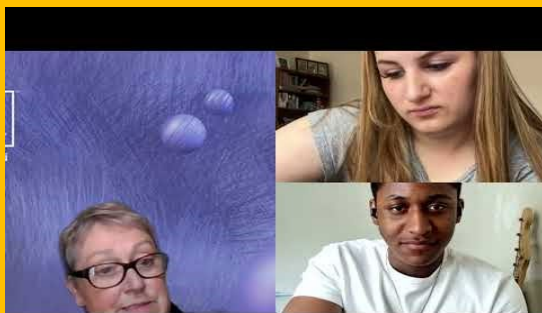
## Tackling Neglect Group

The most recent subgroup to be established in 2021, the 'Tackling Neglect subgroup' has a mandate to take forward the Neglect agenda for the SCSP, this includes:

- Implementing and reviewing the Neglect Strategy and guidance
- Improving awareness of neglect, the harm it causes and how to report and prevent neglect
- Improve the early recognition and identification of neglect across the Partnership
- Identify a clear pathway for support and intervention at the earliest stage
- Establish a collective understanding and threshold for intervention where neglect is a concern (i.e. referral pathways).
- Review and promote the agreed GCP2 Neglect toolkit and ensuring that supporting training is available
- Reviewing the reach and effectiveness of neglect training, including GCP2 across the partnership,
- Identify key learning and messages to be incorporated into the SCSP multi agency training programme.
- Analyse the impact and effectiveness of interventions to address neglect

To demonstrate the activities of this recently formed group, we will start by hearing from the Tackling Neglect Subgroup Chair – Jayne Clarke (Safeguarding Children Lead Sandwell & West Birmingham NHS Trust) as she talks a little about the position of Neglect in Sandwell.

Jayne, Tackling Neglect Subgroup Chair: *"We recognise that we are obviously not identifying it [neglect] soon enough so children are being left in that situation much longer than they should be. So, one of the key things we are doing is rolling out some training around the Graded Care Profile which is a well-researched assessment tool. We're making sure all our practitioners out there; that can be across your social workers, your housing people\* so they've got an awareness of neglect, so that if you've got someone going into a home, it might be a housing person they can see things and think, 'well actually this doesn't look quite right', so that they've got the knowledge and awareness and can take it through to their safeguarding leads. We're doing a lot of work around that. We're starting to, this is very early days, look at some data – we're going back as early as when women are pregnant because if mum isn't accessing antenatal care, then you could say that that is neglect because that child's growing needs in the womb are not being met. Around the [Tackling Neglect] strategy we are raising awareness around the whole area. we have in Sandwell an unborn baby network which is particularly for that reason because what we have recognised **is the best way forward is that early help and early intervention**, not waiting until things are going wrong it's about offering every opportunity to families that they can with support actually put things right"*





## Feedback from Tackling Neglect Training introduced during 2021

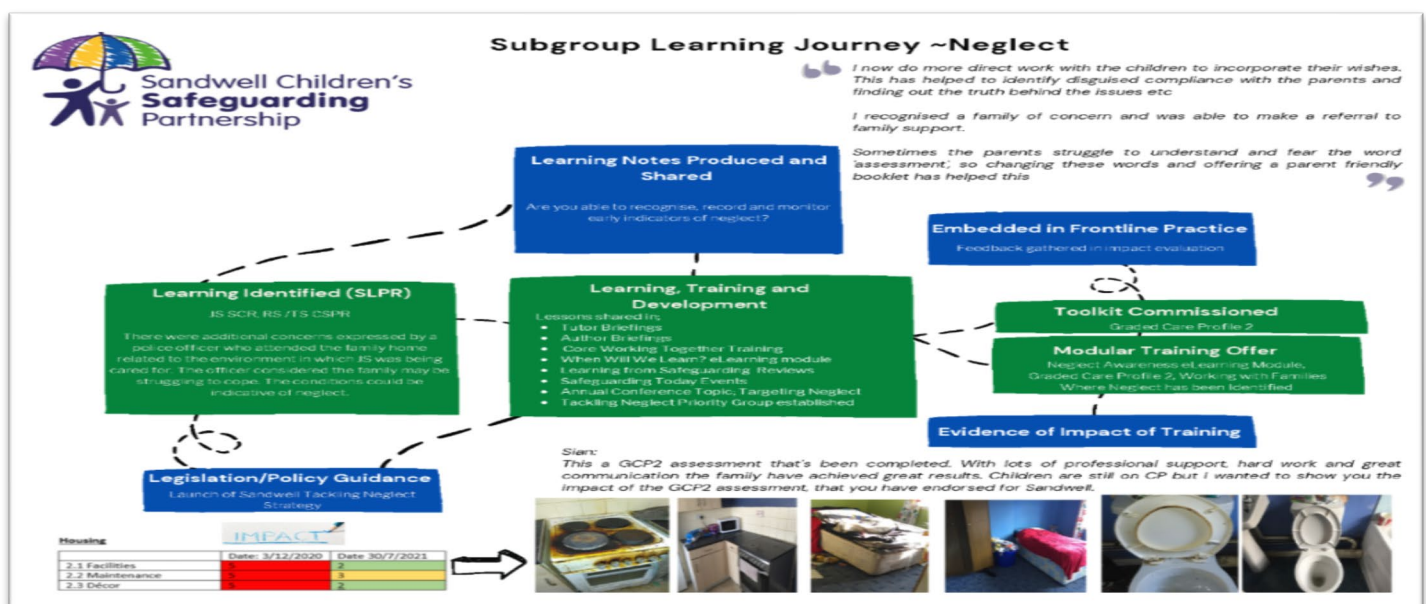
\*350 neighbourhoods' employees have been trained in neglect and exploitation awareness.

Feedback received from delivering the neglect sessions was regarding staff already seeing properties where neglect could be a possibility but thought that was what Sandwell was like, following the training they now realised that they needed to report it in.

Staff also raised concerns with regards to reporting neglect and the tenants being aware that they had reported it, they were concerned for their own personal safety due the fact they have to return to properties to conduct work, we had this concern on numerous sessions. One gas engineer gave an example of a property he reported in where the female of the property was always in bed no matter what time of day he went round, the man living at the property had lots of large knives around – machetes & swords, drugs were lying on the coffee table, children were at the property. He had to return to the property after reporting it and the man at the property stated he was aware that the gas engineer had reported him, he stated this had now put him off reporting anything in again. (Trainers advised they would meet with the managers to discuss his concerns, they looked into it and it wasn't a children's social worker it was a housing officer who told the tenant, so the Business Manager over this area has gone back over confidentiality process with them and we have also told them to utilise the repair as a reason for going to do a visit, instead of stating a safeguarding concern had been raised, to go and complete a visit and explain to the tenant they are there to review the repair job, obviously then once they have access they can see for themselves)

Things that have changed since we delivered the sessions and now an audit of 9000 properties is taking place in regard to 'decent homes' review, our Housing Officers now have to complete more home visits, so we are expecting to have greater visibility of our properties, hence why we have such a large training programme coming up for everyone.

4672 individual referrals, 510 identified a form of neglect – 11%



## The Tackling Neglect subgroup closely monitors the impact of GCP2 – (the NSPCC founded assessment tool) used for effective engagement with children and families where ‘neglect’ is of primary concern

Some of the comments received from practitioners having used GCP2 includes:

- It gives a visual display of scores and progress being made which helps the family and professionals.
- It opens up conversations about how to make improvements.
- The tool was useful in breaking down areas of parenting makes it much clearer and not so overwhelming –
- easier to explain and talk about.
- It helped us to identify where support was most needed.
- It helped us to identify other areas of positive parenting and areas of concern
- Using the tool and parent friendly leaflet reduced potential confusion and improved engagement between the family and worker.
- It has helped parents understand how what they are doing has an impact on the children.
- It helps them see what they are doing well and where they need additional support.
- It helps us work together towards an end goal/ outcome.

The Tackling Neglect group review cases for evidence of the impact of GCP2 with families in Sandwell during 20/21

Click on the links below each image to hear more about the outcome of work with 6 families

**Case 1: Referred from school because of missed medical appointments, deteriorating home conditions, and poor school attendance.**

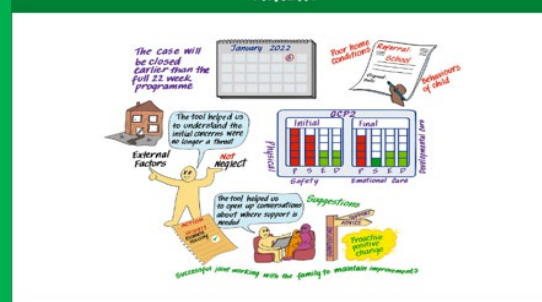
### 1. REDUCED PARENTAL CONFUSION AND IMPROVED ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN THE FAMILY AND THE WORKER



1 <https://youtu.be/3vESVVTsJkk>

**Case 2: The referral came from school due to concerns of poor home conditions and behaviours of a child.**

### 2. IDENTIFIED THAT INITIAL CONCERNS ARE NO LONGER A THREAT



2 <https://youtu.be/kUjh14Yh6QA>

**Case 3: Referral came from the health visitor with regards to the child's development and housing conditions.**

**Case 4: Referral from School, family already on an Early help plan, concerns about condition of accommodation, history of antisocial behaviour with the children's father is affecting new accommodation**

The illustration depicts the 'Child Perspective' through various elements:

- Calendar:** Shows January 2022.
- Document:** Titled 'Child Participation' with a note about 'Annual Report'.
- Housing:** A small brown house with a chimney.
- Character:** A yellow figure pointing towards the charts.
- Charts:** Two bar charts labeled BCP1 and BCP3. BCP1 shows monthly data (Jan-Mar) with red bars. BCP3 shows quarterly data (Q1-Q4) with green bars.
- Text:** 'Focus on nurturing support across the Child Perspective' is written at the bottom.

4. HELPED TO HIGHLIGHT CONCERNS AND FOR PARENT TO SEE THAT SHE WAS STRUGGLING



**5. CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT WAS VERY BENEFICIAL AS THEIR FEELINGS AND WISHES WERE CLEARLY HIGHLIGHTED**



## 6. USING THE TOOL WE WERE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THAT NEGLECT WAS NOT PRESENT



33|

## Early Help

The provision for early help for children and families in Sandwell fits within the remit of work undertaken by the Children & Families Strategic Partnership. The arrangements sees a subgroup in place made up of multi-agency representatives from across multiple statutory community and voluntary sector services, who together are known as 'the Early Help Partnership' (EHP)

The group is Chaired and driven by large under the auspice of the affiliated Sandwell Community & Voluntary Organisation (SCVO)) representing in excess of 500 local groups.

The relationship between the EHP and the SCSP have its basis from legislation, in that; through the EHP Local organisations and agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. Local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs. With the SCSP having a statutory duty support the EHP via the production and publication of a threshold document, setting out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, accessible and easily understood, including the process for the early help assessment and the type and level of early help services to be provided.


The SCSP are also mandated to:

- assess the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families, including early help and have access to data and intelligence for this purpose.
- Evaluate and evidence the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training, on outcomes for children and families from early help to looked-after children and care leavers.

In June 2021, shortly after the arrival of a new 'Chief Officer' for Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT), the question of Early Help was posed to the SCSP: seeking to establish if the SCSP are aware of the position of EH in Sandwell. Where are we up to, and what do we need to do?

Data presented justified the challenge showing:

1. High demands for EH support.




HIGH LEVEL YE	Mar19	Mar20	Mar21	Grand Total
Grand Total	3357	3194	3149	9700

2. A depleting resource bank of allocated 'lead professionals' registered on the EH recording system.



Year	Total
Jan-16	1645
Jan-17	1521
Jan-18	922
Jan-19	1295
Jan-20	1161
Jan-21	1060

3. The numbers of staff attending EH training decreasing year on year.



2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
48	34	46	12	140

**The SCSP recognised the position of the EH approach was unsustainable** and agreed changes required to ensure that children only enter our statutory system when it's appropriate to do so.

The commitment made by the SCSP included to:

1. increase oversight and scrutiny of early help and its effectiveness,
2. ensure the EHP review the definition of early help, what this means in terms of a joined-up approach to early help across the borough,
3. review its levels of need and what this means for families accessing services at the earliest possible point
4. oversees a multi-agency review of our front door, with a specific focus on: integrated systems & processes; evidence-based referrals; and how best to work with and advise our partners where there are potential safeguarding concerns
5. to access independent insight, scrutiny and challenge in undertaking the above review.

### What did we achieve by the end of March 2022

- Multi-agency Early Help workshops attendance from schools, the voluntary sector, police, youth service, education service, school nursing, health visiting, Sandwell Children' Trust, public health, community safety, CAMHS, GP's
- Multi-agency Task and Finish Group to create /shape action plan
- Consult with stakeholder groups
- Consult with Children & Young people
- Devised Early Help Strategy and action plan.
- Consulted with SCSP in refreshing the 'Windscreen Model'.
- Completed the review of 'Front-Door' and associated action plan

Launch the 2022 – 2024 Early Help Strategy in March 2022,

*"Early Help in Sandwell means 'providing support as soon as the problem emerges, from the early years in a child's life and right through to their teenage years (or up to 25 years in the case of young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities). Early Help is known to be effective in preventing issues and problems becoming acute, chronic and costly to the child, young person, the family and the wider community. Reducing the need for intrusive and more expensive statutory services is also key to help sustainably manage resources across all partner agencies. Early Help requires a whole-family approach, involving both children's and adult services. Early Help is therefore a collaborative approach, not a service."*





#### 4. Independent Scrutineer Activity & Reflection

**The report to this stage** captures a quantity of the activities undertaken by the SCSP and its subgroups during 21 -22. As reference in the introduction, the SCSP have within its structure, the role of an 'Independent Scrutineer. To ensure a line of sight across all our activities, the 'Safeguarding Partners agreed an annual programme of scrutiny for the period 2021-23; the programme is reviewed and revised in response to new/emerging issues identified at a local or national level.

*Below, the Independent Scrutineer, Liz Murphy talks about her role in Sandwell, and goes on to report on the activities undertaken as part of the annual programme of*



*scrutiny:*

*Review of ongoing support provided to children born during lockdown once the period of statutory social work involvement ended. This work was in response to a letter received from the children's minister and was complimented by a multi-agency audit that more closely analysed the quality and impact of the service provision to a sample of this cohort of children.*

*Review of multi-agency front door to include understanding and application of local thresholds document*

*Review of domestic abusing screening arrangements and the follow up response to children exposed to domestic abuse.*

*In relation to arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases, I have been invited to participate in the two rapid reviews that were completed during the reporting period. I have also had some oversight of completed Serious Case Reviews/ Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews if they are presented to the Sandwell Children Safeguarding Partnership and I am in attendance to present an item.*

*In addition, the Independent Scrutineer also chairs the Quality, Performance, Practice and Assurance (QPPA) subgroup and regular reports of the outcome of the activity undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding practice in the borough are made to the Chairs Consultation Forum and/or Sandwell Children Safeguarding Partnership*

*In terms of high-level feedback on findings from each review/evaluation, Independent Scrutiny activity has found:*

- *Committed and knowledgeable practitioners from across the Partnership in MASH and involved in Domestic Abuse triage arrangements. They work collaboratively because they recognise the value of multi-agency working.*
- *Consistent evidence that statutory thresholds are appropriately applied by Sandwell Children's Trust at the front door.*

- *A comprehensive domestic abuse needs assessment has been completed and identifies the need for a holistic family support model to be developed.*
- *There are 2 thematic areas for development arising from independent scrutineer activity:*
  - *The need to develop collective responsibility for the delivery of early help including for children and families who “step down” from statutory safeguarding intervention. This would mean early help becomes a shared endeavour/way of working as opposed to being seen as a “service” provided by Sandwell Children’s Trust COGs (now known as Strengthening Families).*
  - *Linked to the above, the need to develop a shared and consistent application of the threshold for statutory social work intervention amongst partners who make referrals to Sandwell Childrens Trust. The quality of referrals is also an area for development for partner agencies.*

The Independent reflects on the other activities undertaken by the SCSP and the wider work of the subgroups during 2021 - 22 and offers the following:

*Some of the challenges/barriers to either making progress in implementing and/or evidencing impact of actions taken to drive improvement include:*

- *Time period required between planning/implementation and evaluation phases to be able to measure impact of action taken*
- *For some activity, clarifying and /or strengthening governance arrangements*
- *Embedding an outcomes focused approach to performance management and quality assurance*
- *Maturity of the partnership arrangements/culture of partnership working*

*As outlined above, partners have put in train a series of actions to respond to the findings of Independent Scrutiny and they have also reviewed the governance arrangements during the period covered by the report.*

*Through the QPPA subgroup, the partnership has been developing an outcomes focused quality assurance framework. This took longer than anticipated and will now be implemented in 2022-23; the delay can be attributed in part to the need to clarify the types of information partners can provide to support an outcomes focused approach. The revised quality assurance framework is intended to support a shift away from “process” driven responses and is indicative of a partnership that recognises the complexity of its work.*

*Enabled by the Independent Chair, statutory partners are continuing to develop both the leadership and challenge they provide, and this will serve to further develop a culture of shared ownership and responsibility for delivering and evaluating the impact of safeguarding services to children and families in Sandwell.*

*One final reflection from the Independent Scrutineer is for statutory partners to consider is how system and practice learning from National Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews e.g. “Safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers” informs action taken at a local level either within individual organisations/sectors or at a partnership level.*

## 5. Snapshot across Single Agency Activities

This year's annual report of Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership predominately focuses on the activities covered by the SCSP over the period.

However, and as critical for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, there are lots of really good work happening all over Sandwell and provided by multiple organisations.

### Let's hear from a few:

#### YJS Prevention

The Prevention offer for Sandwell is encapsulated in the [Early Help Strategy](#).

Moving forward we want to be able to clearly articulate the prevention offer specifically in relation to youth justice as police colleagues in Sandwell have developed a sophisticated prevention offer that includes Early Help Police officers and School Liaison officers as well as an officer specifically dedicated to our Pupil Referral Units. The work undertaken by them ensures that young people have their identified needs met and will also seek to integrate them into positive activities in the community.

#### DECCA Evidence of impact

In mid/late December 2021 DECCA received a referral for a young person using heroin and crack cocaine. Working in partnership with Cranstoun, the adult equivalent to DECCA, we were able to access their prescribing service and get the YP on to a substitute medication prescribing regime before the Xmas break. This, and the 1:1 work we did, provided support for the YP immediately and started the process of change.

DECCA and Cranstoun have continued to work in partnership since then to meet the needs of the YP. The YP has been mainly drug free, a major achievement, and somewhat of an anomaly, for a class A drug user, with only one relapse, confirmed via a drug test, in the last 3 months. All other tests have been negative for class A drugs use so we can clearly evidence this fantastic achievement.

Building the relationship with the young person has been key to these successes. DECCA made the decision to allocate this case to the Treatment Coordinator, who has over two decades experience of working with clients such as this. His approach has ensured that the young person has been able to be honest and open about their issues, has been honest if they have struggled (including admitting when they did relapse), and that has allowed all parties to work together in collaboration, rather than pulling in different directions.

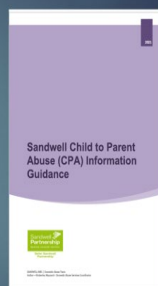
#### Impact for children and families:

- Hospital admission episodes for alcohol specific conditions – Under 18s, in Sandwell (18.3 per 100,000 population) is lower than the national average of 30.7 per 100,000 population.
- Hospital admission due to substance misuse – 15-24 year olds, in Sandwell (63.3 per 100,000 population) is lower than the national average of 84.7 per 100,000 population.
- 14, 515 young people within Universal Education.
- 1045 young people within Alternative Educational settings – 671 of those worked with 'on the street' in partnership with the Detached Youth Service (DYS).
- 100% of clients discharged from Specialist Treatment have met their care plan goals.
- 488 adults trained – general awareness.



## Some of the highlights captured from Partner across Sandwell 21 -22

In 2021, following the Recommendation from a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) Sandwell's Domestic Abuse Partnership Produces a first Midlands Child to Parent Abuse Information Guidance for Practitioners



### Education Undertaking duties to Safeguard and Promote Welfare

Section 175 of the Education Act (2002) requires that Local Education Authorities and the governing bodies of maintained schools and FE colleges have suitable arrangements in place to ensure they are discharging their duty to Safeguard and promote the welfare children and young people.

The MASH Education team have reviewed the self-assessment audits to reassure Sandwell Children Safeguarding Partnership that they are discharging their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The analysis report has focused on seven key themes:

- o Understanding of Threshold
- o Exploitation
- o Neglect
- o Training of staff
- o Curriculum
- o Early Help
- o Policies
- o Mental Health and wellbeing

Work in making improvements will continue in to 2022

### Listening to the voice of Father's & Progressing Learning from Serious Incidents

Actions completed by Health:

We have undertaken audit to review maternity cases to ensure all family/father's details and level of involvement are documented.

This is also an area of focus on the Under 1's Action plan monitored by BC ICB (Sandwell place)

We include all recommendations from CSPP review in our quarterly Newsletter and any updates recent findings, service developments shared via our Safeguarding Children Operation Group.

At the 'Safeguarding Today' event – Action for Children presented on their service developments to be inclusive of fathers and significant males. Their father's group now volunteer led.

From SCT - In January 2022 after a productive consultation process....

**Sandwell's Locality Model goes live**

The model establishes a number of **Assessment & Intervention Teams, plus Child Protection and Court Teams** in three localities, highlighted below along with the respective Heads of Service

Smethwick & Oldbury

West Bromwich & Wednesbury

Tipton & Rowley Regis

From West Midlands Police, Ian Green Chief Superintendent, Sandwell Neighbourhood Policing Unit told us what his teams are doing to keep young people safe in communities:

- "From a police point of view we are trying to protect everyone and trying to be fair, I think at times that can not come across, so if you look at some of the things we do around interacting with young people using some of our powers around stop and search, I think that at times it can be difficult to 'sell' why we're doing it to young people who are on the end of it. I have to say we are always trying to make everyone feel safe and protected, at times that can get misconstrued, if you look at the reason or us being in a lot of public spaces and searching young people its not because we are trying to annoy young people its unfortunately because we have seen people murdered on the streets we knives and stuff and that brings its own problems when we start to search people, we start to criminalise them, if they've got low level amounts of drugs on them. It can be a difficult position to be in policing to be in a space where we're trying to support people but when we do end up dealing with it its very black and white in the law, if we find someone with drugs we have to do something – what that something is getting better with early help."

From West Midlands Police, Detective Chief Inspector, Dez Lambert - Public Protection Unit – Black Country Child Abuse told us how police have been working with other agencies to keep children safe in the last year:

"One thing that we do that all agencies do is we share information as well, so when we have a concern for a child come to the attention of one of the agencies it will sometimes get referred thought to the MASH, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, I then have a team of people who work in West Bromwich that do research. So we will find out what we know about that young person, what we know about their family, what we might know about the person that might be causing them harm or a risk and we'll share that information with other agencies and they'll do the same as well and together we'll make a decision about who is going to own the safeguarding concern and what are we going to do about it, so that's something that all agencies do."

### SHAPE Engaging with children and young people all across Sandwell.



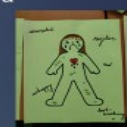
The SHAPE Programme is designed to listen to children and young people in Sandwell.

The SHAPE Programme organises events and opportunities throughout the year for children and young people to engage in positive activities. Within this, the SHAPE Youth Forum, which is the true voice of youth representatives throughout Sandwell, come together to:

- Be representatives of the voice of young people in Sandwell
- Plan, develop and organise the activities and events of the SHAPE Programme
- Support the Young Police Crime Commissioners in their role
- Support the UK Youth Parliament Members and Deputy members and attend British Youth Council conventions
- Be a group for council officers, members and officers from partner organisations to consult with
- Be a link between SHAPE and your school/college

Every session was a real success and was thoroughly enjoyed by all children and young people who took part.

Our Primary School sessions included a variety of activities for children to get involved in including: the crumpled paper activity, understanding how a person being bullied may feel, bullying debates and bullying scenarios.




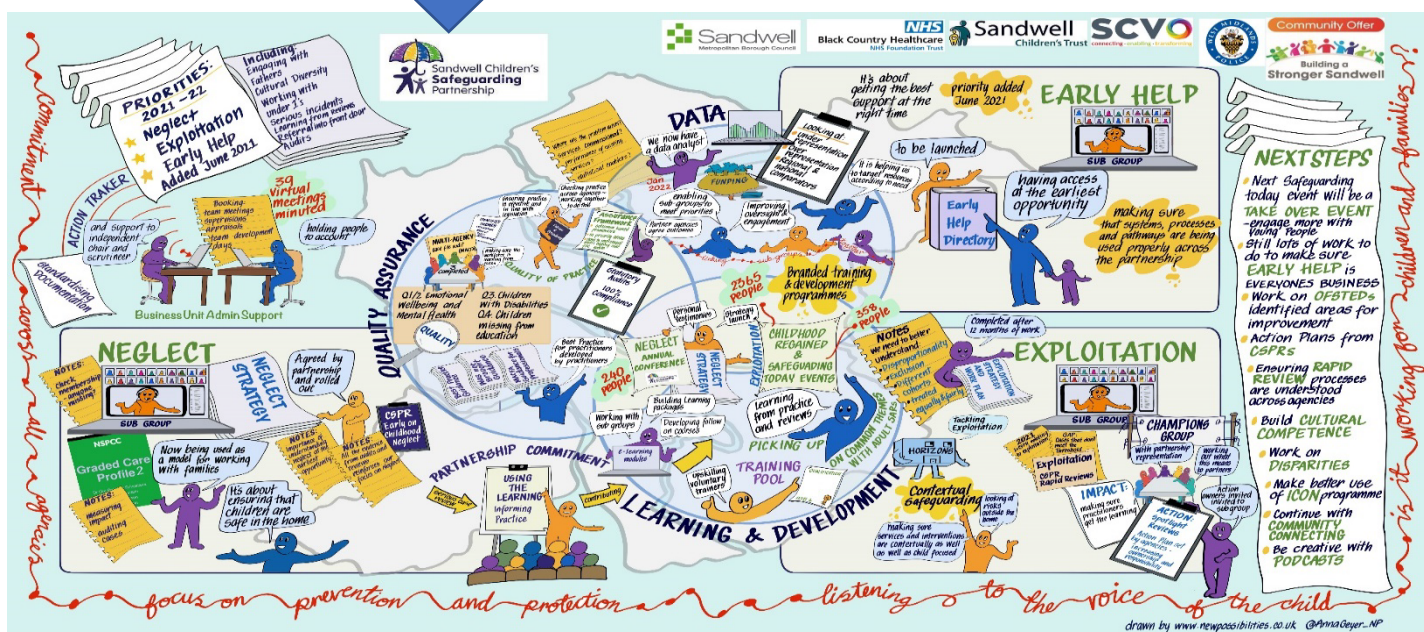
During Anti Bully week 2021: SHAPE, Youth Services and PC Treasure visited 9 primary and secondary schools, as well as Sandwell College as part of our annual anti-bullying roadshow.

We presented a workshop around this year's theme of #OneKindWord and looked at how kindness is shown to us, and how we show kindness to others.

If there are any young people who are interested in joining SHAPE Youth Forum, they can complete the online application form by clicking here!

## 6. SCSP Business Team

A final piece before moving to the conclusion, the SCSP have a dedicated business team that supports the operational key statutory functions whilst also driving forward and delivering on the priorities ensuring effective joined-up services for children and families who are involved in the safeguarding systems. Together the 21/22 business team enhanced the quality control, delivered direct partnership services, explored innovating partnership approaches and consistently reviewed to improve the processes and structures to ensure success in delivery. Inside the business unit is depicted 



## 7. Conclusion and Horizon Setting

Despite the considerable environmental challenges, the SCSP, driven by an Independent Chair, and the business unit, have remained committed and have delivered the functions outlined in the local MASA to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in Sandwell.

Over the last year, progressed has been made, but there are a number of areas that need to be progressed and developed further.

The report demonstrates work of the SCSP does not have a 'stop point' for much of the work, and the activities captured in this report remain in- progress, and forms part of the Partnerships commitment to consistently review, learn and improve. This is particularly so in respect of work arising from LCSPR's, MACFA's and in reviewing the MASA's and we know that the year ahead is also likely to further add to this as we await a due 'Ofsted Inspection' of our provision of children social care services.

Understanding the priority area for EH is required given that this work is driven via the Children & Families Strategic Board with a line of sight for assurance purposes to the SCSP. there is no doubt that the work and activities being undertaken by the tackling neglect subgroup and occurring being progressed by the EHP are inter related. The current position may need to be redefined so not to duplicate resources and find that by applying better joining up may prove advantage and pooled resources.



We know there is work required to do in strengthening our relationship with community, voluntary and faith sector services; with this the SCSP have agree to invest in a dedicated 'short-term' post to support us in making those direct links.

### **Our plans for 2022 – 2023 and beyond**

We have work to do following the 'thematic review' undertaken through CEB, issues of importance for us at a local level but equally also recognised as a priority for national government around disparity. Partners need to drive this forward over next 12 months.

A review of the 'front-door', partners response to 'risks', the links and accountability for 'early help' and ensuring children are getting the right support at the earliest point in response to their needs, is an area currently receiving heightened attention, and work underway to intensify the focus to improve the understanding and application of its thresholds, from early help, through to statutory social work and will be revising to improve its guidance and training to apply to all agencies and organisations.

The areas for attention as covered by the Independent scrutineer be address in the coming year.

### **SCSP Priorities and areas for improvement in 2022 - 2023**

- Focus on Front Door, Early Help and the responsibilities of all agencies
- Refreshing and strengthening the threshold guidance; continuum of help and support, including increasing the understanding and application of the threshold, gaining consent and information sharing and the role of the 'lead professional'
- Neglect
- Exploitation
- Domestic Abuse

### **Themed areas:**

- Under 1's and injuries in non-mobile babies, this includes activities to increase awareness of the role of Sandwell Unborn Baby Network (SUBN) in identifying concerns 'early' and applying appropriate preventative support,
- Creating a culturally competent workforce
- Increased engagement with voluntary, community and faith-based organisations
- Better engagement with fathers and significant others
- Emotional wellbeing of children and young people
- Responding to regional and national reviews following;
  - heightened national interest in serious safeguarding incidents
  - McAllister review
  - local pending Ofsted inspection

The final word from the SCSP Annual Report 21/22 comes from Chief Superintendent Ian Green as he response to a question posed by a young people, who ask: "What is your favourite thing about working in Sandwell" Here's what Ian said:



## **8. Glossary of terms:**

**AHT** – Abusive Head Trauma  
**BC CDOP** – Black Country Childs Death Overview Panel  
**CAMHS** – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service  
**CCG** – Clinical Commissioning Group  
**CEB** – Child Exploitation Board  
**CIN** – Child in Need  
**CME** – Child Missing Education  
**CMFE** – Children Missing From Education  
**CSPR** – Child Safeguarding Practice Review  
**CWD** – Children with Disabilities  
**DASP** – Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership  
**DCI** – Detective Chief Inspector  
**DECCA** – Drug Education, Counselling and Confidential Advice - Service for Young People  
**DHR** - Domestic Homicide Review  
**DSL** – Designated Safeguarding Lead  
**EH** – Early Help  
**EHCP** – Education Health Care Plan  
**EHP** – Early Help Partnership  
**EMHW** – Emotional Mental Health & Wellbeing  
**GCP2** – Graded Care Profile  
**GP** – General Practitioner  
**ICB** – Integrated Care Board  
**ICON** – Infant Crying is OK – Never shake the baby  
**JAR** – Joint Agency Response  
**JTAI** – Joint Target Area Inspection  
**KS** – Key Stage  
**L&D** – Learning and Development  
**LADO** – Local Authority Designated Officer  
**LCSPR** – Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review  
**MACE** – Multi Agency Child Exploitation  
**MACFA**- Multi Agency Case File Audit  
**MARF** – Multi Agency Referral Form  
**MASA** – Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements  
**MASH** – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub  
**NAI** – Non-Accidental Injury  
**NSPCC** – National Society Prevention Cruelty to Children  
**PEP**- Personal Education Plan  
**QAF**- Quality Assurance Framework  
**QPPA** – Quality of Practice, Performance and Assurance  
**SAR** – Service Access Request  
**SCR** – Serious Case Review  
**SCSP** – Sandwell Childrens Safeguarding Partnership  
**SCT** – Sandwell Childrens Trust  
**SCVO** - Sandwell Community & Voluntary Organisation  
**SEND** -Special Educational Needs and Disabilities  
**SHAPE** – Children in Sandwell want to be, **S**afe, **H**ealthy, to **A**chieve, and have **P**ositive **E**xperiences  
**SLPR** – Sandwell Learning from Practice Reviews  
**SUDIC** – Sudden Unexpected Death in infant /Child  
**TAF** – Team Around the Family  
**TED** – Tell, Explain, Describe  
**WMP** – West Midlands Police  
**YJS** – Youth Justice Service

## Report to Council

**31 January 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Council Tax Base 2023/2024
<b>Director:</b>	Simone Hines – Director of Finance
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Ian Dunn <a href="mailto:ian_dunn@sandwell.gov.uk">ian_dunn@sandwell.gov.uk</a> Carl Jones <a href="mailto:carl_jones@sandwell.gov.uk">carl_jones@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That Council approve the Council Tax Base for 2023/2024 be set at 76,764.73
- 1.2 That the the Section 151 Officer be authorised to adjust the Council Tax Base as required following approval of the 2023-2024 Council Tax Reduction Scheme by Council on 21 February 2023.


### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council Tax Base must be calculated in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012. It is used to determine the annual amount of collectable Council Tax.
- 2.2 The regulations set out the methodology to be used by authorities when calculating their Council Tax Base. They further dictate that the Council Tax Base should be set between 01 December and 31 January prior to the financial year to which it refers.



- 2.3 At its meeting on 18 January 2023, Cabinet considered the Council Tax Base for 2023/24 and recommended approval to Full Council.

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

	A strong and inclusive economy	Collection of Council Tax is important as it gives the council money to spend and invest locally
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## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Council Tax Base is an assessment by each billing authority of the number of chargeable dwellings, converted to Band D equivalents (the average band), allowing for discounts, exemptions, non-collection and new properties. This information is used when setting the Council's budget.
- 4.2 In order to calculate the Council Tax Base, it is necessary to take the actual number of properties in each Council Tax band on the valuation list and then make adjustments to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. In addition, assumptions need to be made for changes in the number of properties in each band between now and 31 March 2024 as a result of new builds and demolitions.
- 4.3 The adjusted numbers in each band are then converted to the equivalent number of Band D properties.
- 4.4 At the time of presenting this report, Sandwell's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme has yet to be formally approved. Details of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme are contained within the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme report to Council on 21 February 2023. It is not anticipated that any changes will be made to the scheme which may adjust the assumptions made in the Council Tax Base collection. The Council Tax Base for 2023/24 has been calculated as 76,764.73



4.5 The Council Tax Base must be reduced to reflect any anticipated losses on collection. In recent years this has meant a reduction of 1% as experience has shown that a 99% collection rate is ultimately achievable.

4.6 Due to the current cost of living crisis we are assuming that a 98.5% collection will ultimately be achieved. This reduces the Council Tax Base as follows:

<u>Collection Rate %</u>	<u>Tax Base</u>
98.5	76,764.73

4.7 The actual levels of Council Tax for 2023/2024 will be dependent upon final decisions yet to be taken on both Sandwell budgets and those of the precepting bodies, together with consideration of any surplus or deficit on the Collection Fund.

4.8 For 2022/23 the Council Tax Base was 74,858.45 based on a 98.5% collection rate. The Council Tax Base for 2023/24 has increased by nearly 2.5% and this is mainly due to the additional number of properties.

## 5 Alternative Options

5.1 Not applicable.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The calculation of Council Tax Base is based on the number of domestic properties in the valuation list in Sandwell. Statistical information indicates that the number of domestic properties in Sandwell is now starting to increase again after the pandemic.
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<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The Council Tax Base must be calculated in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 and be determined between 01 December and 31 January of the financial year preceding the financial year to which it will apply.
<b>Risk:</b>	If Council Tax is not collected the Council's income could be affected and services provided by the Council may need to be cut.
<b>Equality:</b>	No impact
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	No impact
<b>Social Value</b>	No impact
<b>Climate Change:</b>	No impact

## 7. Appendices

None

## 8. Background Papers

None





## Report to Council

**31 January 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2022/23
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Finance Simone Hines
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Simone Hines Director of Finance simone_hines@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That Council approve the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2022/23 and revised Minimum Revenue Provision Policy.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 To comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management.
- 2.2 To ensure the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision Policy is prudent.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 18 January 2023, Cabinet considered the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and recommended approval to Full Council.



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

	The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People
	People Live Well and Age Well
	Strong Resilient Communities
	Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods
	A Strong and Inclusive Economy
	A Connected and Accessible Sandwell

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Council is required to consider the performance of the Treasury Management function in order to comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management (revised 2021).
- 4.2 Appendix A to the report sets out the Treasury Management performance for the first half of 2022/23 as required by the Code. It outlines
- An economic update for the first six months of 2022/23;
  - A review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy;
  - The Council's capital expenditure, as set out in the Capital Strategy, and prudential indicators;
  - A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2022/23;
  - A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2022/23;
  - A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits for 2022/23.



- 4.3 Alongside the mid-year review, officers have also reviewed the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy. The Council is required to pay a revenue charge annually, known as MRP, for the repayment of borrowing used to finance the Capital Programme. The Council must have an MRP Policy in place which sets out a methodology for how the charge will be calculated to ensure that the Council's debt repayment position remains prudent. There are a number of different approaches that can be taken when setting an MRP Policy and the Council's Treasury Advisors, Link has recently supported the Council in reviewing the most appropriate methodology to be used. The outcome of this review has then been through an internal due diligence process resulting in a recommended change to the Council's current policy. The revised approach is also compliant with CIPFA guidance.
- 4.4 The proposed changes are set out at Appendix B to this report. It is recommended that option D be adopted and applied from the 2022/23 financial year. This will generate savings for 25 years, including an in-year saving of £4.5m and a 2023/24 saving of £4.2m (£3m of which has already been included in the draft budget assumptions). A revised MRP Policy Statement is attached for approval at Appendix C.
- 4.4 The code requires the Treasury Management Strategy, MRP Policy and mid-year review to be approved by full Council.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 If the Mid-Year Review report is not approved then the Council would not be compliant with the CIPFA Code.
- 5.2 Cabinet could choose not to adopt the revised MRP Policy, but this will forgo savings of over £4m in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and savings for the next 25 years.



## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The Mid-Year Review report sets out the Council's Treasury performance for the first half of 2022/23. The MRP Policy amendment generates a saving of £4.5m in 2022/23.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The Council will not be compliant with the CIPFA Code of Practice if a Mid-Year Review report is not presented and approved. The Council is also required to have a prudent MRP Policy in place.
<b>Risk:</b>	The Council's Treasury Management Strategy and MRP Policy ensures security of the Council's investments and borrowings and a prudent repayment of debt.
<b>Equality:</b>	N/A
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	N/A
<b>Social Value:</b>	N/A
<b>Climate Change:</b>	N/A

## 7. Appendices

Appendix A – Mid-Year Review

Appendix B – MRP policy amendment

Appendix C – Updated MRP Policy Statement

## 8. Background Papers

None



## **Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Prudential Indicators Mid-Year Monitoring Report 2022/23**

### **1 Background**

#### **1.1 Treasury Management**

The Council operates a balanced budget, which broadly means cash raised during the year will meet its cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operations ensure this cash flow is adequately planned, with surplus monies being invested in low risk counterparties, providing adequate liquidity initially before considering optimising investment return.

The second main function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Council's capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning to ensure the Council can meet its capital spending operations. This management of longer term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer term cash flow surpluses and on occasion, any debt previously drawn, may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

Accordingly, treasury management is defined as:

*“The management of local authority’s borrowing, investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.”*

### **2. Introduction**

This report has been written in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management (revised 2017).

The primary requirements of the Code are as follows:

- Creation and maintenance of a Treasury Management Policy Statement which sets out the policies and objectives of the Council's treasury management activities.
- Creation and maintenance of Treasury Management Practices which set out the way the Council will seek to achieve those policies and objectives.
- Receipt by the full council of an annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement – including the Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum

Revenue Provision Policy – for the year ahead, a Mid-Year Review Report and an Annual Report (stewardship report) covering activities during the previous year.

- Delegation by the Council of responsibilities for implementing and monitoring treasury management policies and practices and for the execution and administration of treasury management decisions.
- Delegation by the Council of the role of scrutiny of treasury management strategy and policies to a specified named body. For this Council the delegated body is the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

This mid-year report has been prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management and covers the following:

- An economic update for the first half of the 2022/23 financial year;
- A review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy;
- The Council's capital expenditure, as set out in the Capital Strategy, and prudential indicators;
- A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2022/23;
- A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2022/23;
- A review of any debt rescheduling undertaken during 2022/23;
- A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits for 2022/23.

### **3. Economics and Interest Rates**

#### **3.1 Full Economic Update**

- The second quarter of 2022/23 saw:
  - GDP revised upwards in Q1 2022/23 to +0.2% q/q from -0.1%, which means the UK economy has avoided recession for the time being;
  - Signs of economic activity losing momentum as production fell due to rising energy prices;
  - CPI inflation ease to 9.9% y/y in August, having been 9.0% in April, but domestic price pressures showing little sign of abating in the near-term;
  - The unemployment rate fall to a 48-year low of 3.6% due to a large shortfall in labour supply;
  - Bank Rate rise by 100bps over the quarter, taking Bank Rate to 2.25% with further rises to come;
  - Gilt yields surge and sterling fall following the "fiscal event" of the new Prime Minister and Chancellor on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

- The UK economy grew by 0.2% q/q in Q1 2022/23, though revisions to historic data left it below pre-pandemic levels.
- There are signs of higher energy prices creating more persistent downward effects in economic activity. Both industrial production (-0.3% m/m) and construction output (-0.8% m/m) fell in July 2022 for a second month in a row. Although some of this was probably due to the heat wave at the time, manufacturing output fell in some of the most energy intensive sectors (e.g., chemicals), pointing to signs of higher energy prices weighing on production. With the drag on real activity from high inflation having grown in recent months, GDP is at risk of contracting through the autumn and winter months.
- The fall in the composite PMI from 49.6 in August to a 20-month low preliminary reading of 48.4 in September points to a fall in GDP of around 0.2% q/q in Q3 and consumer confidence is at a record low. Retail sales volumes fell by 1.6% m/m in August, which was the ninth fall in 10 months. That left sales volumes in August just 0.5% above their pre-Covid level and 3.3% below their level at the start of the year. There are also signs that households are spending their excess savings in response to high prices. Indeed, cash in households' bank accounts rose by £3.2bn in August, which was below the £3.9bn rise in July and much smaller than the 2019 average monthly rate of £4.6bn.
- The labour market remained exceptionally tight. Data for July and August provided further evidence that the weaker economy is leading to a cooling in labour demand. Labour Force Survey (LFS) employment rose by 40,000 in the three months to July (the smallest rise since February). But a renewed rise in inactivity of 154,000 over the same period meant that the unemployment rate fell from 3.8% in June to a new 48-year low of 3.6%. The single-month data showed that inactivity rose by 354,000 in July itself and there are now 904,000 more inactive people aged 16+ compared to before the pandemic in February 2020. The number of vacancies has started to level off from recent record highs but there have been few signs of a slowing in the upward momentum on wage growth. Indeed, in July, the 3my/y rate of average earnings growth rose from 5.2% in June to 5.5%.
- CPI inflation eased from 10.1% in July to 9.9% in August, though inflation has not peaked yet. The easing in August was mainly due to a decline in fuel prices reducing fuel inflation from 43.7% to 32.1%. And with the oil price now just below \$90pb, we would expect to see fuel prices fall further in the coming months.
- However, utility price inflation is expected to add 0.7% to CPI inflation in October when the Ofgem unit price cap increases to, typically, £2,500 per household (prior to any benefit payments). But, as the government has frozen utility prices at that level for two years, energy price inflation will fall sharply after October and have a big downward influence on CPI inflation.



- Nonetheless, the rise in services CPI inflation from 5.7% y/y in July to a 30-year high of 5.9% y/y in August suggests that domestic price pressures are showing little sign of abating. A lot of that is being driven by the tight labour market and strong wage growth. CPI inflation is expected to peak close to 10.4% in November and, with the supply of workers set to remain unusually low, the tight labour market will keep underlying inflationary pressures strong until early next year.
- During H1 2022, there has been a change of both Prime Minister and Chancellor. The new team (Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng) have made a step change in government policy. The government's huge fiscal loosening from its proposed significant tax cuts will add to existing domestic inflationary pressures and will potentially leave a legacy of higher interest rates and public debt. Whilst the government's utility price freeze, which could cost up to £150bn (5.7% of GDP) over 2 years, will reduce peak inflation from 14.5% in January next year to 10.4% in November this year, the long list of tax measures announced at the "fiscal event" adds up to a loosening in fiscal policy relative to the previous government's plans of £44.8bn (1.8% of GDP) by 2026/27. These included the reversal of April's national insurance tax on 6<sup>th</sup> November, the cut in the basic rate of income tax from 20p to 19p in April 2023, the cancellation of next April's corporation tax rise, the cut to stamp duty and the removal of the 45p tax rate, although the 45p tax rate cut announcement has already been reversed.
- Fears that the government has no fiscal anchor on the back of these announcements has meant that the pound has weakened again, adding further upward pressure to interest rates. Whilst the pound fell to a record low of \$1.035 on the Monday following the government's "fiscal event", it has since recovered to around \$1.12. That is due to hopes that the Bank of England will deliver a very big rise in interest rates at the policy meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> November and the government will lay out a credible medium-term plan in the near term. This was originally expected as part of the fiscal statement on 23<sup>rd</sup> November but has subsequently been moved forward to an expected release date in October. Nevertheless, with concerns over a global recession growing, there are downside risks to the pound.
- The MPC has now increased interest rates seven times in as many meetings in 2022 and has raised rates to their highest level since the Global Financial Crisis. Even so, coming after the Fed and ECB raised rates by 75 basis points (bps) in their most recent meetings, the Bank of England's latest 50 basis points hike looks relatively dovish. However, the UK's status as a large importer of commodities, which have jumped in price, means that households in the UK are now facing a much larger squeeze on their real incomes.
- Since the fiscal event on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, we now expect the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to increase interest rates further and faster, from 2.25% currently to a peak of 5.00% in February 2023. The combination of the



government's fiscal loosening, the tight labour market and sticky inflation expectations means we expect the MPC to raise interest rates by 100bps at the policy meetings in November (to 3.25%) and 75 basis points in December (to 4%) followed by further 50 basis point hikes in February and March (to 5.00%). Market expectations for what the MPC will do are volatile. If Bank Rate climbs to these levels the housing market looks very vulnerable, which is one reason why the peak in our forecast is lower than the peak of 5.50% - 5.75% priced into the financial markets at present.

- Throughout 2022/23, gilt yields have been on an upward trend. They were initially caught up in the global surge in bond yields triggered by the surprisingly strong rise in CPI inflation in the US in May. The rises in two-year gilt yields (to a peak of 2.37% on 21<sup>st</sup> June) and 10-year yields (to a peak of 2.62%) took them to their highest level since 2008 and 2014 respectively. However, the upward trend was exceptionally sharply at the end of September as investors demanded a higher risk premium and expected faster and higher interest rate rises to offset the government's extraordinary fiscal stimulus plans. The 30-year gilt yield rose from 3.60% to 5.10% following the "fiscal event", which threatened financial stability by forcing pension funds to sell assets into a falling market to meet cash collateral requirements. In response, the Bank did two things. First, it postponed its plans to start selling some of its quantitative easing (QE) gilt holdings until 31<sup>st</sup> October. Second, it committed to buy up to £65bn of long-term gilts to "restore orderly market conditions" until 14<sup>th</sup> October. In other words, the Bank is restarting QE, although for financial stability reasons rather than monetary policy reasons.
- Since the Bank's announcement on 28<sup>th</sup> September, the 30-year gilt yield has fallen back from 5.10% to 3.83%. The 2-year gilt yield dropped from 4.70% to 4.30% and the 10-year yield fell back from 4.55% to 4.09%.
- There is a possibility that the Bank continues with QE at the long-end beyond 14<sup>th</sup> October or it decides to delay quantitative tightening beyond 31<sup>st</sup> October, even as it raises interest rates. So far at least, investors seem to have taken the Bank at its word that this is not a change in the direction of monetary policy nor a step towards monetary financing of the government's deficit. But instead, that it is a temporary intervention with financial stability in mind.
- After a shaky start to the year, the S&P 500 and FTSE 100 climbed in the first half of Q2 2022/23 before falling to their lowest levels since November 2020 and July 2021 respectively. The S&P 500 is 7.2% below its level at the start of the quarter, whilst the FTSE 100 is 5.2% below it as the fall in the pound has boosted the value of overseas earnings in the index. The decline has, in part, been driven by the rise in global real yields and the resulting downward pressure on equity valuations as well as concerns over economic growth leading to a deterioration in investor risk appetite.

### 3.2 Interest Rate Movements and Expectations

The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012.

The latest forecast on 27<sup>th</sup> September sets out a view that both short and long-dated interest rates will be elevated for some little while, as the Bank of England seeks to squeeze inflation out of the economy, whilst the government is providing a package of fiscal loosening to try and protect households and businesses from the ravages of ultra-high wholesale gas and electricity prices.

The increase in PWLB rates reflects a broad sell-off in sovereign bonds internationally but more so the disaffection investors have with the position of the UK public finances after September's "fiscal event". To that end, the MPC has tightened short-term interest rates with a view to trying to slow the economy sufficiently to keep the secondary effects of inflation – as measured by wage rises – under control, but its job is that much harder now.

Our PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps, calculated as gilts plus 80bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012.

Link Group Interest Rate View 27.09.22												
	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25
BANK RATE	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.75	3.25	3.00	2.75	2.75	2.50
3 month ave earnings	4.50	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.80	3.30	3.00	2.80	2.80	2.50
6 month ave earnings	4.70	5.20	5.10	5.00	4.60	4.10	3.90	3.40	3.10	3.00	2.90	2.60
12 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	5.20	5.00	4.70	4.20	4.00	3.50	3.20	3.10	3.00	2.70
5 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.20	3.90	3.70	3.50	3.40	3.30	3.20	3.20
10 yr PWLB	4.90	4.70	4.60	4.30	4.10	3.80	3.60	3.50	3.40	3.30	3.20	3.20
25 yr PWLB	5.10	4.90	4.80	4.50	4.30	4.10	3.90	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50	3.40
50 yr PWLB	4.80	4.60	4.50	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.60	3.40	3.30	3.30	3.20	3.10

### 4. Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Update

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2022/23 was approved by this Council on 1 March 2022.

The underlying TMSS approved previously requires revision in the light of economic and operational movements during the year. The proposed changes and supporting detail for the changes are set out below:

	2022/23	
	Original Estimate £'m	Revised Prudential Indicator £'m
Authorised Limit	858.992	844.533
Operational Boundary	613.842	591.513
Capital Financing Requirement	857.674	843.689

## 5. The Council's Capital Position (Prudential Indicators)

This part of the report is structured to update:

- The Council's capital expenditure plans;
- How these plans are being financed;
- The impact of the changes in the capital expenditure plans on the prudential indicators and the underlying need to borrow; and
- Compliance with the limits in place for borrowing activity

### 5.1. Prudential Indicator for Capital Expenditure

This table shows the projected outturn for capital expenditure based on projections at period 6, along with the expected financing arrangements against the original indicators set at the time the capital programme was agreed in March 2022.

	2022/23	
	Original Estimate £'m	Projected Outturn £'m
<b>Capital Expenditure</b>		
General Fund	48.839	97.248
HRA	69.511	70.378
<b>Total</b>	<b>118.350</b>	<b>167.626</b>
<b>Resourced by:</b>		
Capital Receipts	8.496	19.769
Capital Grants & Contributions	22.036	64.477
Revenue	19.415	26.311
<b>Capital Expenditure Financed from Borrowing</b>	<b>68.403</b>	<b>57.069</b>

There has been an overall increase in the projected level of expenditure since the original estimate. This is due to re-profiling of expenditure from 2021/22 and additional approvals (e.g. Towns Fund).

The borrowing need underlines the indebtedness of the Council by way of the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), although this will be reduced in part by

revenue charges for the repayment of debt known as the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). This direct borrowing need may also be supplemented by maturing debt and other treasury requirements.

## 5.2. Changes to the Prudential Indicators for the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), External Debt and the Operational Boundary

The table shows the CFR, which is the underlying external need to incur borrowing for a capital purpose. It also shows the expected debt position over the period, which is termed as the Operational Boundary.

	2022/23					
	Original Estimate			Projected Outturn		
	HRA	General Fund	Total	HRA	General Fund	Total
	£'m	£'m	£'m	£'m	£'m	£'m
<b>Opening Capital Financing Requirement</b>	<b>497.324</b>	<b>317.837</b>	<b>815.161</b>	<b>487.431</b>	<b>325.177</b>	<b>812.608</b>
add: Capital Expenditure funded from Borrowing	54.270	14.133	68.403	49.195	7.874	57.069
less: MRP	-10.000	-10.810	-20.810	-10.000	-10.842	-20.842
add: Movement on Other Long Term Liabilities	-1.356	-3.724	-5.080	-1.356	-3.790	-5.146
<b>Closing Capital Financing Requirement</b>	<b>540.238</b>	<b>317.436</b>	<b>857.674</b>	<b>525.270</b>	<b>318.419</b>	<b>843.689</b>
<b>External Debt / Operational Boundary</b>						
Borrowing			555.124			523.115
Other Long Term Liabilities*			58.718			68.398
<b>Total Debt at 31 March (Operational Boundary)</b>			<b>613.842</b>			<b>591.513</b>

\* - Represents the estimated finance lease creditors liability as at 31 March 2022 in relation to 'on balance sheet' PFI schemes and the assets included within the Serco waste contract which have been included on the balance sheet in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards.

## 5.3. Limits to Borrowing Activity

The first key control over the treasury activity is a prudential indicator to ensure that over the medium term, net borrowing (borrowings less investments) will only be for a capital purpose. Gross external borrowing should not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2022/23 and the next two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years. The Council has approved a policy for borrowing in advance of need which will be adhered to if this proves prudent.

	<b>2022/23</b>	
	<b>Original Estimate £'m</b>	<b>Projected Outturn £'m</b>
Gross Borrowing	555.124	523.115
add: Other Long Term Liabilities*	58.718	68.398
<b>Total Debt</b>	<b>613.842</b>	<b>591.513</b>
<b>CFR (Year end position)</b>	<b>857.674</b>	<b>843.689</b>

\* Includes on balance sheet PFI schemes and finance leases etc.

The Section 151 Officer can report that there are no difficulties envisaged for the current or future years in complying with this prudential indicator.

A further prudential indicator controls the overall level of borrowing. This is the Authorised Limit which represents the limit beyond which borrowing is prohibited and needs to be set and revised by Members. It reflects the level of borrowing which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term but is not sustainable in the longer term. It is the expected maximum borrowing need with some headroom for unexpected movements. This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

	<b>2022/23</b>	
	<b>Original Estimate £'m</b>	<b>Projected Outturn £'m</b>
Borrowing	555.124	523.115
add: Other Long Term Liabilities*	58.718	68.398
<b>Total Operational Boundary</b>	<b>613.842</b>	<b>591.513</b>
<b>Total Authorised Limit</b>	<b>858.992</b>	<b>844.533</b>

\* Includes on balance sheet PFI schemes and finance leases etc.

## 6. Borrowing / Debt Activity during 2022/23

This table shows the Council's actual external debt and anticipated need against the underlying capital borrowing need (the CFR), highlighting any under or over borrowing.

	2022/23	
	Original Estimate £'m	Projected Outturn £'m
External Debt as at 1 April	555.124	523.115
Expected need to 31 March	0.000	0.000
Other Long Term Liabilities*	58.718	68.398
<b>Estimated Debt as at 31 March</b>	<b>613.842</b>	<b>591.513</b>
<b>Capital Financing Requirement</b>	<b>857.674</b>	<b>843.689</b>
(-)Under / (+)Borrowed	-243.832	-252.176
Investment as at 31 March	-25.000	-25.000
<b>Net Debt Position as at 31 March</b>	<b>588.842</b>	<b>566.513</b>

\* - Includes on balance sheet PFI schemes and finance leases etc.

Due to the overall financial position, no new long term external borrowing was undertaken. The capital programme is being kept under regular review due to the effects of inflationary pressures, shortages of materials and labour. Our borrowing strategy will, therefore, also be regularly reviewed and then revised, if necessary, in order to achieve optimum value and risk exposure in the long-term.

PWLB maturity certainty rates year to date to 30 September 2022 Gilt yields and PWLB rates were on a rising trend between 1st April and 30th September. The 50-year PWLB target certainty rate for new long-term borrowing started 2022/23 at 2.20% before increasing to 4.80% in September. (Please note, however, that we see PWLB rates trending downwards through 2023 and 2024.)

The revised budget position for debt charges is shown in the table below:

	2022/23	
	Original Estimate £'m	Projected Outturn £'m
Debt Charges	48.440	48.128

The reduction in debt charges is due to a reduction in internal borrowing costs within the HRA.

## 6.1. Debt Rescheduling

Debt rescheduling opportunities have been very limited in the current economic climate and following the various increases in the margins added to gilt yields which have impacted PWLB new borrowing rates since October 2010, no debt rescheduling has therefore been undertaken to date, in the current financial year. However, now that the whole of the yield curve has shifted higher there may be better opportunities in the future, although only prudent and affordable debt rescheduling will be considered.

## 7. Investment Strategy 2022/23 – 2026/27

### Key Objectives

The approved Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2022/23, includes the Council's Annual Investment Strategy. In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, it sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:

- Security of capital
- Liquidity
- Yield

The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with the Council's risk appetite. In the current economic climate it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term to cover cash flow needs, but also to seek out value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, using the Link suggested creditworthiness approach, including a minimum sovereign credit rating and Credit Default Swap (CDS) overlay information.

### Current Investment Position

The Council held £125.487m of investments at 30 September 2022 with the structure of the portfolio being detailed below and in line with IFRS9. This table also highlights the 'historic risk of default' on these investments. As at 30 September 2022 the Council is reporting a risk of default percentage of 0.000%:

Borrower	Principal (£)	Interest Rate	Start Date	Maturity Date	Lowest LT / Fund Rating	Historic Risk of Default
The Royal Bank of Scotland Plc (RFB)	636,620	0.10%		Call	A	0.000%
MMF Aberdeen Standard Investments	14,700,000	1.54%		MMF	AAAm	
MMF Aviva	10,000,000	1.75%		MMF	AAAm	
MMF BlackRock	10,000,000	1.66%		MMF	AAAm	
MMF BNP Paribas	20,000,000	2.22%		MMF	AAAm	
MMF CCLA	10,000,000	1.67%		MMF	AAAm	
MMF Federated Investors (UK)	20,000,000	1.88%		MMF	AAAm	
MMF Fidelity	19,900,000	1.74%		MMF	AAAm	
MMF Invesco	20,000,000	1.83%		MMF	AAAm	
* 6 Towns Credit Union	250,000	1.49%	13/11/2017	14/11/2022	Not Rated	
<b>Total Investments</b>	<b>£125,486,820</b>	<b>1.81%</b>				<b>0.000%</b>



The section 151 Officer confirms that the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were not breached during the 6 months of 2022/23.

The revised budget position for investment income is shown in the table below; it shows the estimated interest earned based on average temporary deposits of £57.153m (placed between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022), the estimated interest accrued by non-general fund deposits and HRA estimated internal borrowing interest for 2022/23:

	2022/23	
	Original Estimate £'m	Projected Outturn £'m
Interest on Temporary Deposits	0.450	1.148
Interest Payable on Non GF Deposits	-0.675	-0.086
Interest on HRA Internal Borrowing	4.464	3.937
<b>Interest Receivable</b>	<b>4.239</b>	<b>4.999</b>

### Risk Benchmarking

A regulatory development is the consideration and approval of security and liquidity benchmarks. Yield benchmarks are currently widely used to assess investment performance. Discrete security and liquidity benchmarks are new requirements to Member reporting, although the application of these is more subjective in nature.

The current position against the originally approved benchmarks is reported below;

% Benchmarks	O/N	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	12 Month
Benchmark Return (SONIA)	1.22%	1.39%	1.70%	2.12%	2.63%

### Liquidity

In respect of this area, the Council set liquidity facilities / benchmarks to maintain:

- Bank overdraft - £2m
- Liquid short-term deposits of at least £21m available within a week's notice.

The Section 151 Officer can report that liquidity arrangements have been adequate during the year to date.

### Yield

Local measures of yield benchmarks are:

- Investments – Internal returns to be above the O/N SONIA rate

The Director of Resources can report that the return to date has averaged 1.061%, against an average O/N SONIA at 30 September 2022 of 1.22%.

## **8. Other**

### **8.1 Compliant with Treasury and Prudential Limits**

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits. During the half year ended 30 September 2022, the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2022/23. The Director of Finance reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators.

All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

### **8.2 Changes in Risk Appetite**

There is no change to the Council Risk appetite at present however, the authority is currently assessing the potential rewards and risks of investing in property funds.

### **8.3 Creditworthiness Policy Update**

The criteria for providing a pool of high-quality investment counterparties (both Specified and Non-specified investments) is:

- Banks 1 - good credit quality – the council will only use banks which:
  - i. are UK banks and/or
  - ii. are non-UK and domiciled in a country which has a minimum sovereign long-term rating of AA-

and have, as a minimum, the following Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poors credit ratings (where rated):

- i. Short term - F1, P-1, A-1 respectively
- ii. Long term – A-, A3 and A- respectively\*\*

*\*\*Update to bring in line with rating agency publications.*

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## **Proposed Changes to MRP Calculation Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The Councils Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is an indication of the amount of historic capital spend that has yet to be financed (i.e. funded through borrowing including PFI). Guidance issued by Central Government indicates that the Council must make a prudent charge to the General Fund through a calculation of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) as a replacement of the depreciation charge. This is effectively setting aside revenue resources to fund the payment of the principal element of Council debt.

The Guidance does not stipulate how the MRP is to be calculated, although it does provide four “suggested” options, but does not rule out or preclude a Council from choosing its own method.

### **Background**

The Council has historically charged MRP to the revenue accounts of the council on a straight-line basis. This method, whilst prudent and acceptable within the Guidelines, does not necessarily match the flow of economic benefits of the assets the borrowing was used to purchase. A more effective method is to move to an annuity basis which is being used by a large number of Councils.

CIPFA put forward the following reasoning for using an annuity method in ‘The Practitioner’s Guide to Capital Finance in Local Government (2019)’ which states:

*‘The annuity method provides a fairer charge than equal instalments as it takes account of the time value of money, whereby paying £100 in 10 years’ time is less of a burden than paying £100 now.*

*The schedule of charges produced by the annuity method thus results in a consistent charge over an asset’s life, considering the real value of the amounts when they fall due.*

*The annuity method would then be a prudent basis for providing for assets that provided a steady flow of benefits over their useful life.’*

The Council therefore commissioned Link (the Council’s treasury advisors) to review the method currently used to calculate MRP and provide options for consideration.

The result is that by moving to an annuity basis of calculation generates substantial savings in the early years. A change to an annuity method is not less prudent than the current method as the overall period of repayment remains unchanged nor does the overall payment total.

The CFR is derived from a number of different sources, not all of which require an MRP (e.g. the Housing Revenue Account). The MRP Policy Statement draws on the areas where the Council is required to make such a charge:

- Outstanding amounts relating to borrowing supported by Central Government
- Outstanding amounts relating to unsupported borrowing (Prudential Borrowing)
- Outstanding liabilities relating to PFI contracts and Finance Leases

### **Options Considered**

**A** – Do Nothing (Straight Line)

**B** – Annuity Basis (PWLB Annuity Rate – Scheme Specific)

**C** – Annuity Basis (PWLB Annuity Rate – Weighted Average Life)

**D** – Annuity Basis (Council's Weighted Average Borrowing Rate – Scheme Specific)

**E** – Annuity Basis (Council's Weighted Average Borrowing Rate – Weighted Average Life)

For all options the supported borrowing element of the CFR will be written down over a period of 47 years, being the remaining average useful life of the Councils assets. This will either be on a straight line basis (Option A) or utilising the PWLB Annuity Rate for 47 years on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 of 2.85% (Options B and C) or the Council's Weighted Average Borrowing Rate (WABR) for external debt help on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 of 4.86% (Options D and E).

For the unsupported borrowing element of the CFR as well as using the straight line method there are two further sub-methods of calculating the amounts to which the annuity rate is applied (using either appropriate PWLB annuity rate for the asset life or WABR):

- i. Scheme Specific: each asset funded by borrowing is assigned an asset life and the MRP charged over that period on an individual scheme basis.
- ii. Weighted Average Life: for each financial year the assets funded by borrowing are combined with their individual asset lives to provide a single amount of borrowing for that financial year with an average asset life. The

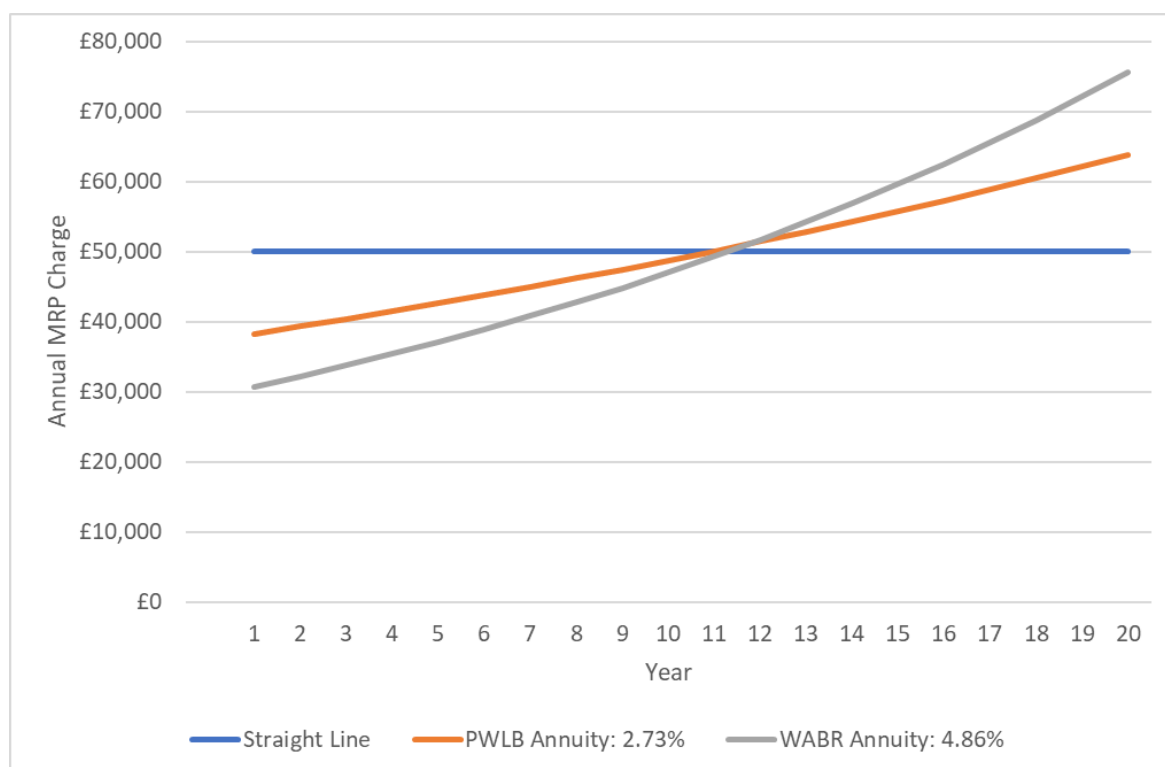
total balance for each year financial year is then charged over the average asset life.

This therefore generated four options (B through to E).

## Preferred Choice

Option B through to Option E all generate savings in the early years compared to Option A of doing nothing. However, it should be noted that as amounts charged in later years fall in Option A, they increase in other options as the annual annuity charge increases over the life of the asset. This can be seen in a graphical illustration in **Chart 1** below. The total amount charged over the period is the same for all options.

**Chart 1** : Illustration of £1m Borrowing charged over 20 year straight line vs Annuity (PWLB and WABR)



Notwithstanding the fact that future years would incur higher charges compared to the current method, the time value of money referred to earlier in this note means that the overall benefit to the council is beneficial by opting for an annuity basis.

To compare options presented in this report, a Net Present Value (NPV) has been calculated over the entire period of MRP repayments utilising the HM Treasury suggested discount rate of 3.5%. The NPV considers the time value

of money and allows comparison to the current straight-line basis. The resultant NPV savings are shown in the table below:

<b>Option:</b>	<b>Net NPV Saving compared to Option A – Do Nothing £m</b>
<b>B</b> – Annuity Basis (PWLB Annuity Rate – Scheme Specific)	16.46
<b>C</b> – Annuity Basis (PWLB Annuity Rate – Weighted Average Life)	16.38
<b>D</b> – Annuity Basis (Council's Weighted Average Borrowing Rate – Scheme Specific)	26.08
<b>E</b> – Annuity Basis (Council's Weighted Average Borrowing Rate – Weighted Average Life)	25.93

**Option D** provides the greatest NPV saving and is considered a prudent and effective method of calculating MRP and is therefore proposed as the preferred method for adoption.

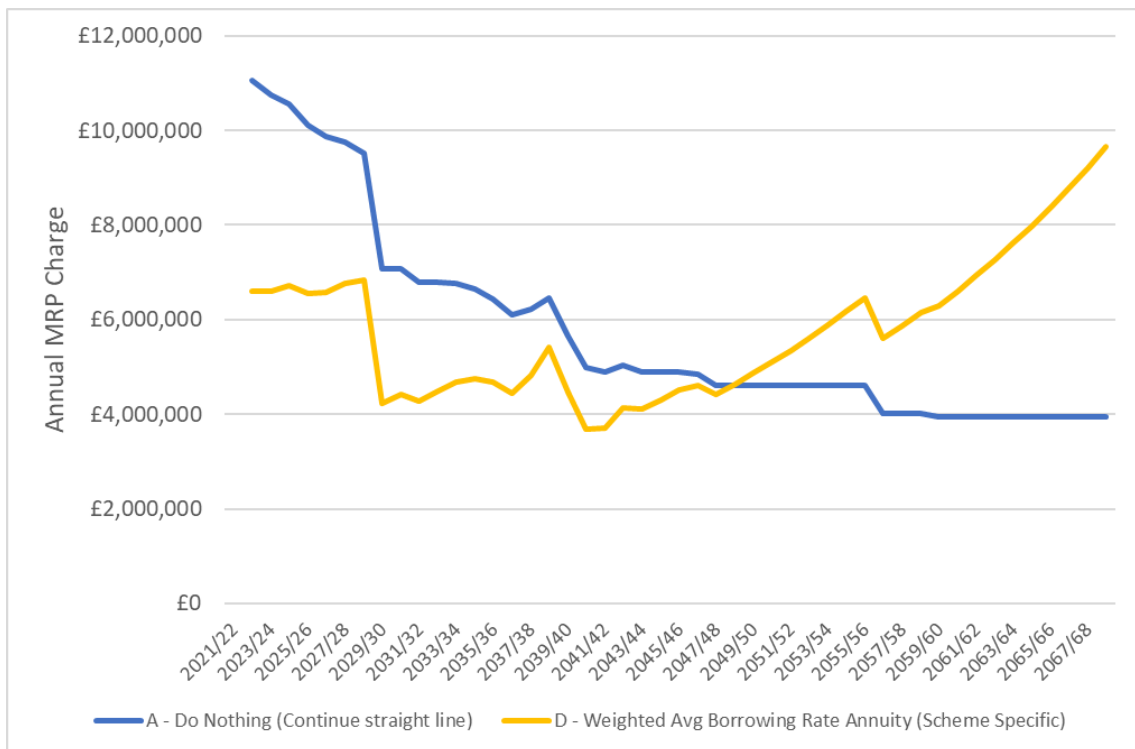
The benefits of this method are

- The calculation is scheme specific and therefore each charge made to the General Fund Revenue Account is directly linked to the life of the asset funded through borrowing.
- Utilising the WABR as the annuity rate is a direct link to the Council's actual debt portfolio and not the PWLB rates as published each year (which may not reflect the Council's debt for any given year).

**Chart 2** below shows the annual MRP charges calculated under Option D compared to Option A. This shows the savings that can be generated by implementing this option although future years rates will increase, albeit not to levels the Council are current paying through its MRP).

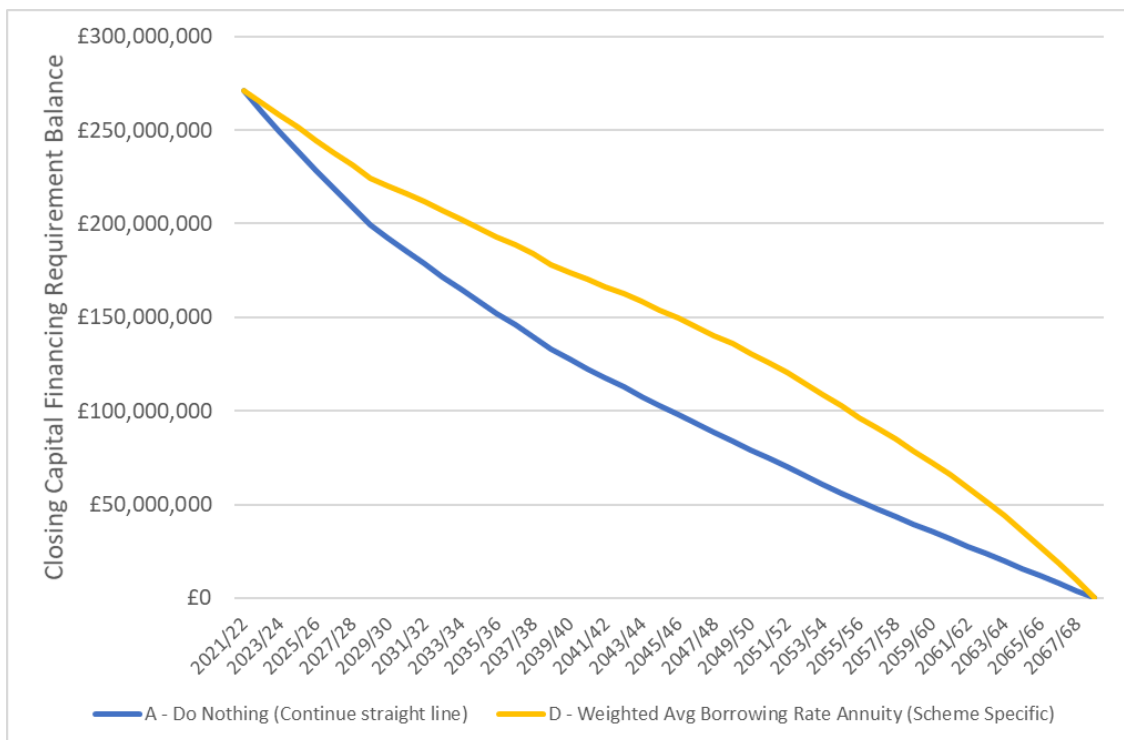


**Chart 2 : Annual MRP Charge - Option A vs Option D**



**Chart 3** shows the closing CFR balance (supported and unsupported debt elements) for Options D compared to Option A. This is to demonstrate that the CFR will be cleared over the same period compared to Option A.

**Chart 3 : Closing CFR Balances (Supported Borrowing plus Unsupported Borrowing) - Option A vs Option D**



All graphs and calculations are taken from the closing position at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 and therefore future prudential borrowing decisions will increase the MRP charge from those detailed in this report.

The revised MRP Policy Statement attached to this report for approval has been drafted adopting Option D methodology.

## **Updated Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement**

### **Introduction**

Where the Council finances capital expenditure by debt, it must put aside resources to repay that debt in later years. The amount charged to the revenue budget for the repayment of debt is known as Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), although there has been no statutory minimum since 2008. The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Authority to have regard to the former Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Guidance on Minimum Revenue Provision (the Guidance) most recently issued in 2018.

The broad aim of the Guidance is to ensure that capital expenditure is financed over a period that is either reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits, or, in the case of borrowing supported by Government Revenue Support Grant, reasonably commensurate with the period implicit in the determination of that grant.

The Guidance requires the Council to approve an Annual MRP Statement each year and recommends a number of options for calculating a prudent amount of MRP, but authorities retain flexibility over their determination of what is prudent.

The proposed methodologies for use within Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council are set out below and reflect the basic principles set out in the guidance, along with some locally determined and prudent modifications.

### **Proposed MRP Policy Statement for 2022/23**

The following MRP Policy is proposed, under guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is as follows:

- (a) MRP will be calculated on the Council's opening Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) for each financial year.
- (b) The CFR will be reduced by the appropriate amount for assets financed by debt but not yet operational, purely for the purposes of the MRP calculation. This will ensure that the revenue account will only be charged an MRP once the economic benefits of such asset are being realised.

- (c) For capital expenditure financed from debt arising up to 2007/08 and all new Government-supported borrowing arising from 2007/08 and thereafter - to spread the cost outstanding at the end of 2021/22 over the total average estimated life of assets held by the Council, but to use the annuity variant, based on the Councils Weighted Average Borrowing Rate as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.
- (d) For capital expenditure that is self-financed from debt arising in 2007/08 and thereafter - to charge the expenditure over the expected useful life of the relevant asset ("the Asset Life Method"), but to use the annuity variant, based on the Councils opening weighted average borrowing rate in the year of the expenditure (rather than charging on a straight line basis over the asset life). For amounts outstanding at the end of 2021/22 the rate applied will be the Councils Weighted Average Borrowing Rate as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 (i.e. the financial year of the change in MRP calculation).
- (e) In cases where asset lives cannot be readily determined - a default period of 20 or 25 years will be used in line with government guidance.
- (f) For 'on-balance sheet' Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts and Finance Leases – Annual principal repayments included in contract payments for PFI Schemes or finance leases are applied as MRP.
- (g) There is no requirement on the HRA to make a minimum revenue provision payment but there is a requirement to make a charge for depreciation.

The Guidance allows Councils to choose to provide more MRP in any given year. This is known as a Voluntary Revenue Provision (VRP). Any VRP provided in year, along with the total cumulative amount must be disclosed in the MRP Policy Statement. Up until the 31 March 2022 the total VRP overpayments made by the General Fund account was £5.423m.

## Report to Council

**31 January 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Proposed departure from the Development Plan at Brook Road, Oldbury
<b>Director:</b>	Tony McGovern Director of Regeneration & Growth - Neighbourhoods
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Development Planning Manager Alison Bishop alison_bishop@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to an exception to the Development Plan in respect of planning application ref: DC/20/64505, proposed development of 13 dwellings at Brook Road, Oldbury.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The open space was audited in 2013 and found to be of low value to the public for recreational use and that adequate open space is provided within the Oldbury area. This led to the land being disposed of by the Council. The proposal provides good quality housing development which will assist in meeting Sandwell's five-year housing land supply and is acceptable in design terms. It is considered on balance, that the proposal is acceptable and a departure from the Development Plan be allowed on this occasion.



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan? (select relevant category and inc narrative how deliver)



Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods – the proposal provides much needed homes within Sandwell

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At the planning committee of 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023, consideration was given to planning application DC/20/64505, which sought approval
- 4.2 At the meeting, the Committee approved the planning application with conditions, subject to the application being referred to Full Council as a departure from the approved Development Plan.
- 4.3 The scheme seeks to erect 13 detached dwellings comprising of two house types (Type A and Type B). The Type A house type would have five bedrooms and a detached garage. The Type B house type would have four bedrooms and an integral garage.
- 4.4 The purpose of this report is to discuss the 'departure' from the Development Plan only. It is not the role of Council to reconsider the wider planning merits of the application which have already been considered by Planning Committee.
- 4.5 The application was publicised by neighbour notification and no objections have been received.
- 4.6 The Councils Planning Policy, Highways and Public Health, Severn Trent, Lead Local Flood Authority and Police have been consulted. No objections were received from all the consultees, which could not be overcome by conditions.
- 4.7 From a policy perspective, the site being Community Open Space was assessed as part of 2013 Green Space Audit and identified as 'high quality/low value'. 'Quality' being defined as condition of the site and its accessibility and 'value' being the value to the community for its recreational use. Under these criteria, the change to a different use should be considered if the value could not be uplifted through change of the primary purpose. The Audit shows that Oldbury has over 60 hectares



of amenity open space - the second highest in the Borough after West Bromwich. Oldbury and West Bromwich account for over 73% of outdoor sports provision in the Borough. The loss of the Brook Road open space, would have little impact on the overall provision of amenity space in the local area, as there are other amenity open spaces (Cakemore Playing Fields and Barnford Hill Park) within proximity. Consequently, the site was not assessed as part of the 2018 Green Space Audit as, following the land sale, the Council did not consider the site as part of its greenspace portfolio. Therefore, it is considered that the site should come forward for development based on the premise that, as the site was deemed 'high quality/low value' whilst in Council ownership, it is highly unlikely that the quality of the site as open space would be maintained or improved following the Council's disposal of the land. On balance, taking these factors into account, residential development would appear to me to be the most viable option for the site.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Refusing the departure is an option, in doing so clear planning justification would have to be provided as any refusal of planning permission could result in an appeal and costs being awarded against the Council.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Financial, staffing, land/building implications
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions
<b>Risk:</b>	Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications
<b>Equality:</b>	Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities
<b>Social Value</b>	Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)





<b>Climate Change</b>	Sandwell Council supports the transition to a low carbon future, in a way that takes full account of the need to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Proposals that help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure, will be welcomed.
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## 7. Appendices

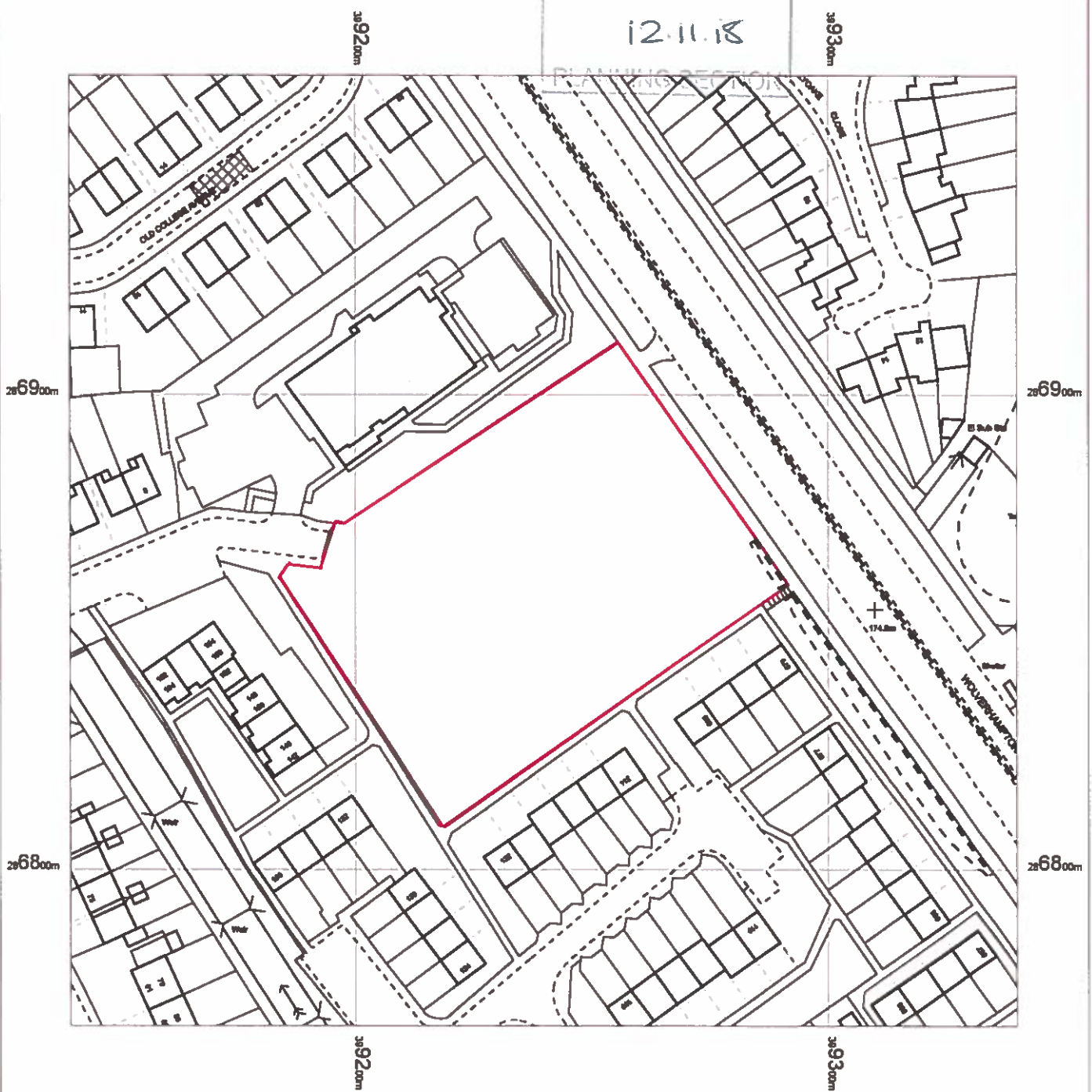
Location Plan

## 8. Background Papers

Planning application reference DC/20/64505



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12.11.18  
PLANNING SECTION



BROOK  
ROAD/WOLVERHAMPTON  
ROAD

OS MasterMap 1250/2500/10000 scale  
30 January 2017, ID: BW1-00595019  
[www.blackwellmapping.co.uk](http://www.blackwellmapping.co.uk)  
1:1250 scale print at A4, Centre: 399240 E, 286867 N  
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[www.blackwellmapping.co.uk](http://www.blackwellmapping.co.uk)  
TEL: 0114 268 7658  
[maps.sheffield@blackwell.co.uk](mailto:maps.sheffield@blackwell.co.uk)

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## Report to Council

**31 January 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Proposed departure from the Development Plan at London Street, Smethwick
<b>Director:</b>	Tony McGovern Director of Regeneration & Growth - Neighbourhoods
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Development Planning Manager Alison Bishop alison_bishop@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to an exception to the Development Plan in respect of planning application ref: DC/22/67165, erection of a residential led, mixed use building of between 7 and 14 storeys to include 392 dwellings (Use Class C3) and 555sqm (GIA) commercial floorspace (flexible within Use Class E, drinking establishments (sui generis) and hot food takeaway (sui generis), plus associated amenity space, access, parking and demolition of existing buildings, at London Street, Smethwick.




### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The site is allocated for employment use; however, it is acknowledged that the Council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. The development plan cannot therefore be considered as being up to date. Paragraph 11d of the NPPF and the presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged and permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and



demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies of the framework as a whole. The site forms part of the Grove Lane Masterplan and other residential development is located nearby. Therefore, it is considered that the site, with appropriate mitigation, is a suitable location for new housing. Furthermore, the use of conditions and planning obligations will ensure that the scheme is acceptable in all other respects.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan? (select relevant category and inc narrative how deliver)

	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods – the proposal will provide much needed housing within Sandwell
	A strong and inclusive economy – the proposal will provide opportunities for apprenticeships/local employment during construction and post construction.
	A connected and accessible Sandwell – the applicant has agreed to make a financial contribution towards public transport infrastructure improvements.

## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At the planning committee of 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023, consideration was given to planning application DC/22/67165, which sought approval
- 4.2 At the meeting, the Committee were minded to approve the planning application with conditions subject to final details being reviewed by highways and then final delegated authority to approve in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee and that the application be referred to Full Council as a departure from the Development Plan.
- 4.3 The proposal is a predominately residential scheme over 15 floors which provides a total of 392 apartments, namely 240 (2 beds) and 152 (1 beds) and would be an 'E' shape in its footprint. Vehicular access would be provided from Cranford Street and pedestrian access from London Street. The scheme also includes some commercial office and retail space on the ground floor along with two floors for parking.



- 4.4. The application was publicised by neighbour notification and one objection was received raising concerns about competition from the retail element to their existing retail businesses. Such matters are material planning considerations and the objector was advised as such.
- 4.6 The Councils Planning Policy, Highways and Public Health, Lead Local Flood Authority, Severn Trent, Police, Canals and River Trust and Urban Design have been consulted. No objections were received from all the consultees, which could not be overcome by conditions.
- 4.7 From a policy perspective, the site is allocated within the Black Country Core Strategy for employment uses, however subsequent to this allocation a more recent study known as the Grove Lane masterplan has indicated that the area and its surrounding could accommodate new residential development. Furthermore, the Council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. Whilst the allocation envisaged that this part of Grove Lane/London Street would be employment led, the surrounding area is changing and a recently completed residential development is immediately to the west and existing residential is to the east of the site. It is therefore considered that more recent studies of this area recognise that residential uses are appropriate within this area.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Refusing the departure is an option, in doing so clear planning justification would have to be provided as any refusal of planning permission could result in an appeal and costs being awarded against the Council.



## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Financial, staffing, land/building implications
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions
<b>Risk:</b>	Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications
<b>Equality:</b>	Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities
<b>Social Value</b>	Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)
<b>Climate Change</b>	Sandwell Council supports the transition to a low carbon future, in a way that takes full account of the need to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Proposals that help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure, will be welcomed.

## 7. Appendices

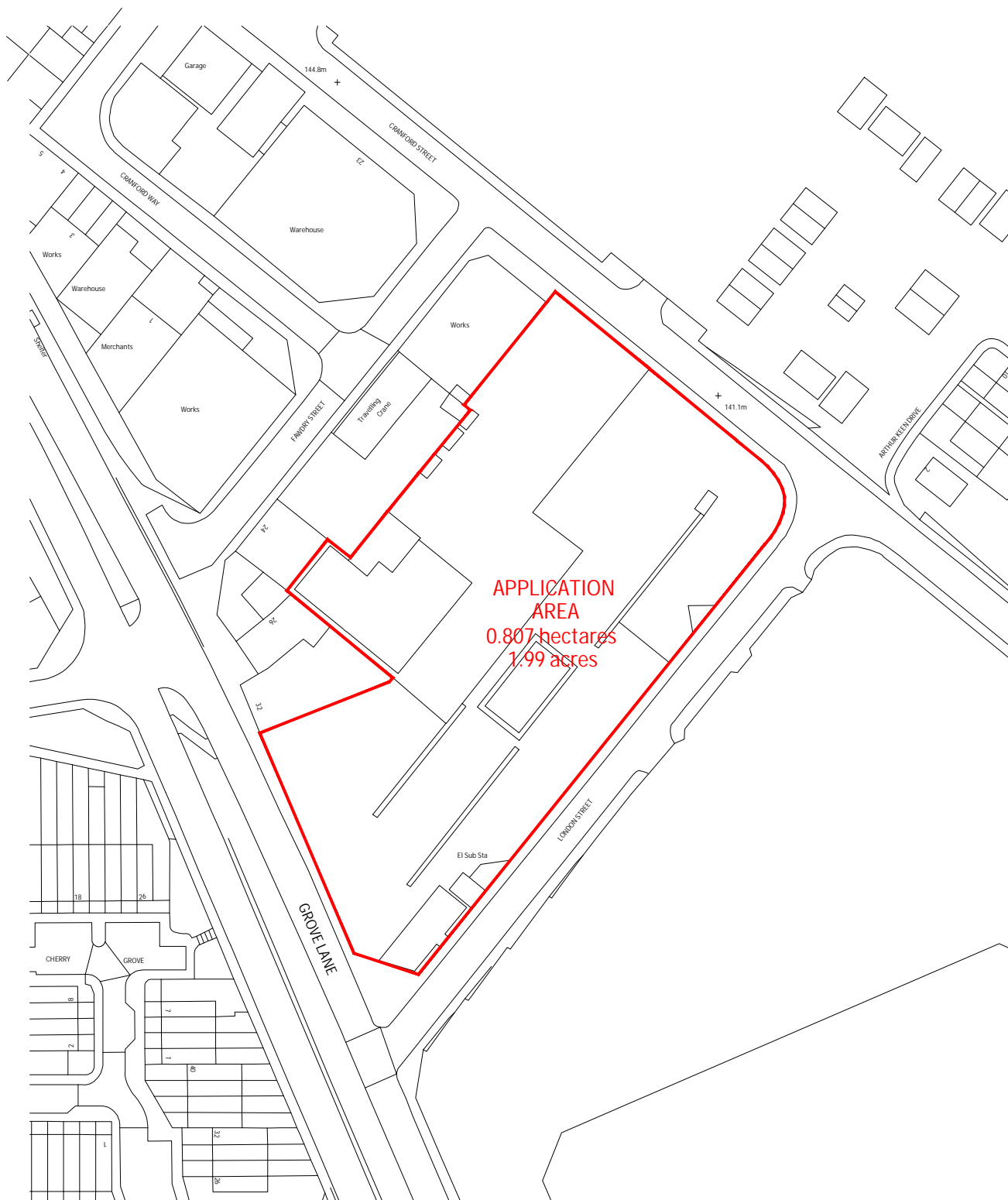
Location plan

## 8. Background Papers

Planning application reference - DC/22/67165







**LP** **Location Plan**  
1:1250

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## Report to Council

31 January 2023

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Appointment to Committees/Boards and Other Bodies</b>
<b>Director:</b>	Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Trisha Newton Senior Democratic Services Officer Trisha_newton@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations







- 1.1 To receive and consider nominations for changes to appointments to committees, boards and other bodies established by the Council, as set out in Appendix A.
- 1.2 That subject to 1.1 above, the nominations received be approved and appointed to those bodies with immediate effect.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Appointments to positions on committee/boards/other bodies is a matter for Council to determine.



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

		The Council's decision-making structures are designed to support the delivery of Sandwell's Vision 2030.
		
		

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Council's Constitution sets out the executive, scrutiny and constitutional functions and the rules and procedures for how the Council operates, it also prescribes the issues that the Council should address at its Annual Meeting in identifying the person(s) or bodies it wishes to carry out its functions as a local authority and the portfolios and terms of reference for those persons and bodies.

### 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 There is no alternative option. Appointment of elected members to committees and other/outside bodies can only be made by full Council.

### 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Council can determine the making of non-executive appointments to committees and other fora. Council is under a legal and constitutional obligation to make appointments to its committees, boards and other fora to ensure the effective operation of the Council's functions and other obligations, duties and responsibilities.



<b>Risk:</b>	A risk assessment is not required.
<b>Equality:</b>	An equality impact assessment is not required.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The proposals have no direct implications.
<b>Social Value</b>	The proposals have no direct implications.

## 7. Appendices

Appendix A – Appointment to Committees, Boards and Other Bodies

## 8. Background Papers

None.



## Appendix A

Nominations received:-

Chair of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – Cllr Hinchliff

Vice Chair Children's Services and Education Scrutiny – Cllr Chidley





## Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday 7 December 2022 at 3.30pm  
at Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House**

**Present:** Councillor Carmichael (Chair);  
Councillors Ahmed, Hackett, Hartwell, Hughes, Millard,  
Padda, Piper and Rollins.

**In attendance:** Councillors Chidley, Moore, Fenton, Randhawa,  
Simms, Taylor and Uddin.

**Also present:** Kim Bromley-Derry (Managing Director Commissioner),  
Rashpal Bishop (Director of Adult Social Care), Gillian  
Douglas (Director of Housing), Michael Jarrett (Director  
of Children's Services), Alice Davey (Director of  
Borough Economy), Lisa McNally (Director of Public  
Health), Surjit Tour (Director of Law and Governance  
and Monitoring Officer), Elaine Newsome (Service  
Manager – Democracy), Rebecca Maher (Head of  
Finance), ( Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services  
Officer) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services  
Manager).

### 223/22      **Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received by Councillor Elaine  
Giles.

### 224/22      **Declarations of Interest**

The following interests were made by members:-



Councillor Hartwell declared a pecuniary interest in relation to Minute No 233/22 (Grant Funding for Advice Services 2023/24 – 2025/26) on the basis that she worked for Bangladeshi Women's Association who receive advice funding from the Council;

Councillor Ahmed declared a pecuniary interest in relation to Minute No 233/22 (Grant Funding for Advice Services 2023/24 – 2025/26) on the basis that he is a committee member of Smethwick Pakistani Muslim Association;

Councillor Hughes declared a personal interest in relation to Minute No 236/22 (Recommissioning of the pre and post dementia diagnostic Support Service) on the basis that he and his wife had recently accessed the service;

Councillor Simms declared a personal interest in relation to Minute No 233/22 (Grant Funding for Advice Services 2023/24 – 2025/26) on the basis that she worked within a community that delivers a variation of services to the public.

## **225/22 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.

## **226/22 Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

## **227/22 Adult Social Care Direct Payments Policy**

Approval was sought to authorise the Director of Adult Social Care and the Director of Finance to implement the proposed Direct Payments Policy and ensure it is embedded in future practice by all relevant staff members.

On behalf of the Chair of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board, the Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board asked for clarification on

the result of the commissioned work regarding the Care Act 2014.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources identified that the following key areas were in need of improvement:-

- A requirement for care and support planning to ensure DPs were promoted but with suitable safeguards and checks
- Strengthen Care Act practice by testing people's capacity & suitability to manage a DP
- Clarifying rules regarding using DPs to pay for services delivered by Close Family Members
- Ensuring clear guidance to clients about their and the Council's respective responsibilities around the use of DPs, particularly when they are employing staff
- Strengthening safeguarding aspects by setting out clear roles and expectations for social care and DP workers regarding reviews of the DP package and the financial audit of the DP's use
- Improvements in financial audit process to identify key issues quicker so that attention could focus on the clients who appear to have issues in managing their DP
- Clarifying social care and DP workers' responsibilities to suspend or terminate DPs in cases of clear misuse, and social care workers' responsibilities to promptly review the case in terms of safeguarding and to arrange alternative care as appropriate

Clarification from external solicitors was sought on two of the Care Act issues; the Council's rights to expect DBS checks on people involved in a person's DP, and the use of Close Family Members. This had been used to set out Care Act-compliant policy.

The outcome was the creation of the policy which sets out proposed policies on these key areas. Revised practice guidance reinforced by training and development would ensure it was delivered.

Questions were also asked on how the Council could support people receiving direct payment of the risk of abuse.

It was explained that this consideration starts during the initial process, where social care workers must check that the person had the capacity to make the decision about whether they want a DP, and whether they had the capability to manage it. If the person did not have capacity, then they would not have a DP unless there was an authorised person to manage it, who must have capacity to do so and who would act in the client's best interest

During the operation of the DP, it was the social care workers' regular reviews of the care package and the DP workers' regular financial audits of the use of the DP that were the key tool in ensuring that the person is buying the care required to meet their assessed needs and that the DP is being used appropriately in line with their care and support plan.

Further questions regarding the right to decline direct payments were asked on behalf of the Vice Chair of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board. It was highlighted that national literature implies that having a DP was a right. The new policy clarified that it is subject to Care Act conditions regarding capacity and suitability. Paying an external service to manage a DP on behalf of someone was not a compliant solution – if the person could not manage a DP then they are not suitable to be given one and should have a commissioned service instead.

Clients were not obliged to take a DP and could access a commissioned service instead.

In response to questions seeking clarification on whether direct payments could be used for anything other than care, it was confirmed that the services that a DP could be used for were set out in the Care Act. Provided it is a valid and legal service or activity that met the assessed needs, anything in the care and support plan could be delivered by a DP, apart from permanent residential/nursing care and also services delivered directly by the Council. The only real restrictions is that the services must not be ones that were "everyday living" or a lifestyle choice.

A final question was put forward regarding the limitations of Direct Payments for Sandwell citizens assessed as in need of care and support.

It was the potential freedom of a DP that could be a limitation. Having a DP encouraged people to take ownership of their care and support planning and be free to choose how their needs were met. However, as these were public funds, it was stressed that users needed to be aware of the responsibility that went with it, particularly if they had capacity issues and were relying on a friend or family member to support them and to act in their best interests.

### **Reason for Decision**

The Director of Adult Social Care and the Director of Finance had commissioned work to check the compliance of the Council's Direct Payments practice against the Care Act 2014.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

The Council should have a Direct Payments Policy to cover areas of discretion, or to clarify decisions where issues had arisen in the past.

It could be possible to carry on without a policy, but this risked the Council being challenged on areas where the Care Act does not set out a clear framework, and it was considered prudent, therefore, to ensure that people understand what Sandwell's policy was.

**Agreed** that the Director of Adult Social Care and the Director of Finance be authorised to implement the proposed Direct Payments Policy and ensure it is embedded in future practice by all relevant staff members.

## **228/22 The review of council tenant rents and housing related property charges**

Approval was sought to authorise the Director of Housing to adjust council rents and housing related charges with effect from 3 April 2023. A 5% increase was proposed to help battle

inflation and ensure that the Local Authority was able to continue to maintain, modernise and manage social housing properties within a ringfenced budget.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board requested further information on what would be the likely impact as a result of the increase in charges on the ability of tenants to pay them. It was also questioned why the increase in garage fees proposed a further 5% increase when they were significantly increased last year.

The Cabinet Member for Housing clarified that It was estimated that 70.2% of Sandwell tenants were in receipt of full or partial housing benefit or housing element of Universal Credit that would mitigate the impact of rent increases. The Establishment of a hardship fund to support those on low incomes not in receipt of benefits would provide further targeted support. This would be in addition to a wider package of hardship interventions.

Regarding the increase in garage fees, it was stated that it was normal practice to review and revise fees and charges annually. The increase to garage rents last year was done in recognition that the charges had not been reviewed for some time and were low in comparison to charges by other Local Authorities. The proposals for this year was to enable the charges to meet inflationary pressures, although as with the social housing rent increase it was recommended that this would be capped at 5% rather than much higher rate of CPI. A lower increase would create a budget pressure on the general fund that would need to be met from other General Fund budgets. Garages were a discretionary rather than essential service, 62% were rented by home owners and tenants with more than one garage.

The Chair of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board asked if Sandwell's rent rates were in line with neighbouring authorities. Comparisons were also requested for the increase in garage rental rates with other authorities.

The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that Local Authorities in the region were asked to share details on their current rent levels, only Dudley MBC responded. The Housing Regulator had recently published a report on Local Authority Stock and rents, this reports an average social rent in England of £89.53 and a regional average rent for the West Midlands of £81.28. Sandwell's average rent was £83.32. Whilst this was a helpful benchmark, members were minded that caution should be exercised as data on average rents would have a large degree of variation driven by the number of Local Authorities in each region and the difference in type of properties which would impact on the overall average.

Rent levels were benchmarked in 2021 when increasing the charges and all were comparable with others in the region and remained very favourable when compared to other storage hire options in the private sector. The uplift proposed was capped below the level of CPI and was in line with proposals for other fees and charges across the Council.

Following queries raised, the Cabinet Member for Housing was minded to further review the proposal to increase rental charges for garages for consideration at a future meeting.

### **Reasons for recommendations**

Each year council tenants, leaseholders and other residents are notified of the rent and other related housing charges to be set from the following April. The Council had to achieve the right balance between supporting tenants in hardship and protecting the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to ensure that the Council could continue to provide affordable social housing to residents.

The recommendations were reported to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board in September. Members of the Board were understanding and supportive of increases to rent and service charges, whilst acknowledging the current difficulties posed by the national financial situation.

### **Alternative options considered**

It was recommended from April 2023 to increase rents by 5% for tenants within the Riverside managed PFI estate of Wednesbury. The council had the discretion to set PFI rent. It would be seen to be very unfair for other council tenants in neighbouring areas to have had council rent increased and not have the same with the PFI estate in Wednesbury.

The Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) policy allowed social landlords to increase their annual rents by 7% which is in line with the recent government rental cap. It is recommended that rents are increased rents by 5%, 2% lower than the cap to support tenants with the cost of living.

Increasing rents below the rate of inflation would create financial pressures for the council to deliver key services. The provision of good quality Housing and Neighbourhoods were key to improving lives and life chances for Sandwell residents. Reducing the level of income to the HRA would seriously impact the 30-year business plans and would mean less funding for new homes provision.

An alternative would be to increase rents by 3%. The budgetary pressures from this would impact the Council's ability to deliver key services and may result in reduced services where costs can't be met through operational budgets.

### **Agreed:-**

- (1) that approval be given to authorise the Director of Housing to adjust council rents and housing related charges with effect from 3 April 2023 as follows:
  - (a) Increase rental charges by 5%, which is 2% below the government's social rental cap of 7%;
  - (b) increase housing service charges by the consumer price index (CPI) + 1%, equivalent to a 11.1% increase;



- (c) that subject to consultation with the residents of the site, to increase rent at the traveller's pitch in Hills View, Tipton by 5%;
  - (d) that properties managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement receive a 5% rental increase and a 11.1% increase in service charges, which need to match the councils rent and service charge increases;
  - (e) that properties that sit outside the Housing Revenue Account (including service tenants for Parks, Sandwell Valley and Caretaking) receive a 11.1% increase in rental charges and service charges, which is equivalent to CPI plus 1%;
  - (f) that the leaseholder annual fee be increase by 11.1%, CPI + 1% in 2023/24 from £104.10 to £115.66;
- (2) that the Director of Housing be authorised to establish a hardship fund for Housing Revenue Account tenants (to support them in their tenancy) and to allocate £100k of HRA reserves, to be reviewed annually;
  - (3) that a further report be submitted on an increase in Council garage rent following review.

229/22      **Asset transfer of Greets Green Resource Centre and adjoining land to the Confederation of Bangladeshi Organisations (CBO) Ltd**

Approval was sought to agree the asset transfer of Greets Green Resource Centre, including the surrounding land, to the Confederation of Bangladeshi Organisations LTD on the basis of a full repairing lease for 99 years. It was highlighted that the Confederation of Bangladeshi Organisations LTD

was a long-standing trusted partner of Sandwell that supported communities efficiently and effectively.

### **Reason for Decision**

CBO currently lease the premises on a full repairing, rent free basis and the lease expires in 2041. They also hold a coterminous lease of the adjacent land which also expires in 2041. CBO have submitted an application for a single asset transfer of both sites, on the basis of a 99 year full repairing rent free lease. CBO deliver excellent value for money. For example, in 2021/22 CBO supported 872 residents with generalist advice, securing £1,256,056 confirmed benefit gains and £7,130 one off charitable payments/ household goods. For every £1 of advice funding CBO have delivered £19 into the pockets of residents.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

Do nothing – CBO have a 25 year, rent free, full repairing voluntary body lease, expiring in 2041. This would not signal to the wider voluntary and community sector that we value their contribution as partners and want to use asset transfer as a positive tool for enabling the development of enterprising and sustainable organisations with a long term stake in the area.

### **Agreed:-**

- (1) that approval be given to the asset transfer of the Greets Green Resource Centre, including the surrounding land, to the Confederation of Bangladeshi Organisations (CBO) Ltd on the basis of a full repairing lease for 99 years with a rental of £1 pa for the purpose of running a community centre;
- (2) that the Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into or execute under seal if necessary, a formal lease for the Greets Green Resource Centre, West Bromwich and adjacent land relating thereto;

**Chance Heritage Trust - Memorandum of Understanding**

Approval was sought to endorse the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Chance Heritage Trust relating to the heritage – led regeneration of the Chance Glassworks site. The Memorandum of Understanding was not legally binding but would instead set out how the parties would work together.

**Reasons for Decision**

The objectives of the Chance Heritage Trust (CHT) are closely aligned with the Council's aspirations and policy objectives for the site and its locality. Regeneration of the site would create a boost for the local economy, create jobs and homes, conserve a locally and nationally important cultural asset and enhance the image of the borough through restoration of this high-profile industrial heritage site.

**Alternative Options Considered**

Do nothing – the heritage assets would continue to deteriorate, resulting in loss of heritage significance and poor image, and creating potential for reputational damage to the Council.

**Agreed:-**

- (1) that Cabinet endorse the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Chance Heritage Trust relating to the heritage – led regeneration of the Chance Glassworks site;
- (2) that details of the allocation of approved Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership Capacity Funding to support the regeneration of the Chance Glassworks Site be received.

**Empty Property Strategy 2023-2028**

Approval was sought to the Empty Property Strategy 2023 – 2028, including the introduction of empty property loans and the use of Planning Act enforcement powers by the Empty Property Officer.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board questioned how the strategy proposed to tackle the issue of planning enforcement lacking a specific budget to carry out works and then recharge these against the property where an owner had repeatedly failed to comply with requests to improve their empty property.

The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that £750,000 had been allocated to fund home improvement loans. Implementing a loan scheme would enable this funding to be recycled and used for multiple interventions across the life of the strategy. Additionally, the Empty Property Officer would have powers to make owners carry out repairs to remove hazards from empty properties to ensure they were managed and safe to live in. Civil Penalty powers would be used to charge owners for non-compliance with such notices. Revenue from such penalties would be recycled back into housing standards work

**Reasons for decision**

The private sector housing market is a key resource in providing the housing needs of the borough. Family homes are always in high demand, yet there are a large number of them remaining empty and unmanaged, blighting communities and removing good homes from the market. The Council has identified privately owned empty properties as one of its key priority areas in relation to private rented and owner-occupied housing.

**Alternative options considered**

Choose not to have an empty homes strategy and / or continue to provide a reactive service to complaints about empty properties dealing with nuisance and open to access only in addition to applying increased council tax charges.

**Agreed** that approval be given to the Empty Property Strategy 2023 - 2028, including the introduction of empty property loans and the use of Planning Act enforcement powers by the Empty Property Officer.

232/22      **On Street Residential Charging Scheme – Authorisation to enter into a contract with a Chargepoint Operator**

Approval was sought to authorise the Section 151 Officer to sign and enter into a contract with Gamma Energy Ltd., the successful bidder for the installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) chargepoints across the Black Country with the initial call-off covering the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) funded project at a value of £400,574, but call-offs up to a total of £2.5million are possible.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board asked what the Council were doing to address the need for ever-increasing requirements for charging points as a result of the end of new petrol and diesel cars in the UK by 2030.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth stated that the proposed contract was specifically to provide on-street charge points in residential areas where there is no off-street parking and thus no ability for people to locate charge points within their own property boundary.

Further funding was available through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) to increase the number of charge points in Sandwell to the target figure of 250 by 2025 as set out in the Black Country ULEV Strategy.

This target was based on the forecast number of EVs likely to be in use in areas without off-street parking by that date. There would be further rounds of Government funding through the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles specifically targeted at areas without off-street parking and Sandwell would take every opportunity to bid for such funds.

Residents with driveways that own electric vehicles would continue to be expected to provide their own charge points.

In addition to the ORCS funding, the West Midlands Combined Authority was seeking to provide 10 Charging Area Transit Stations, effectively service stations for EVs with rapid charging facilities, across the West Midlands through CRSTS. At least one of these would be located in Sandwell.

Planning policies would require all new residential, office, retail and leisure developments and any major extension proposals to include EV charging in their design.

The LGA had responded to Government that Local Authorities are best placed to establish where EV charging was required and was lobbying Government to increase the amount funding available to LAs to bring this about.

### **Reasons for Decision**

This contract will be used to deliver 37 public dual socket chargepoints (74 sockets) in residential areas where residents do not have access to off-street parking and are therefore not able to charge their vehicles on driveways with a private charge point, as is the norm. The funding will therefore deliver approximately 40% of the 7kW chargepoints required by 2025 in order to support Sandwell's transition to electric vehicles in the light of the Government's intended ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles in 2030, as outlined in the Black Country ULEV (Ultra Low Emission Vehicles) Strategy.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

The decision to progress with this approach was the culmination of months of discussions and independent advice. The concession model was chosen as the best compromise between pursuing a fully operator funded model which would significantly limit our ability to influence locations of chargepoints, and minimise and possible revenue return, and a more hands-on own-and-operate model that would carry significant revenue risk.

The model gives the local authorities the ability to leverage capital grant funding available to de-risk the delivery and secure an operator who will commit to covering all revenue costs for the contract term.

Having chosen to seek a concession contract, discussions were carried out to select the best route to market. An open tender process was considered, but the increased resource required, and the greater risk when compared to using an existing framework were unattractive. A large number of available frameworks and Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS) were considered, eventually settling on the Oxford City Council framework owing to the broad range of suppliers with access offering the best chance of a competitive process leading to stronger bids. The DPS also benefits from being new, which means that it incorporates all the latest technical specifications and experience from the last few years of public sector EV chargepoint delivery.

The successful bidder, Gamma Energy Ltd., scored the highest during our further competition on the DPS, meeting all mandatory requirements and achieving the best overall score across the criteria with a 50:50 price/quality split.

**Agreed:-**

- (1) that approval be given for the s.151 officer to sign and enter into contract with Gamma Energy Ltd., the successful bidder for the installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) chargepoints across the Black Country with the initial call-off covering the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) funded project at a value of £400,574, but call-offs up to a total of £2.5million are possible.
- (2) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, the conditions relating to the grant-funded element and the revenue share implications be received.



Approval was sought to allocate grants to voluntary organisations from April 2023 until March 2026.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board sought further clarification on why the Council was not reviewing its model to check that it was still the best option available since it appeared that this approach had been agreed 10 years ago.

The Cabinet Member for Communities explained that the model was flexible and had changed over time. It was kept under continuous review, primarily through monthly meetings with managers of services. Adjustments had been made to delivery to take account of external factors such as welfare reform, Brexit and Covid, as well as responding to the changing needs of residents.

It was also confirmed that no new providers had been able to bid for a grant. Additional resources would be needed to develop new less experienced providers and that it would not be in the best interests of residents to do this by reducing funding to very experienced local providers with a strong track record in delivering positive outcomes for their clients.

### **Reasons for recommendations**

Stable funding will enable providers to retain skilled advisers and to continue to work well together to deliver high quality services that respond flexibly to changes in need. This is particularly important as residents are facing increased hardship as a result of the cost of living crisis and the need for free, high quality, community-based benefits, debt and budgeting advice is more important than ever.

### **Alternative options considered**

- 1) Reduce levels of funding to vcs providers – this is not a viable option when demand for services are increasing because of the cost of living crisis.
- 2) Move to contracts - this is highly likely to cause disruption and uncertainty amongst providers just at a time when we

need a stable advice offer for our residents to support them through the cost of living crisis. We need providers to continue to focus their energy and creativity on delivery - meeting residents' needs, rather than competing with each other to secure continued funding.

**Agreed:-**

- (1) that approval is given to allocating the following grants to voluntary organisations with effect from April 2023 until March 2026:

<b>Organisation/service</b>	<b>2023/24 £</b>	<b>2024/25 £</b>	<b>2025/26 £</b>
Citizens Advice Sandwell (generalist open door, debt service and phone service)	585,728	585,728	585,728
Citizens Advice Sandwell (homeless prevention project)	70,000	70,000	70,000
Citizens Advice Sandwell (Resilient Residents/ budgeting support)	25,260	25,260	25,260
Sandwell Consortium (generalist open door & advice in children's centres)	240,305	240,305	240,305
Sandwell Consortium (advice in children's centres)	100,265	100,265	100,265
Smethwick Pakistani Muslim Association (generalist open door)	31,458	31,458	31,458
Brushstrokes (immigration advice)	32,719	32,719	32,719
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,085,735</b>	<b>1,085,735</b>	<b>1,085,735</b>

(Councillors Ahmed, Hartwell and Simms left the room during consideration of this matter and did not take part in the discussion)

**Improvement Plan Progress**

Approval was sought to recommend to Council that the Improvement Plan Progress report, along with the September progress report and an accompanying letter be submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to form the Council's 6 monthly update on progress against the Improvement Plan.

Recent return visits occurred from Grant Thornton, the LGA and CIPFA. The LGA had recognised the significant progress that has been made and the Council was awaiting the final review reports from Grant Thornton and CIPFA; members would be updated further once these reports had been received.

Consideration was also given to the re scrutiny feedback of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board from their meeting held on 29 November 2022.

The Leader thanked everyone who had been involved and committed to driving through improvements.

**Reasons for recommendations**

Under the Statutory Directions, the council is required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months. The first report is due for submission by 22 December 2022. It is proposed that this report, along with the quarterly update received by Cabinet in September will form the basis of the report to the Secretary of State along with a covering letter. Council are responsible for approving the report made to the Secretary of State and Cabinet will make a recommendation to Council.

**Alternative options considered**

The Value for Money Governance Review was undertaken as part of the external auditor's role to provide assurance on the council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. As the report includes statutory recommendations the council has a legal obligation to respond appropriately.

The Directions issued by the Secretary of State are a statutory requirement and the council has a legal obligation to respond appropriately. Failure to do so would likely result in further intervention measures.

Reviewing progress against the Improvement Plan enables senior officers and members have oversight of delivery, and take corrective action, as necessary.

Alternative formats for reporting to the Secretary of State could be adopted, however the proposal to submit a covering letter along with the quarterly reports made to Cabinet makes use of existing reports. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities confirmed that this would be an acceptable format to them.

**Agreed:-**

- (1) that progress against the Improvement Plan up to 3 November 2022 be received;
- (2) that the Improvement Plan Risk Register be received;
- (3) to recommend to Council that this report along with the September progress report and an accompanying letter be submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to form the Council's 6 monthly update on progress against the Improvement Plan.

**235/22 Sandwell Local Plan – Approval to carry out consultation on Issues & Options and open a Call for Sites exercise**

Approval was sought for the Sandwell Development Plan Issues & Options document for public consultation for six weeks commencing in February 2023. The consultation would be a key to a successful adoption of the Local Plan.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board asked how the Sandwell Local Plan could be well publicised so that residents were aware of its importance.

The consultation and engagement approach to the new Local Plan would broadly follow that used for the Black Country Plan. Officers intended to use the full range of social media and online engagement tools combined with the more traditional print media such as the local press and the Sandwell Herald. There would also be a press statement issued prior to the consultation starting and reminders prior to the closing date

### **Reasons for recommendations**

One of the first stages in the preparation of this new Local Plan is to undertake a public consultation on an Issues & Options document; and also the opening of a Call for Sites Exercise. To meet the timetable published in Sandwell's Local Development Scheme (November 2022), these stages need to commence in early 2023.

### **Alternative options considered**

The preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory requirement under planning legislation. The process for preparing a Local Plan is set out in legislation and guidance. As a result, there are no alternative solutions to the preparation of a new local plan for Sandwell, which is a matter of increasing urgency. Options relating to the form and content of the Local Plan were set out in the report to Cabinet on 16th November 2022.

### **Agreed:-**

- (1) that approval be given to the Sandwell Development Plan Issues & Options document for public consultation for six weeks commencing in February 2023;
- (2) that the Director - Regeneration & Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Growth, be authorised to make minor amendments, if required, to the Issues &

Options document prior to the start of public consultation;

- (3) that approval be given to the opening of a Call for Sites exercise for six weeks commencing in February 2023.charges addressed within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

236/22      **Re-Commissioning of the Pre-& Post Dementia Diagnostic Support Service**

Approval was sought to authorise the Director - Adult Social Care to allocate a sum of £376k exclusive of VAT per annum of Better Care Fund (BCF) investment in a two plus one-year contract for a Pre-& Post Dementia Diagnostic Support Service for Sandwell and to award the contract to the successful tenderer.

The model had been evidenced in the Department of Health and Social Care's new 10-year dementia plan which was awaiting publication. The model was showcased at the Alzheimer's Society national conference in May 2022.

**Reasons for Decision**

To ensure continued access to this valued service for local people living with the effects of dementia and provide stability for the service it is recommended that contract length should be for two years with the option to extend for a further year.

**Alternative Options Considered**

There were no alternative options considered.

**Agreed:-**

- (1) that the Director Adult Social Care be authorised to allocate a sum of £376k exclusive of VAT per annum of Better Care Fund (BCF) investment in a two plus one-year contract for a Pre-& Post Dementia Diagnostic Support Service for Sandwell and to award the contract to the successful tenderer;

- (2) that the Director Adult Social Care be authorised to award the Service Funding and contract following a competitive tender process to the successful organisation;
- (3) that the Director Adult Social Care be authorised to work jointly with partners to implement the agreed model which will be overseen by the Sandwell Joint Partnership Board;
- (4) that the Director of Law and Governance be authorised to execute any documents necessary to give effect to the proposals in Resolution (2) for the provision of a Pre-& Post Dementia Diagnostic Support Service and enter into a contract with the successful organisation;
- (5) that Cabinet approve variations to the Contract up to a maximum of 10% of the contract value, should they be necessitated, and that authority to approve such variations be delegated to the appropriate Chief Officer in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member;
- (6) that Cabinet approve an exemption to rule 8.8 (and any other applicable parts) of the Contract Procedure Rules July 2022 to allow the contract to be awarded to the successful tenderer in the event that the required minimum number of tenders are not received.

(Councillor Hughes left the room during consideration of this matter and did not take part in any discussion)

**237/22 Uplands Manor Primary School Making significant changes (prescribed alternations) consultation outcomes**

Approval was sought to the significant alteration to provide 20 Focus Provision places at Upland Manor Primary School, Addenbrooke Road, Smethwick B67 6HT, following the four-week statutory consultation.

Following a query raised by scrutiny members, the Cabinet Member for Children Services and Education offered to work closely with Scrutiny Members to ensure that any future reports regarding similar matters were clear and concise.

### **Reasons for recommendations**

The Focus Provision Unit will increase the pupil numbers by providing 20 places for children with severe learning disabilities and associated needs. The DfE 'Making Significant Changes (Prescribed Alternations) to Maintained Schools' requires that when the Local Authority is proposing a significant alteration, i.e. altering a school's existing SEN provision it must consult upon the proposal and make a formal decision to make the alteration permanent.

### **Alternative options considered**

The pupil admission number remains the same and the former children's centre remains empty. This would leave a shortage of special educational need places in the borough.  
5.2 There is no alternative accommodation in the borough that could provide the places required for 2022/2023.

**Agreed** that approval be given for the significant alternation to provide 20 Focus Provision places at Upland Manor Primary School, Addenbrooke Road, Smethwick B67 6HT, following the four-week statutory consultation.

## **238/22 Q2 Budget Monitoring 2022/23**

Approval was sought to make budget virements above £1m in line with the revised delegated limits for Cabinet Members and Directors. The projected overspend had reduced since the previous quarter, but members were minded that it was still important to reduce the use of reserves in 2022/23.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board asked for further comments on the delayed savings that were listed as an area of concern; six of those listed were regarding adult services.



The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources explained that the double handed care project had been delayed but would be in place and full savings would be achieved next financial year.

COVID funding had been allocated to the directorate for them to undertake social care reviews and these were expected to identify savings that could cover the first two items in 2023/24.

Walker Grange had a number of empty flats that were being modernised and once this work was complete the savings would be achieved.

Willow Gardens had been slowly occupied but the level of vacant properties had meant that the saving hadn't been achieved as quickly as hoped. Communication to increase awareness of the facility was under way.

This proposed saving for Borough Economy would form part of the wider work that was ongoing around leisure provision in the area.

Regarding savings within Regeneration, the lease had been terminated and the full saving would be achieved next financial year.

### **Reasons for recommendations**

Section 151 of the 1972 Local Government Act requires the Chief Financial Officer to ensure the proper administration of the council's financial affairs. Budgetary control, which includes the regular monitoring and reporting of budgets is an essential element in discharging this statutory responsibility. The recommended treatment of the year end variances supports the financial sustainability of the council.

### **Alternative options considered**

There are limited alternatives to the recommendations included in this report. Cabinet could decide not to allow the proposed use of reserves by directorates, but this would increase the projected overspend and result in a further reduction in the council's general fund balance.

### **Agreed:-**

- (1) that details of the financial monitoring position as at 30 September 2022 be received and referred to the report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment;
- (2) that Cabinet approve the following budget virements above £1m in line with the revised delegated limits for Cabinet Members and Directors: -

<b>Virements above £1m for Cabinet Approval</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Law & Governance - Removal of Legal fee income	1,300	
Corporate - Removal of legal fee income		1,300
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,300</b>	<b>1,300</b>

- (3) that Cabinet approve an allocation of £356,634 Covid funding to Sandwell Children's Trust to cover pressures relating to the pandemic experienced by them during 2021/22.

## **239/22 Performance Management Framework – Q2 Monitoring**

Approval was sought to the Q2 monitoring report of the performance framework.

Good progress had been made against many of the commitments in the Performance Management Framework. A major step forward had been made in providing consolidated performance and risk reporting for Cabinet. Further reports would be brought to Cabinet on the remaining commitments in due course.

### **Reasons for recommendations**

Council approved a corporate Performance Management Framework (PMF) on 12 April 2022, to address the recommendations of the Governance Value for Money Review by Grant Thornton and as a key element of the Council's Improvement Plan.

Since April, the corporate PMF has been further refined and built into business processes. Reporting on Q1 was presented to Cabinet on 28 September 2022. The report on Q2 seeks to build on the intelligence gathered for Q1 and offers the opportunity to assess in year progress.

### **Alternative options considered**

The Directions issued by the Secretary of State, including the requirement to have a performance management framework in place, are a statutory requirement and the council has a legal obligation to respond appropriately. Failure to do so would likely result in further intervention measures.

The council had various options on what type of performance management framework to establish. Our approach has been developed through understanding the needs of the organisation and drawing on best practice from other local authorities. As the Council continues the improvement journey, the PMF will evolve to meet our changing requirements.

**Agreed** that details of progress made on the further development of the Corporate Performance Management Framework and the Q2 monitoring reports be received.

240/22      **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

**Resolved** that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to the financial and business affairs of any person, including the authority holding that information.

241/22      **Update on Streamlining Black Country Ways Of Working – Black Country Consortium Ltd**

Approval was sought to the closure of the Black Country Consortium Limited.

**Reasons for recommendations**

The 2022 Levelling White Paper signalled the current shift in policy direction and a significant change in economic development architecture, namely emphasising and empowering local leadership and improving pride of place. This shift provides the latest context for a root and branch review of how streamlining ways of working at a Black Country geography needs to be reflected.

**Alternative options considered**

There are no alternative options as the Association of Black Country Authorities Leaders meeting held on 19 October 2022 has agreed to the closure of the company. The recommendations in the report are for each of the ABCA Cabinets to confirm the action taken.

**Agreed:-**

- (1) that approval be given to the closure of the Black Country Consortium Limited
- (2) that the following Association of Black Country Authorities Leaders' approvals made at their meeting held on 19th October 2022 be noted:
  - a) Acknowledge the track record and positive contribution enabled by BC Consortium Ltd.
  - b) A calling of a directors meeting of Black Country Consortium Ltd in January 2023 with a recommendation to voluntary wind up the company at a date to be advised and agreed during 2023.
  - c) A commitment to working towards a goal of a clear regional arrangement for data and intelligence clarifying roles and responsibilities and in the interim hosting of Black Country Consortium Economic Intelligence team via Walsall MBC who will still continue to provide via a service level agreement data and intelligence to Black Country Councils as required.
  - d) A fit for purpose and timely arrangement for a TUPE transfer arrangement for Active Black Country, currently hosted via Black Country Consortium Ltd to an independent entity arrangement, noting local authority hosting offers in principle from the City of Wolverhampton Council and Sandwell MBC.
  - e) A potential hosting/ integration of current cultural/ visitor economy expertise by one of the BC local authorities.

- f) Historical BCC Ltd company deferred pensioners and pensioners liabilities split as a liability equally across the 4 BC councils, noting pension liabilities for BCC Ltd are already reflected on Black Country Councils balance sheets.
- g) A report to individual local authority cabinets (November / December 2022) to endorse the closure of BCC Ltd.

Meeting ended at 4.43pm

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

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# Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday 21 December 2022 at 11.30am  
at Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House**

**Present:** Councillor Carmichael (Chair);  
Councillors Ahmed, Piper, Hartwell, Hackett, Rollins,  
Millard and Singh

**Also present:** Rashpal Bishop (Director of Adult Social Care), Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing), Alice Davey (Director of Borough Economy), Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth), Mark Stocks (Grant Thornton), Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer) and Trisha Newton (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)

**242/22      Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

**243/22      Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

**244/22      Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.



## **Improvement Plan Progress - Grant Thornton Follow-up Report**

The Cabinet received an update on Grant Thornton's Value for Money Governance review and the follow up Review Report.

Significant progress had been made by the Council, especially regarding the statutory recommendations made by the initial Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance review.

The Council had a greater corporate grip over improvement, performance and decision making. It had demonstrated progress on a number of areas such as children's social care and leisure services. The Council's leadership had taken shared responsibility for the oversight of the delivery of the Improvement Plan, and for cascading the plan through the organisation. The introduction of a Performance Management Framework (PMF) provided an opportunity to improve evidenced based decision making and set out accountabilities to drive the delivery of the Corporate Plan. Significant progress had also been made on the ERP systems replacement including the procurement of a new implementation partner.

Improved engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and Senior Officers was evident. Work programming and planning was efficient and a greater level of professionalism was now being displayed in the way in which business was being conducted.

The Council had improved its relationships and contract management arrangements with Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) and the most recent Ofsted rating is evidence that positive steps had been taken on the Trust's improvement journey. It was advised that the Council should continue to work with SCT to ensure there was sustainability of continued progress. The Council had taken decisive steps to manage the contractual arrangements with Sandwell Leisure Trust and was making changes to improve the provision of leisure services. A better relationship with

SERCO was underway but more work was needed to monitor progress. It was also noted that issues around Providence Place, Made Festival, SLaP and SEND transport had been resolved.

It was highlighted that the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements required significant improvement. A number of legacy issues from prior years, dating back to the previous accounts, were still undermining the quality of the financial statements. This needed to be an area of priority for the Council. The Council also needed to successfully implement the new corporate asset management system to timescale, ensuring all key finance roles had permanent appointments.

Four main recommendations were made to members in relation to the next steps for the Council to continue the improvement journey:

1. The Council must conclude the design of Phase 2 of the Improvement Plan, which focused on organisational culture, values and behaviours required to deliver change, and introduced a “golden thread” aligning corporate KPIs to individual’s performance objectives, so that planned improvements and changes became embedded across the organisation.
2. The Council needed to ensure that the new corporate PMO remained appropriately resourced, integrates all transformation and change activity being undertaken across the Council, and has access to appropriate data sources to be able to effectively monitor the delivery.
3. The Council should progress and finalise outstanding actions relating to previous recommendations, in particular introducing a commercial strategy and an asset management strategy and conclude the service-based actions arising from previous recommendations, including improvements in the management of the waste contract and the creation of the new leisure services company.

4. Once all the planned revisions to the Constitution had been agreed, the Council would need to embed these changes and demonstrate sustainable improvements in governance and scrutiny of decision making.

Members welcomed the report and agreed that significant good work had taken place. Officers and external reviewers were thanked for their support.

Meeting ended at 11.55am

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

## Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

**Tuesday, 6 December 2022 at 6.00 pm**  
**In Council Chamber at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Moore (Chair);  
Councillors Fenton, Hinchliff, Taylor, Trumpeter and Simms.

**In attendance:** Neil Cox (Director of Business Strategy and Change), Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead – Service Improvement), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager - Democratic Services), Kim Bromley-Derry (Managing Director Commissioner), Kerrie Carmichael (Leader of the Council), Victoria Lee (Head of Human Resources), Debbie Sant (Assistant HR Business Partner), Surjit Tour (Monitoring Officer and Director of Legal Services), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager) and Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer).

### **60/22 Election of a Vice Chair to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board**

Councillor Ellen Fenton was elected as the Vice Chair to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

### **60/22 Apology for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anandou and Elaine Giles.



**61/22**

## **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**62/22**

## **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

**63/22**

## **Employee Engagement and Organisational Culture**

The Board was informed that positive improvements had been made and many external reviewers such as Grant Thornton and the LGA had praised the progress made by the Council thus far in achieving milestones including the preparation of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and work around Council Culture. Ensuring that members and officers knew the importance of the improvement plan as well as promoting good working relationships between officers and the public were key factors in progressing further.

The difficulties faced by Sandwell Council over the past several years and over the pandemic provided important lessons on maintaining a cultural grip on organisation and staff. Additional issues such as managerial behaviour and the relationship between members and officers were also affected during this time. As a result, staff morale was low, and many officers did not feel empowered in their roles. These problems had cascaded down throughout the Council to frontline officers which, in turn, created further issues with the recruitment and retention of staff.

The Employee Engagement Survey (EES) was conducted between February and March 2022 with a response rate of 61% of employees (2,374 responses from a staff population of 3,913). The survey remained broadly consistent with 2018 and previous years. The survey was accessible via an email invitation as well as paper surveys.

The results of the EES showed that employee engagement had fallen from 69% in 2018 to 63% in 2022. Whilst scores across all five factors were lower in 2022 than in the previous survey, Sandwell scored above the local authority benchmark in pride amongst staff (7 percentage points above benchmark) and

recommending the council as a good place to work (8 percentage points above).

Corporate level results were presented to Leadership Team on 12 May 2022 and with staff via an All Staff Briefing on 26 May 2022. The results were also published on the intranet.

Directorates compiled the key actions to address the top three issues in their specific areas and the top three high performing areas to ensure good practice continued. These action plans were reviewed by Leadership Team on 18 October 2022, with the agreement that the action plans would be monitored corporately on a quarterly basis.

### **Organisational Culture:**

The organisational culture workstream consisted of two main phases. Phase 1 included conversation exercises with staff and members. The second phase would be to then utilise the information obtained from these conversations to better inform what the desired values, behaviour and culture should actually be.

A “Culture Working Group” was established, this included representatives from across the council that contributed to and provided constructive challenge to the approach, including leads on EDI and Member Development; Culture Champion volunteers were also appointed. Culture Champions were offered training sessions that enabled them to carry out listening group sessions. The sessions were to seek qualitative feedback from employees regarding the current culture and their aspirations for the future. Staff who could not attend these sessions were invited to fill out surveys.

The next phase was to agree the values and behaviours that would then inform the activities to embed the culture. This would include the following actions:

- Leadership Team sign off the agreed desired values and behaviours.
- Develop a plan to promote and communicate values and behaviours.
- Embedding values and behaviours into HR practices, appraisals, and performance management, employee induction and the alignment to a management development programme.

- Embed values and behaviours as a foundation of the council's workforce strategy and aligned with and to our work on Customer Journey and equalities, diversity and inclusion
- Consider the approach for frontline workers due to difficulties around access to work devices
- Staff briefings and Leadership communications

Members identified that implementing changes would be more difficult with the introduction of hybrid working. It was highlighted that although more difficult, hybrid working was a part of the recruitment retention policy and many staff would look elsewhere if the arrangements were changed to working full-time within the office. The main goal was to ensure that staff were present in the building, alongside their teams, at core times. Team attendance within Council buildings would be clustered to ensure that enough desk space was available; this would also ensure that the aforementioned core service terms were covered every day.

Members welcomed the idea of regular updates to the Scrutiny Boards to help shape and monitor any actions taken.

#### **Councillor Fenton left the meeting at 6.49pm**

Intermittent surveys would take place that would cover a variety of topics to keep employee engagement and feelings relevant and up-to-date. Concerns were raised around Employees of the Council not believing that leaders or managers communicated efficiently or that their feedback would be listened to.

#### **Councillor Trumpeter left the meeting at 7.00pm**

Members were assured that there was an appraising system in place however, compliance with the system had been an issue at Sandwell Council. A planned "re-launch" and emphasis on appraisal would take place and performance would be measured to ensure that those that work hard are recognised and rewarded.

Members thanked officers for their time and encouraged open dialogues with staff to ensure that views were listened to and noted.

Meeting ended at 7.15pm.

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# Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

**Thursday, 12 January 2023 at 6.00 pm**  
**In Council Chamber at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Moore (Chair);  
Councillors Anandou, Bhullar, Giles, Fenton and Taylor.

**In attendance:** Rebecca Maher (Head of Finance), Abi Asimolowo (Finance Business Partner), Sarah Sprung (Senior Lead Officer - Business Strategy & Change), Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing), Dawn Winters (Assistant Director - Libraries, Archives, Information Services), Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead – Service Improvement), Surjit Tour (Monitoring Officer and Director of Legal Services), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager) and Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer).

## 1/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Trumpeter, Hinchliff and Simms.

## 2/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.





**Resolved** that the minutes of the meetings held on 29 November 2022 and 6 December 2022 are approved as a correct record.

**Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider as a matter of urgency.

**Q2 Budget Monitoring 2022/23**

It was reported that at its meeting held on 7 December 2022, the Cabinet considered the 2022/23 Budget Monitoring report for Quarter 2 and referred the report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment.

In total, the overall projected outturn position for the General Fund in 2022/23 was an overspend of £1.927m. Whilst the projected overspend had reduced since the previous quarter, it was still important to reduce the use of reserves in 2022/23. The recent pay award to Council staff, inflation, Adult Social Care placement costs and shortfalls in income from garages and markets were identified as main contributors for the overspend. Significant costs had also arisen from project work as a result of the governance review. Vacancy controls had been put in place since October 2022 and officers were actively trying to reduce the use of reserves as much as possible. A further report detailing Q3 monitoring would be received by Cabinet in February 2023.

In response to questions from members, it was confirmed that directorates that underspend can utilise the remaining funds in following years, if approved by Leadership Team. If the unspent funds were not used, the first step would be to ensure that the general reserves fund was prioritised. The Head of Finance highlighted details around delayed and future savings in the report and agreed to provide members with figures for the target savings of the current financial year. Members noted that the majority of the planned proposed savings were in place before the cost of living crisis and, therefore, inflation precautions within the budget were underestimated. Future budgets would consider higher inflation rates.

Discussions ensued regarding the significant overspend by Sandwell's Children's Trust (SCT). It was stated that many of the current issues faced by SCT were not directly within their control but, instead, impacted by external factors. A national shortage of social workers meant that retention and recruitment was difficult due to competition with other authorities. Supplements had been introduced to both new and existing staff to assist recruitment and retention; this was a significant drain on financial resources but was necessary to ensure critical safeguarding posts were filled. Limited availability of residential placements for children had also caused significant cost to the Council as rates had increased in-line with demand.

Frequent meetings between the Council and SCT were in place to monitor the performance and finances of the Trust. Despite difficulties, the recent value for money review found that governance arrangements at SCT had improved and relationships were much stronger. The recent Ofsted inspection was deemed positive.

In response to further questions, the following answers were provided:-

- The possibility of in-house residential places was being investigated.
- Officers would confirm if the Government's published reports around the reformation of children's services at local and national levels had been reviewed.
- Social workers were currently allocated 16.5 cases on average, meeting the target of a maximum of 18 cases per social worker.
- More information would be provided to members on how we were currently looking after our social workers.

Reserves would not be used to balance the budget next year.

The Board thanked officers for their attendance and had no specific recommendations for the Cabinet to consider on the budget at this point.

## **Performance Management Framework – Q2 Monitoring**

Council approved a corporate Performance Management Framework (PMF) on 12 April 2022, to address the recommendations of the Governance Value for Money Review by Grant Thornton and as a key element of the Council's Improvement Plan. Since April, the corporate PMF had been further refined and built into business processes. Reporting on Q1 was presented to Budget and Scrutiny Management Board on 13 October 2022. The report on Q2 sought to build on the intelligence gathered for Q1 and offered the opportunity to assess in year progress.

There were four key components to the Corporate PMF. Combined, these provided the oversight and intelligence the council needed to determine progress in delivering the Corporate Plan and how the organisation was performing in key areas. The amount of actions on track had increased although several actions that were listed as “red” had also increased. Further improvements were expected in Q3.

### **Organisational health**

During Q2, an average of 5.29 working days per employee were lost due to sickness. This was against a target of 3.86. The largest cause of sickness was absence due to stress, depression and mental health, followed by infection and muscular-skeletal problems. COVID was deemed the main source of the “Infection” absence. A detailed review was scheduled to take place to analyse causes and trends in sickness absence.

The total percentage of leavers and starters was lower than the previous financial year. The number of apprentices had also dropped from 69 to 48.

### **Financial Performance**

Several KPIs that did not meet their performance target were highlighted to the Board. A backlog of work was currently being experienced in relation to the number of days taken to process Housing Benefit Changes in Circumstances. Good progress had been made and performance would most likely improve within the next quarter.

Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) had seen improvement in comparison to Q1. The Trust was able to bring the number of children unallocated for longer than 5 days figure down to zero in September 2022. This was a red rated KPI at Q1. The total number of children in care, as of September 2022, had also decreased. The general trend across statistical neighbours for the last 12 months has been an increase in the rate of children in care, whereas in Sandwell the rate has fallen.

However, difficulties had remained with recruiting social workers. Three project teams were in place providing interim capacity whilst the Trust continued to recruit to the workforce. Three cohorts of AYSE (assessed and supported year in employment) social workers had joined the Trust.

The high cost of placements, as well as recruitment and retention issues, meant that SCT were forecasting an overspend, against the MTFP, of £570k as at the end of Quarter 2.

Significant improvement had been reported regarding the governance, contract management and overall performance of the SERCO contract. 100% compliance with all governance meetings had been met and on-going conversations were taking place to discuss potential penalties on performance, if necessary. Missed bin monitoring was underway following disruptions in the summer, however, food waste collections had been positive and continued to improve. Street cleansing, data, reporting and systems, annual plans and contractual compliance were all areas for focus moving forward.

A brief update was provided regarding Sandwell Leisure Trust. Services would formally cease after 2 May 2023 and interim contract management measures were in place. Retrospective reports would be provided to the Board at a later date.

### **Customer Experience**

It was noted that all contact centres experienced reduced performance during Q2. The main reasons identified for the reduced performance were staff vacancies and recruitment difficulties; this was estimated to continue to impact performance moving into Q3. Additional workload due to ICT issues, Energy Rebate requests and additional support to customers due to the on-going cost of living crisis also affected performance.

Timescales for responding to Subject Access Requests (SARS) and Freedom of Information (FOIs) requests were below target, however, a slight improvement had been made when compared to Q1. Several system limitations had been identified which impacted data validity. A manual data analysis had commenced to resolve the issue.

In response to questions from members, the following clarification was given:-

- Further information would be provided on the impact of COVID related illnesses on the workforce.
- Directorates had received data from the resident engagement survey and a further breakdown and analysis was taking place.
- HR was currently investigating and identifying the key causes of stress, poor mental health and depression on staff.
- Staff were provided with information on good mental health practice via the wellbeing hub.
- Occupational Health initiatives such as the encouragement to exercise and take frequent breaks were highlighted.
- It was confirmed that a re-run of the staff survey would take place in Summer 2023.
- Further information would be provided in relation to the capital funding required for the replacement of street lights.
- A customer journey plan was currently underway to address the issues of increased demand on the Council's contact centres.

Officers were thanked for their attendance and had no specific recommendations for the Cabinet to consider on the performance management framework at this point.

7/23

## **Cost of Living**

The Director of Housing was invited to address the Board.

It was noted that the Council recognised the key role it had to play in supporting residents through the Cost of Living crisis, with the high levels of inflation and spiralling energy costs having a particular impact.

The Council already had several initiatives in place to help reach out to those in need of assistance; a dedicated webpage had been created to provide “Cost of Living Advice” to Sandwell residents, signposting those who required help where possible. Further initiatives such as the training of 80 “cost of living champions” had taken place with further champions to be identified and trained. The Library service had also agreed to utilise the community bus which would be promoted in due course. Residents could also contact Citizens Advice for further assistance and guidance.

The Household Support Fund was being used in various ways to provide support such as the provision of free school meals during holiday periods as well as providing support to care leavers. A significant increase in the number of referrals received for the Local Welfare Scheme had been witnessed and those in debt were receiving support in a more holistic way although difficulties were still experienced with reaching private sector tenants.

A cross-council piece of work to help assist those who were in debt to multiple areas of the Council was underway. In some circumstances, this could result in intervention and/or debt write off. The Council tax support fund had been agreed and announced for 2023/24.

In total, 486 winter warmth packets had been distributed and a further 114 remained for distribution; winter support packs for pets were also in place. Go Play provision had been expanded by 30 sessions between December 2022 and March 2023, the next grant cycle had been rewritten. Proposed revised actions around improving food networks were also commencing to identify need. A focussed effort was on-going to ensure families were not stuck in temporary accommodation, although, it was highlighted that the opening of Manifoldia Grange had been delayed due to water hygiene issues. Work was scheduled to start in Q4 to help tenants downsize.

Investigations into tackling loneliness and isolation within the Borough had taken place and the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board were examining the concerns further. Additionally, the Better Mental Health programme had been assessed and extended. Employee benefits were being widely promoted with 579 employees signed up in November 2022 and events were taking place to highlight employee benefits, wellbeing and cost of living advice to staff members.

“Warm Space” details were provided to the Board who noted the hard work carried out by staff and volunteers over the Christmas period. Libraries were open for a total of 150 hours over the Christmas and New Year period including at least one library being open on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year’s Day. 1,879 customers had used a warm space during this time. Donations of presents, jumpers and food parcels were handed out to those in need.

Members suggested that any further recommendations regarding the Cost of Living item be reported to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Communities Scrutiny (SNAC) Board to assist their current Scrutiny Review. It was also agreed that the SNAC Board would receive regular updates on the current position of Manifoldia Grange and invite ward members to those meetings.

In response to queries from the Board, it was confirmed that Libraries would remain flexible and welcoming to those who wished to bring pets to warm spaces. Members were minded that the Council were doing their best to ensure that no one felt left behind. Teams were currently running home checks on a prioritised basis to reach tenants that may not be able to communicate with the Council. Leaflets detailing advice on the crisis had been delivered to those living within the borough and following comments on some residents not receiving these leaflets, officers undertook to investigate.

Members noted the difficult circumstances that officers had to operate in and thanked them for their hard work.

8/23

### **Scrutiny Review - Customer Journey**

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board proposed the creation of a working group to further investigate the Customer Journey Scrutiny Review. The invitation was open to the Board. Councillors Moore, Giles, Fenton, Anandou, Bhullar and Taylor all agreed to be a member of the working group.

#### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that the draft Scoping Document for the Customer Journey Scrutiny Review, as now submitted, be approved;

- (2) that a working group be established to further investigate the Customer Journey Scrutiny Review comprising of the following members:

Councillors Moore, E M Giles, Fenton, Anandou, Bhullar and Taylor.

9/23

### **Cabinet Forward Plan**

After consideration by members of the Board, no items within the forward plan were considered for pre-decision scrutiny.

10/23

### **Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board Work Programme**

The “Update on the review of procurement and contract procedure rules” item, that was originally scheduled for consideration at the Board’s meeting on 2 February 2023, was provisionally deferred to a later meeting that was to take place on 29 March 2023.

Meeting ended at 7.56pm.

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## Minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

**Tuesday 15 November 2022 at 6.00pm**  
**In the Council Chamber at Sandwell Council House**

- Present:** Councillor Preece (Chair);  
Councillors Anandou, Choudhry, Hinchliff and Khatun.  
Mr Ager (Independent Member) and Mr Hussain  
(Independent Member)
- Officers:** Peter Farrow (Audit Services Manager); Gillian Douglas  
(Director of Housing); Rebecca Maher (Assistant Director of  
Finance); Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead – Service  
Improvement); Lee Constable (Strategic Lead – Strategic  
Assets and Land); Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration  
and Growth); Alexander Goddard (Democratic Services  
Officer); Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer).

### 54/22 **Apologies for Absence**

An apology as was received from Councillor Luke Giles.

### 55/22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.



## 56/22 Minutes

**Resolved** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

## 57/22 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business for discussion.

## 58/22 Council Improvement Plan Update

The Committee received an update on both the Council's progress against the Improvement Plan and an update on the Risk Register for the Council's Improvement Plan.

### Council Improvement Plan

The Improvement Plan incorporated all recommendations from the Grant Thornton Governance Review, the LGA (Local Government Association) Corporate Peer Challenge and the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Financial Management Review, as well as the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

There were six themes within the improvement plan; four were RAG (Red, Amber Green) rated Green, one was rated Amber and one was rated Red. Specific attention was drawn to the Strategic Direction theme; this theme was RAG rated red due to two particular high-risk areas.

The first area was slippage against the adoption of LGA guidance in relation to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda. Progress continued to be made and a consultant had been employed to assist further. It was noted that there was also slippage against the commercial strategy strand within this theme. A new "customer journey" work stream had been incorporated into the improvement plan.



The second theme of concern was the partnerships and relationships strand. This area had experienced medium slippage and was therefore RAG rated Amber. Progress had been made across all workstreams, but specific slippage had occurred around timescales regarding the contract review with Sandwell Children's Trust. Contract and KPI discussions were on-going with a provisional end date of April.

Updates against recommendations, that were raised by the Grant Thornton Review specifically for Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, were presented:

- Member learning and development plans had been created and programmed for regular reviews.
- Finance and Audit training sessions had already taken place with further training sessions scheduled soon.
- Succession planning was in place for aspiring members; work was also underway to produce specialised independent development plans.
- Cabinet forward plans were now incorporated into Audit and Scrutiny Boards and Agenda planning meetings were in place.

It was highlighted that the Improvement Plan was intended to be a "live document" in order to enable officers to change and update the plan in response to the changing environment and priorities of the Council. Descriptions and timescales had been amended across the plan in the hope of eventually reducing the number of strands so that work-strands from the Improvement Plan could be incorporated into the Corporate Improvement Plan.

The following point were confirmed in response to questions from members:-

- Some plans were overlapping due to common goals.
- In relation to organisation goals, timescales would be updated and/or extended when incorporated into the Corporate plan.
- Customer engagement sessions were wide reaching to all staff members.



- No concerns were highlighted regarding the scheduled report to government in December.
- Members would be provided with a copy of the member development check-list, if required.

### **Improvement Plan Risk Register**

An update against the Improvement Plan Risk Register was provided to the Committee. In relation to the 12 risks, three were RAG rated Green, eight were rated amber and one was rated Red.

Improvements were made against IP6 (Investment and Financial Resources). This risk measured the Council's ability to ensure that the Council had sufficient resources to deliver the improvement plan. This risk had improved from Red to Amber due to the regular monitoring around use of resources. An interim assistant director had also been employed. Future actions included the recruitment of a corporate performance management team; several offers of employment had been made to start building this team.

IP10 (Performance Management Framework and Data Quality) remained red however, data had now been identified and the embedding process was underway. The resident survey and budget consultation was underway.

Members noted the updates and thanked officers for their attendance and hard work.

**Resolved** that the Improvement Plan Update and Risk Register be noted.

59/22

### **Internal Audit Progress Report**

Progress was identified against the delivery of the 2023/23 Internal Audit Plan up to September 2022.

Each audit review that had been completed was listed, and set against the number of green, amber or red recommendations, and the level of assurance assigned to each review. Further narrative on each of the completed reviews was also provided later in the report.



It was reported that Riverside rents had consecutively seen an increase in arrears over the last several years. Recommendations were provided to Riverside to review their options on how to best pursue those arrears. A governance review within the Housing Directorate had also been carried out. It was considered that more defined terms of reference be created to better highlight the purpose of each team, however, good progress had been made overall.

Regarding the limited assurance report on the disabled facilities grant, a potential data breach had been discovered which had been referred to the information management unit for further investigation. The policies and procedures in place for administering the grant were in need of a refresh to ensure that best practice was being adhered to following the recent move of the service from Adults to Housing. A backlog of outstanding payments to contractors had been identified due to the delay in the receipt of invoices from contractors. Recommendations were made to contact the contractors to improve billing times.

Variations with the Council's cash handling processes had been identified across the Council and work was underway so that a more uniform approach could be adopted.

**Resolved** that the Internal Audit Progress Report be noted.

## 60/22 Internal Audit Charter

The Audit Services Manager sought approval of the Internal Audit Charter. It was noted that no changes had been made since the last Charter.

The Audit Charter set out how Audit, which was a statutory requirement, would operate against a set of pre-determined standards, along with their core principles and responsibilities.



The Committee noted the update and thanked officers for their attendance.

**Resolved** that the Internal Audit Charter is approved.

## 61/22 **Corporate Risk Management Strategy**

Approval of the Corporate Risk Management Strategy, following a recent review and refresh, was sought.

It was highlighted that the new strategy referenced the work of the Corporate Transformation Board and Improvement Plan as well as including extra focus on the impact of safeguarding and the risk of injury to personnel. Additionally, the previous “3 lines of defence” model had been replaced with the “3 lines model”. Following questions from members, clarification was provided on the intricate differences between the 2 models. It was considered that the clarification of details on second line roles could be included, where appropriate in future reports.

**Resolved** that the Corporate Risk Management Strategy is approved.

## 62/22 **Directorate Risk Register - Housing**

An update was received from the Director of Housing regarding the Directorate Risk Register for Housing.

Risks on the Housing Risk Register linked, where appropriate, to those found on the Strategic Risk Register. The Housing Directorate was responsible for over 27,000 homes with a further 1,000 homes being under private finance initiatives. The Directorate was also responsible for preventing and reducing homelessness as well as providing temporary accommodation.

In total, 11 risks had been identified and were monitored through the directorate risk register by the register. It was identified that of these 11 risks, two were RAG rated Green, seven were rated Amber and 2 were rated Red.





The first Red risk was “disrepair”. Nationally, many authorities were facing difficulties with damp and mould in their properties. In Sandwell, there were currently 250 cases of reported disrepair submissions from tenants. Claims had increased nationally, and work was underway to inspect properties to assess if remedial action was needed. In some cases, there was a need to offer compensation to tenants.

The second Red risk identified was the on-going impact of inflation on the cost of construction and supplies. Many contractors working on behalf of the Council were facing additional costs due to inflation, significantly raising costs. There were also difficulties in supply-chains and some contractors had withdrawn from contracts entirely.

In response to questions, officers confirmed that Sandwell would support greater oversight and regulation on exempt accommodation after recommendations were provided by the Parliamentary Select Committee. Housing, alongside the Revenues and Benefits service, were reviewing if the higher rate housing benefit was justified.

Members sought clarification on what actions were taken to reduce the homelessness risk and what could be done to reduce it further.

In total, 98 households were currently in temporary accommodation, this included 200 children. On occasion, Sandwell Council had exceeded the 6-week maximum bed and breakfast accommodation rule and work was underway to prevent this going forward. One solution that was investigated was to ensure that more in-house accommodation was available; the opening of Manifoldia Grange was highlighted as a positive step in further minimising the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

**Resolved** that the Directorate Risk Register - Housing be noted.





## 63/22 **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was presented for information and to allow the Committee an opportunity to contribute to any items or raise any issues with the Executive.

## 64/22 **Work Programme**

The Committee noted the work programme for 2022/23.

## 65/22 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

**Resolved** that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to the financial and business affairs of any person, including the authority holding that information.

## 66/22 **ICT incident Report**

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, at its meeting on 29 October 2022, requested an update on a significant ICT incident that occurred during the Summer.

Due to an accidental release of the main server room fire gas suppression system and subsequent building fabric damage, council ICT systems were severely impacted upon resulting in a loss of connectivity across the whole council for certain ICT system applications. ICT resilience plans were instigated which helped mitigate continued loss of connectivity across the council leaving only certain applications requiring further work to bring back on line.

As a result, a detailed action plan and working group had been created to prevent similar events happening in the future. The



following proposed/completed actions were presented to the Committee:-

- Additional details would be included in on-site induction for external contractors accessing the building.
- Representatives from the relevant service area will be required to be present for the duration of the works.
- Regular checks of all gases panels would be undertaken.
- ICT would carry out a range of checks on a regular basis.
- The Gas suppression system panel had been replaced for a new updated panel and the card access reader had been relocated.
- Redundant equipment had been removed to avoid confusion.
- Plans had been made to move the Council's system to the Cloud.

In response to questions from Members, it was confirmed that there were other buildings within the Council's portfolio that had similar systems in place; these systems would also be reviewed. An external contractor had been contacted to review the room layout and provide details on the best possible layout.

Meeting ended at 7.31p.m

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