

Agenda

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Thursday 23 March 2023 at 5.45pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

1 Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Members to declare any interests and party whips in relation to matters to be discussed at the meeting.

3 Minutes

7 - 30

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January and 23 February 2023.

4 Additional Items of Business

To determine whether there are any additional items of business to be considered as a matter of urgency.

5 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy

31 - 82

To consider and comment upon the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.



6	Implementation of the Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022- 2026	83 - 168
	To consider and comment on the Implementation of the Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022-2026.	
7	Report of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group - Home Checks Review	169 - 200
	To receive and comment upon the outcomes and recommendations of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group Report – Home Checks Review	
8	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing	201 - 282
	To consider and comment upon the updated Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing.	
9	Update from the Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group	283 - 284
	To receive an update from the Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group.	
10	Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Action Tracker	285 - 292
	To consider and note progress on implementation of actions and recommendations.	
11	Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan	293 - 306
	To note and review the Boards Work Programme 2023/ 23 and the Cabinet Forward Plan.	

Shokat Lal

Chief Executive

Sandwell Council House

Freeth Street

Oldbury

West Midlands

Distribution

Councillor Fenton (Chair)

Councillors Akhtar (Vice- Chair), Ashman, Bhullar, Fisher, Jalil, Kaur, Lewis,
Mayo, Shaeen and Webb

Ms Brown (Co- Opted Member)

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Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

26 January 2023 at 6pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillors Fenton (Chair), Ashman, Fisher, Lewis and Shaeen.
Phillippe Brown (Co-opted Member and Chair - Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group).

Also present: Jan Macmillian (Senior Manager – Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service (SCIPS)).
Ben Percival (Assistant Director – Borough Economy), Tammy Stokes (Service Manager – Growth and Spatial Planning), Liann Brookes- Smith (Public Health Consultant), Alan Martin (Housing Programmes and Partnerships Manager), Manny Sehmbi – Business Manager – Community Partnerships), Alexander Goddard (Democratic Services Officer), John Swann (Democratic Services Officer).

8/23 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akhtar (Vice- Chair), Bhullar, Jalil, Kaur and Webb.

9/23 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillors Ashman and Fenton declared an other interest in the matter referred to at Minute No. 12/23; Launch-Plan of the Sandwell Aquatic Centre, in that they were members of Sandwell Leisure Trust.

10/23

Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 24 November 2022 and 10 January 2023 be confirmed as correct records.

11/23

Urgent Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

12/23

Launch- Plan of the Sandwell Aquatic Centre

The Board received an overview detailing the outline plan to prepare for the opening of the **Sandwell Aquatic Centre**.

The site was due to be opened to the public from the Summer of 2023, with the first regional event due to be held in September 2023, following draft programmes having been developed in consultation with partners. The draft programme had been informed by key values including overcoming barriers to participation and the use of exercise to promote physical fitness and mental wellbeing.

The Assistant Director of Borough Economy outlined that the Sandwell Aquatic Centre had to appeal to both residents of the Borough, and regional users to ensure it was a commercially viable site.

Work had also been undertaken to draft operating procedures, with health and safety principles having been used to ensure a safe and high-quality environment for users of the facilities.

Recruitment was progressing well, an offer of employment had been made to the Head Diving Coach and the Chief Operating Officer of the Local Authority Trading Company had been in post for a two week period. Recruitment for other positions was ongoing, with staff being transferred from the Langley and Smethwick sites ensuring no redundancies would take place.

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

- That a precise opening date for Sandwell Aquatic Centre had yet to be clarified, but the Local Authority Trading Company was on target and schedule.
- The Assistant Director of Borough Economy agreed to provide further information on what action was being taken to open Langleigh swimming facilities to the public.
- A Working Group would be set up to provide support and guide both Operational and Business Planning areas.
- Further input from Ward Members and local communities would be utilised to develop plans for community groups and schools to access facilities.
- It was identified that plans remained an outline at present, with financial matters to be finalised.

Resolved that a Working Group comprised of the members of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board be established to support and guide both Operational and Business Planning areas related to the Launch-Plan of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre.

13/23 **Playing Pitch Strategy**

The Board received an overview of the **Playing Pitch Strategy**, which had been commissioned in accordance with Sport England Guidance. The Strategy was being developed and aimed to address the facility needs of identified sports across the Borough.

Playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities played a fundamental role in achieving physical activity outcomes, and improved quality of life for residents via access to local green spaces.

The Assistant Director of Borough Economy outlined that playing pitches, particularly those with natural grass, were expensive to maintain with significant resources required to ensure they were of a high standard. It was proposed that a supply and demand analysis should be used to ensure

resources were being utilised effectively, with prioritisation tools including area-by-area and site-by-site action plans, to ensure best value for money.

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

- Upon completion, the Strategy would have considered predicted population growth and existing regeneration areas.
- For facilities that were at-risk the Strategy would guide subsequent developments and protect critical assets.
- A Working Group would be set up to support the completion, adoption and implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy.

Resolved that a Working Group comprised of the members of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board be established to support the completion, adoption and implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy.

14/23

Council House New Builds Programme Update

Further to Minute No. 20/22 (30 August 2022), the Board received an Update on the Council House New Builds Programme.

The Board was informed that the Home England Grant partnership had reduced Sandwell's allocation from 195 to 123 units, as these were unable to be delivered within timescales. Challenges had been encountered by the Council and housing associations, however three selected sites have been awarded grant funding of £53,000 with increased timescales for construction.

The Housing Partnerships and Programmes Manager also outlined the recent changes to the Right-to-Buy Receipts Scheme which enabled the Council to re-invest in building replacement Council homes. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, receipts could be used by the Council to make-up 40% of the new build cost and could be used within 5 years.

The programme was funded by multiple funding sources, however higher land remediation costs and land availability in Sandwell had generated challenges.

The Board was advised of the following issues that were impacting upon scheme delivery:-

- Increased energy efficiency measures via changes to building regulations having resulted in cost per unit increasing by £10,000 – 15,000.
- Constructed tender price returns having been above scheme estimated costs due to construction cost inflation.
- Current economic conditions, having resulted in increased, fuel, transportation, and energy costs.
- Contractors having sought to negotiate after tender submission, which is against Council procurement policy.

It was accepted that current conditions were contributing to a challenging period for the Council when building new houses and the Board thanked Officers for their continued efforts.

15/23

Update of Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector to Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis.

Further to Minute No. 38/22 (1 November 2022), the Board received an Update on **Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector to Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis.**

The Board received an overview of the Council's response to the Cost of Living Crisis, including the response of third sector organisations. Feedback had overwhelmingly been positive with friends groups and support networks having been developed by residents and community groups to support people throughout the winter.

The Board heard that efforts had also been made to reduce the stigma associated with accessing warm spaces, with events including a Christmas Grotto, live music and family creative events having happened. The purpose of this was to encourage and incentivise these spaces to residents, particularly with sectors of the community less likely to access support available.

Training had been provided to warm space providers to equip staff to provide support and facilitate specialist referrals to organisations including Citizens Advice, where needed. Warm spaces grants had also been available via Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) to small organisations to support the Warm Spaces charter, with 34 groups being awarded £118,849 over the Winter period.

The Public Health Consultant outlined that libraries had been particularly instrumental with 83,495 visits since October 2022, uses included to access warm drinks and charge devices. Libraries had remained open throughout the festive period including on Christmas Day to support with referrals to water companies and financial advice.

The Board further heard that cascading information to residents about available support and remained a key focus. The Cost of Living Booklet had been sent to all households, including care homes and was available in multiple languages. In addition, the Council website had been used to map support services collate information both by type and by area to make it accessible to residents.

The Council's Cost of Living Champions programme had enabled Sandwell citizens to educate members of the public on what channels of support was available. Further sessions had been planned across the NHS and local partners, with 153 attendees to date.

Winter Warm packs have also been distributed across Sandwell for those who needed them. £10,000 was awarded to Black Country Foodbanks to use across their Sandwell sites to provide support when required to vulnerable residents.

The Board received a presentation from the Senior Manager at Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service (SCIPS) who outlined the value of Community Centres helping people during challenging times. She noted the particular success of the sessions her organisation had held informing people of the routes to access support.

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

- Not all foodbanks within Sandwell were part of Black Country Foodbanks network, meaning they had missed out on financial support.
- New methods of providing financial support to foodbanks may be required.
- A dedicated officer to answer queries, share information and support Councillors in relation to foodbank coordination would be advantageous.
- Foodbanks had largely been reliant upon volunteers to run and were low on non-food items, in particular period products.
- Poverty proofing and financial support provision for schools to be explored, particularly in relation to school trips.
- That warm packs may not have been evenly distributed across the borough, however more had been ordered to be distributed across the borough.
- The distribution of warm packs should be monitored centrally and these should be distributed direct to organisations where possible.
- There have been multiple reports of residents not receiving the Sandwell Herald, this was to be looked into as part of the corporate contract.
- The mapping of support services and foodbanks has continued to be communicated to both residents and this Board.
- Warm bank usage had been a success story across the borough; it was agreed that a statistical breakdown of warm bank usage by town be provided to the Board.
- Agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to library staff operating warm spaces in recognition for their hard work, particularly over the Christmas period.

Resolved that:-

- (1) that Director of Public Health provide a dedicated contact officer to answer queries, share information and support councillors in relation to foodbank coordination as part of the Cost of Living Crisis;

- (2) that the Director of Public Health explores providing financial support to foodbanks;
- (3) that the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board refer poverty proofing and financial support provision for schools to the Children's Services and education Scrutiny Board;
- (4) that the Director of Borough Economy arrange for letter's to be sent to library staff operating warm banks in recognition for their hard work.
- (5) Resolved that an Update **of Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector to Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis** is provided to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board on a quarterly basis.

16/23

Update from the Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group

The Board received an **update from the Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group**. The Board heard that the Group was progressing well and had utilised its January meeting to reflect on the progress of the last calendar year.

The Group was focused on partnership working with Housing Management and holding meetings with senior staff members to discuss moving forward.

The Chair of the Board thanked members of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group for their hard work and endeavours.

17/23

Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board noted its Work Programme for 2022/23 and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Meeting ended at 8.06pm

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Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**23 February 2023 at 10.18am
at the Sandwell Valley Visitor Centre Meeting Room**

Present: Councillors Fenton (Chair), Akhtar, Dunn and Lewis.
Phillippe Brown (Co-opted Member and Chair - Tenant
and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group).

In Attendance: Councillor Rollins (Cabinet Member for Leisure and
Tourism);
Alice Davey (Director of Borough Economy), Gillian
Douglas (Director of Housing), Jim Brennan (Business
Manager Tenancy and Estate Management), Nigel
Collumbell (Assistant Director – Housing Management),
Matthew Huggins (Assistant Director – Green Spaces,
Green Services and Events), Marianne Monro
(Community Partnerships Officer) and Dawn Winter
(Assistant Director – Libraries, Archives, Information
Services, Tourism and Community Hubs).

Also present: Alexander Goddard (Democratic Services Officer).

18/23 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors
Ashman, Fisher, Kaur and Shaheen.

19/23 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

20/23

Urgent Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

21/23

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour in Council Tenancies

The Board received a presentation on how the Council addressed anti-social behaviour (ASB) in Council tenancies. This included joint working between Sandwell Locals and the ASB Team. A protocol was in place that informed how different types of incident were managed – with different teams responsible for taking a lead on different issues. In general this broke down as:-

- Tenancy management aspects – Sandwell Local Teams;
- Higher risk aspects (that could include violence, drugs or domestic abuse – ASB Team).

The Protocol included measures such as a Victim Vulnerability Risk Assessment and determination of a risk rating.

The Board noted that regular meetings were held between ASB officers and Housing officers in Locals. This had multiple benefits; as well as helping with escalation of issues where required, it also helped to build the knowledge base of Housing officers on ASB issues.

An escalation process was in place which included a range of teams from across the Council with different enforcement powers. It was also possible to involve external agencies such as the Police, where appropriate.

The latest enforcement figures were presented to the Board and covered the period from January 2021 to September 2022. The figures indicated a rise in civil injunctions and fixed penalty notices, as well as the first Closure Order to prevent access to a property. It was noted that the numbers of enforcement measures were low compared to the number of warnings issued; this indicated that most people responded to the warnings and changed their behaviour.

Officers outlined the preventative work that took place to support tenants and help them change their behaviour where necessary. This included Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Good Neighbour Agreements and referrals to other support services where appropriate (e.g. substance abuse issues).

The Board noted the annual 'Safer 6' initiative and the activity that had taken place around ASB in Council tenancies, including drop-in coffee mornings and walkabouts in areas with known issues. The main objective was to raise awareness of what the Council could offer to support tenants.

A case study was shared with the Board which demonstrated the often-complex nature of ASB cases and the partnership working that was needed to ensure positive outcomes.

The Board was also informed about 'Cuckooing' which was where isolated and vulnerable people were taken advantage of by criminals and gangs who used their home as a base for criminal activities such as drug dealing or benefit scams.

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

- Noise complaints were difficult to handle, but the Council's ASB policy made it clear that one-off/occasional parties (or similar) were not ASB. For longer-term noise issues, the Council encouraged residents to speak to their neighbours as they might not be aware of the noise. The Council did have electronic equipment it could install to monitor noise and had access to an App that could be deployed to residents to measure noise. These technological options provided an objective measure of what was happening in a case.
- Misuse of common areas in blocks of flatted accommodation was an issue. The specific issues varied, but included drug-use and unauthorised access (including sleeping in common spaces). Environmental Protection Officers helped to build an information and evidence base of the issue and provide effective interventions.

- Some misuse of common areas was due to boredom experienced by young people. Where this happened it was discussed with the Council's Youth Service, at tasking meetings and with third sector partners where appropriate.
- There were no set specific levels for property condition. A shared process with tenants including a home check and discussion was utilised. Where there was a lack of awareness or ability by the tenant to care for their home the Council looked to offer support, either through advice or bringing in other agencies. The Council wanted tenancies to be successful and did not seek to take punitive approaches except as a last resort.
- A review of the Council's Voids was currently underway and would include looking at how to help tenancies get started on the right footing. The review would also look at standards of Voids, including gardens as this could impact re-let times.
- A Community Safety newsletter was available, and residents could sign up to receive it through the Council's Communications Team. Members highlighted that information could also be shared through the Sandwell Herald as well as at community spaces including the Warm Spaces initiative.

Members acknowledged that the presentation had only covered ASB in Council tenancies and asked for a further report on ASB involving private tenants and owner-occupiers to be included on the work programme for the Scrutiny Board.

Resolved that the following topics be included on the work programme for the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board:-

- (a) Anti-social Behaviour by private tenants and owner-occupiers;
- (b) Tenant Satisfaction Survey outcomes.

Towards a Heritage Strategy

The Board considered a report prepared by specialist consultants 'Towards a Heritage Strategy' which had been originally commissioned in 2021.

The Council had recognised the need to look beyond museums and arts towards a wider heritage and culture offer and strategy. The Strategy would go beyond museums and even beyond buildings themselves.

Although museum accreditation was not compulsory, it could assist the Council in attracting funding, so Wednesbury Art Gallery and Haden Hill House had been progressed for accreditation with the outcome currently awaited.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism acknowledged that the current focus on buildings as the heritage of the borough didn't work and did not resonate with the people of Sandwell. Instead the Council needed to re-consider how it engaged with residents in their heritage. Buildings could be a vehicle for telling the heritage story of Sandwell and the many communities that form it.

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

- Income generation was important to consider as it would safeguard buildings of heritage importance. One potential source of such income was weddings (and other events). Haden Hill House currently offered weddings and other venues were being considered.
- A Visitor Services Operations Manager had recently been appointed, which included venue hire, retail and catering.
- A new electronic venue hire system was being introduced in April.

- When any services were operating in a financial surplus a decision would be required as to how that surplus should be used.
- There were a wide range of community associations across the borough that would be willing to talk and discuss the heritage and history of the people they represented.
- There would be public engagement and consultation, as well as further councillor involvement. This had not yet been designed.
- It was recognised that due to limitations on storage the current Archives service did not reflect the full history of the borough or its people as it had not been possible to actively collect archival materials. The Heritage Strategy was an opportunity to rectify this.
- The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism highlighted the opportunity presented by the approaching 50th anniversary of Sandwell as a way to engage with, and hear the stories of, the people of the borough.
- The option to share heritage and archive material online would help to reach wider audiences and enhance the heritage offer through physical buildings and spaces.
- There was potential for heritage to help strengthen community cohesion through sharing of stories and histories.
- It was important to ensure that all communities were involved, not just those which had existing working relationships or avenues to express their views to the Council.
- Marketing and communication was identified as an important aspect to get right.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism undertook to discuss timelines for further reports on the Heritage Strategy journey for inclusion

on the work programme for the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.

23/23 Green Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan

The Board considered a report and presentation on the Green Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan.

It was reported that there were 543 green spaces in Sandwell. Of these there were 32 parks and gardens and the remainder were mostly green spaces such as amenity spaces, corridors and allotments.

The Board acknowledged the important role that green spaces had in Sandwell, providing places for our residents and visitors to exercise and socialise as well as provide valuable habitat for wildlife.

Members noted that there was a period of transition over the last 12 months from a reactive service to a planned and proactive programme of improvement directed at the lowest quality green spaces. This required a change in culture and approach.

The Board received an overview of the Green Spaces Audit that had been last carried out in 2018. The Audit confirmed that overall Sandwell's green spaces were low quality (with the notable exception of destination sites such as Sandwell Valley and the parks that had been awarded Green Flag status). It was reported that in terms of unrestricted access to green space, Sandwell was in the middle of its comparator group, with 3.63 hectares of such space per 1000 residents.

The Audit had set frameworks for scoring Quality and Value. For Value this included social value and value to nature; for Quality is included the green space being welcoming and clean, with adequate signage. The 2018 Audit determined the average score for Sandwell green spaces to be 34/100 – which was classed as 'poor'. It was acknowledged that this needed to be improved and would require more investment of resources in the lowest scoring sites. The targets that had been set were considered reasonable and there were some stretch targets also. It was highlighted that the initial targets

were not the end goal in themselves, but would provide a basis for further improvements.

Members noted that in the last year 158 sites had been cleared, with an identified need to strengthen cross-service work to build on this work.

The Board was advised that there were 202 Green Space Improvements Plans to be completed that would help determine the levels of resources required and the type of interventions needed to improve these spaces.

It was acknowledged that whilst parks and green spaces needed to be free at the point of access, there was demand for additional services or experiences at an additional cost. For example catering facilities; the Council had opened seven new such facilities in the last year. A pop-up coffee shop was also being trialled to see if it could work in different sites. Any surplus from these kinds of offers could be reinvested to further develop and improve the sites.

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

- The Service had been realigned within existing resources with an increased education offer bringing income and the interim Volunteer Management post bringing in person-hours.
- It was acknowledged that there was a need to improve communication with local residents, Friends groups and ward members around improvements and planned works.
- It was planned to have a new Green Space Strategy in 2025, with a mini Green Space Audit planned for the end of 2024.
- Members felt that utilising local connectivity and a multi-partner approach could allow for more effective consultation with residents. The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism highlighted that rather than a big

consultation exercise, continual engagement was the aim.

- It was suggested that a separate report on Hot Spot Solutions could be brought to a future meeting of the Board.
- There was a £4.5m programme of works set out as of November 2022. This was the first time that the Council had been able to specify where it would spend those funds, and also be held account on it.
- The Council was on target to have reviewed and repaired all play areas and outdoor gyms by the end of March 2023.
- Other strategies would underpin the wider Green Spaces Strategy such as the Allotment Strategy and the Safer Green Spaces Strategy.
- The Council was working with Sandwell College to provide an avenue for students to enter green careers. This was made possible through repurposing a previously difficult to solve problematic site into a training site.
- External funding was also actively sought including from national sports governing bodies such as the English Cricket Board and the Lawn Tennis Association.
- The maintenance of the existing Green Flag parks had been factored in to business plans.
- Events were working towards covering their costs and trials of approaches had been taken to determine commercial viability which could be scaled up in future years.

Officers felt that there had been a misunderstanding around the Friends Framework. It had been introduced to put structure in place and to provide better support for Friends groups (both of spaces as well as parks). Members felt that the language used in the new agreements as part of the Framework was potentially too strong.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism addressed the Board and confirmed that the Council was not seeking to control Friends Groups, but to set out clear expectations. It was acknowledged that the Council greatly valued Friends groups which had vast knowledge and experience.

In relation to the Friends Framework and agreements the following points and responses were made:-

- Previously more vocal groups had received a disproportionate amount of officer time. The intention of the Framework was to be clear around what the Council offered Friends groups and to ensure equality of access to officers.
- Two Friends networks had been established for the North and South of the borough to help bring Friends group members together to help share their experiences and knowledge.
- The Council had already extended the deadline for Friends groups to sign up to the new agreement and the majority of groups had already signed up.
- It might be possible to produce a simplified language overview of the agreement, but as it was a partnership agreement it was, by necessity, worded in a certain way.
- Friends groups had been consulted throughout the production of the Framework and changes had been made taking on board their feedback.
- Legal responsibilities around parks and green spaces remained with the Council – it wasn't appropriate for Friends groups to undertake works without permission for example.
- A target had been set for Friends groups to attract £10k of funding each, but this was more for Council officers to work to support and to set aspirations for Friends groups.

- The Council was putting in a range of resources to help support Friends groups – officer time, training opportunities etc. In return there was an expectation that they would put back into the park/space.

24/23

Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023-2028

The Board considered the Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023-2028 that was due to be considered by the Cabinet in March 2023.

The Strategy sought to refresh the Council's approach to the protection, enhancement and management of its tree stock in Sandwell, aligning with practice in other areas and national guidance.

For context, it was reported that there were approximately 265,000 trees in Sandwell, which covered 18.1% of the borough. As well as providing an important natural habitat for wildlife, health and wellbeing benefits to residents and reducing noise, trees provided almost £6bn in annual benefit based on carbon storage, air pollution removal and rainwater interception.

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

- Trees on Council housing land were the responsibility of the Council in its role as landlord, therefore costs associated with them were funded by the Housing Revenue Account.
- The Council would not know the extent of remedial works required until inspections were completed.
- The Council had a team of three officers trained to Level 3 in Arboriculture as well as other officers trained to a lower level that could undertake some kinds of works.

- It was planned to plant 15,000 trees by 2030; these would be in addition to those the Council plants to replace any trees that were felled. The figure would include private residents and businesses that planted trees and the Council would encourage them to register their tree.
- There had been some concerns that the introduction of technology would lead to over-monitoring of staff, but it was confirmed that the intention was to allow the Council to move to a data-led approach.
- The Council's policy in relation to healthy trees had not been amended although it was acknowledged that the application had historically not been completely consistent. This meant the Council would not fell or prune trees due to loss of light or television/satellite signal disruption.
- It was intended to survey urban street trees as 'red risk' trees and resources would be available to remediate where the need was identified.

Resolved that the following matters be included on the work programme of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board:-

- (1) Update on Grounds Maintenance (including use of technology);
- (2) Checkpoint reports throughout the first 18 months of the Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan;
- (3) Feedback from the survey of trees, to include impact on light to habitable rooms where possible.

25/23 Sandwell Valley Masterplan

Consideration of this item was deferred to a future meeting of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.

Meeting ended at 4.24pm following adjournments between 11.08am-11.17am, 12.14pm-12.28pm and 1.40pm-2.16pm.

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

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Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

23 March 2023

Subject:	Update on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy progress
Director:	Gillian Douglas - Director of Housing
Contact Officer:	Karl Robinson Business Manager – Housing Solutions and PRS


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Scrutiny Board considers and comments on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Delivery Plan.
- 1.2 That the Scrutiny Board considers the initial progress made to date in delivering the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities are required to produce on a maximum five-year cycle a homelessness review and a homelessness strategy that sets out the strategic direction that the local authority will take to tackle homelessness. The Council adopted a refreshed strategy to provide this strategic direction up to 2027 (unless significant developments require a revision at a sooner date).
- 2.2 This strategy was approved in 2022 and the Housing Solutions Service has been working with our homelessness partnership forum to develop and embed a delivery plan to ensure the key priorities in the strategy are delivered.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Strong resilient communities Feeling safe at home and in the local community is fundamental to living well and to strong community relationships. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy supports this objective.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The new strategy has been approved and in place for almost 12 months (appendix one) and the service has been working with internal and external partners as part of the partnership forum to further develop the themes/ priorities and to develop a robust delivery plan at the same time as implementing key internal actions to ensure the service is fit for purpose.
- 4.2 The key themes and priorities in the strategy set out how we will:
- prevent and relieve homelessness
 - ensuring that a range of suitable, sustainable accommodation options are available for people who are or may become homeless
 - understand our customers and the real problems to solve around homelessness
 - provide robust holistic support for people who are or may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them becoming homeless again
 - ensure that no one in Sandwell has to sleep rough
- 4.3 The vision, purpose and priorities for the strategy were set out in Section 4 of the strategy. The vision for the strategy was set out as:

To prevent homelessness and rough sleeping and where people find themselves homeless, ensure that we can resolve their housing need through a range of suitable and sustainable housing options

The key priorities were set out as follows:

1. Preventing homelessness
2. Improving communication, education and engagement
3. Enhancing housing options
4. Improving partnership, collaboration and whole system

5. Eliminating rough sleeping
6. Making best use of resources

- 4.4 The draft Delivery Plan can be found at Appendix Two and is currently undergoing consultation with key partners (commenced in February 2023) as part of the Homelessness Partnership and the service welcomes consultation with members and in particular the scrutiny group.
- 4.5 Consultation on the delivery plan commenced in February 2023 and the service is requesting comments to be provided through the Housing Strategy email box (housing_strategy@sandwell.gov.uk) and it is intended to hold a Partnership workshop in April 2023 to allow further discussion on the delivery plan and any consultation feedback. This workshop will explore the proposed actions, any new actions and will look to secure a range of partnership leads for the various themes and actions. The council encourages leadership and ownership of the actions across the various partners to ensure the plan is not wholly council owned and led.
- 4.6 Whilst the draft delivery plan at appendix two is being developed, a number of actions have been underway during the launch of the new strategy and some significant progress has been made to date. A summary of the key deliverables to date can be found below:

Theme 1 Preventing Homelessness

- Recruited more Homelessness Prevention Officers to increase staffing to help ensure that the service can carry out earlier intervention and prevention in cases of homelessness. This has been an increase in homelessness support staffing from 11 staff to 23 officers
- Rolling out an in-depth training and development programme for all staff in Housing Solutions with roll-out in February and March 2023. This includes new skills in motivational interviewing to understand the real problems to solve and awareness of the range of prevention tools available to them
- Improved the initial access channels for customers presenting, including a reception presence at the one stop shop. The service has a least three advisors available each day to support presenting demand. The service has also rolled out the self-referral mechanism through the Jigsaw IT system
- Continued to grow the Call Before You Serve support for landlords (advice and support to prevent evictions) and the Secure and Sustain incentive model to secure PRS properties for our homelessness

cases. The service has worked on over 200 cases to help prevent homelessness and secured over 100 properties for use in homelessness cases

- Using new techniques, principles and practice to understand the real problems to solve and developing a robust toolkit to help alleviate these issues
- Developed a range of tools and support as part of the homelessness toolkit, providing expert support to case officers to help prevent and relieve homelessness

Theme 2 - Improve Communication, Education and Engagement

- Developing a communications plan to communicate the new operating model and to stress the benefits of early intervention with customers and partners. This will be launched on completion of the staff training programme and will be reinforced at quarterly intervals to ensure the message remains refreshed
- Started to rebrand Housing Solutions communications including the website, information packs and guides for customers, streamlining the volume and content. There is now one single Homelessness and Housing Options in Sandwell information pack that can be found at Appendix three.

Theme 3 – enhancing housing options

- Developed a draft Housing Strategy in conjunction with the Housing Needs Assessment
- Enhanced the current incentive model for the PRS to secure housing for people who are at risk of or already homeless – the council is now working with more landlords than ever before and are being offered properties every week to help us meet our homelessness duties and to secure longer term housing
- Developed a new structure and operating model for the PRS Support and Housing Standards team to ensure we have sufficient capacity to work with the sector. This will ensure that the service can improve quality of stock and tenancy management to prevent evictions and unsafe properties. This will increase capacity in this service from 16 to 26 staff
- Developed a Housing Association Panel/Forum to help prevent homelessness and explore totality of stock options across the borough
- In consultation with Housing Associations the service is implementing new Nominations Agreements which will see some providers increase the proportion of properties they offer through the councils choice based letting process. The new nominations agreement has

strengthened the duty to collaborate where there is a risk of homelessness with their tenants and in securing properties for people who are homeless

- Commenced a systemic review into Supported Housing pathway and provision, including a review of supported accommodation needs to recommission provision in 12 months' time
- The service is mobilising 40 additional units of self-contained temporary accommodation to reduce use of bed and breakfast for families. The self contained accommodation will follow the same design as Applewood Grove and, with staff on site, will help ensure we move people on quickly
- The service is currently retendering for the temporary accommodation emergency provision and has built in additional service standards around quality and regular inspection

Theme 5 – Eliminating Rough Sleeping

- Enhanced the outreach capacity within the service to 2 dedicated officers and improved partnership with environmental protection, police and fire service. Partners now regularly refer in people who are sleeping rough and the service responds within a matter of hours
- Developed a pathway for people who have no recourse to public funds who are at risk of or already sleeping rough – secured £20,000 from DLUHC as part of Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding to provide emergency accommodation to this group. This will last until the end of 2023/24 at which point a new bid will be submitted
- Secured £160,000 from the RSI to provide dedicated mental health and drug and alcohol support to people who are at risk of or already sleeping rough until the end of 2023/24. This is to help alleviate some of the backlog in the health system for diagnosis by ensuring people get the diagnosis they need and subsequent access to medication and support. It is intended that this will allow the service to catch up with this latent demand
- Established a pathway to support people leaving prison to ensure they do not sleep rough
- Commenced use of 33 self-contained units of emergency accommodation at a decommissioned Extra Care Scheme (Holly Grange) for people who were at risk of or already homeless – this is supported by officers who provide case management and coordination of services to ensure successful move on to sustained accommodation and has brought an empty property back in to use. The service has now successfully housed 89 people who were a risk of or already homeless
- In the annual national rough sleeper count in November 2022 the Council recorded 2 rough sleepers – the same formal count process

reported a figure of 14 in November 2018. Sandwell was the only council in the West Midlands Combined Authority to see a reduction on the previous year for the 2022 count

- 4.7 The Sandwell Homelessness Partnership will continue to provide governance and oversight ensuring implementation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, including monitoring of the delivery plan and delivery against the key objectives.
- 4.8 The Partnership comprises of representation from Sandwell Council (officers and Councillors), other statutory bodies, third sector and voluntary sector organisations that operate within Sandwell. The role and membership of the Partnership will grow over the life of this strategy and we will be looking to embed the involvement of people with lived experience into the Partnership during 2022/23.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 There are no alternative options as the Council is obliged under law to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and associated delivery plan.

6 Implications

Resources:	There are a range of budgets that support delivery of homelessness including the Homelessness Prevention Grant, Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme. This funding is ringfenced specifically to preventing homelessness and supporting people at risk of or already sleeping rough
Legal and Governance:	<p>Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities are required to produce on a maximum five-year cycle a homelessness review and a homelessness strategy that sets out the strategic direction that the local authority will take to tackle homelessness. The strategy and delivery plan has been revised in compliance with this legislation.</p> <p>The Sandwell Homelessness Partnership will provide governance and oversight ensuring implementation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, including monitoring of the delivery plan and delivery against the key objectives. Unless there are major legislative changes or significant service changes this strategy will be reviewed every five years.</p>
Risk:	The delivery plan will be assessed for any elements of risk as the plan is finalised through consultation. To date no significant risks have been identified in the proposed delivery plan.
Equality:	To date no equality issues have been identified in regard to the protected characteristics – which were addressed in the assessment against the strategy in 2022.
Health and Wellbeing:	The health and wellbeing benefits of living in a decent sustainable home are well documented in improving a wide range of both physical and mental health determinants. This delivery plan supports this objective by enabling people affected by homelessness to access an affordable sustainable home.
Social Value	As identified above

7. **Appendices**

Appendix One: Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy

Appendix Two: Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Delivery Plan

Appendix Three: Homelessness and Housing Options in Sandwell information pack

8. **Background Papers**

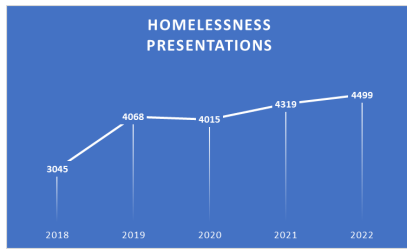
None

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Progress Update – March 2023

- Where are we now
- What challenges do we face
- Next steps

Where are we now – in numbers



Increasing demand

Enhanced homelessness prevention with successful prevention in 67.3% of cases



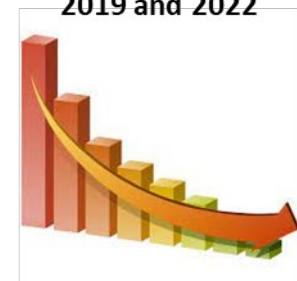
Supported over 150 rough sleepers with accommodation and support



Housed 84 rough sleepers in secure longer term accommodation



Reduced the prevalence of rough sleepers by 85% between 2019 and 2022



Where are we now – in numbers

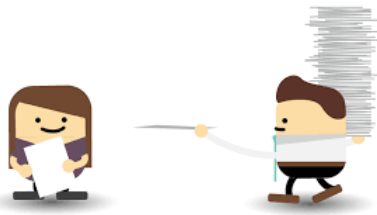


Secured £250k of additional grant/ bid funding for the service in 2022



Introduced Call Before You Serve which provides support to landlords to prevent evictions – supported over 200 cases

Increased staff capacity by 25 staff



Reviewed Housing Solutions Service and implementing new operating model



Introduced incentives for PRS landlords to increase housing options – 150 tenancies commenced in the last 2 years

Where are we now – in action

- Implementing new strategy
- Completing redesign of the Housing Solutions and PRS service – changing out approach to helping our customers
- Enhanced front door/ customer journey
- Increased capacity across all areas
- Introduced new nominations agreements
- Mobilising additional in-house TA units
- New protocol for people with No Recourse
- Opened 33 units of accommodation of single people who were rough sleeping or with complex needs

What challenges do we face

- Increasing demand year on year – growing demand from section 21 evictions
- Cost of living pressures
- Delay in picking up cases affected the service in 2022
- Increasingly more difficult to access the PRS
 - High demand in the sector
 - Market rent higher than LHA rate
- Rising numbers in temporary accommodation
- Increased pressure on housing through resettlement schemes and asylum move on
- Rising prevalence of rough sleeping nationally

What Next

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- **Implementation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated delivery plan**
- Managing the current and future potential step change in demand
- Improving access to viable housing options
- Embedding the new operating model and required culture change
- Reducing the number of households in TA
- Enhancing partnerships to deliver against the delivery plan objectives
- Continued development of PRS support/ incentives and enforcement action where there are standards issues
- Bringing empty properties back in to use

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DRAFT - Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Delivery plan 2022/23 to 2027/28

Theme 1 - Preventing Homelessness

Ref:	Action	Lead Organisation	Lead Job Title	Supporting Organisations	Resources	Priority	Timescale
4.1 (a)	Effectively resource the homelessness prevention model within Sandwell Council's Housing Solutions Service	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	High	March 2023
4.1 (b)	Analyse data and trends relating to homelessness presentations and outcomes to understand intervention points, patterns of homelessness and effective action	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager – (People) Housing solutions. Assisted by strategy policy and performance analyst		Within existing resources	High	Ongoing
4.1 (c)	Develop a training programme on the work of Housing Solutions for key partners to include job shadowing	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	Medium	June 2023
4.1 (d)	Continue to promote and enhance Call Before You Serve within the PRS to develop communication channels to inform us as early as possible of forthcoming tenancies at risk	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager – (PRS) Housing Solutions	Landlord Steering Group	Within existing resources	Medium	Ongoing
4.1 (e)	Embed the homelessness support model with the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment & Strategy – making best use of New Burdens funding	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Black country women's aid	New Burdens Funding	High	TBC
4.1 (f)	Develop a Duty to Collaborate across key partners to ensure a key worker model is successful and that we can	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	High	Sept 2023

	reduce the need for a customer to repeat their story						
4.1 (g)	Develop a robust partnership led toolkit for homelessness prevention and intervention based on understanding the real problems to solve and intelligence gathered as part of 4.1 (b)	Partner volunteer required					
4.1 (h)	Implement a robust training and development plan for the new Housing Solutions delivery model	Sandwell Council	Strategy policy and performance – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	Medium	March 2023

Theme 2 - Improve Communication, Education and Engagement

Ref:	Action	Lead Organisation	Lead Job Title	Supporting Organisations	Resources	Priority	Timescale
4.2 (a)	Raise awareness of the Housing Options service with partners and customers to ensure that opportunities for prevention and early intervention can be maximised	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	Medium	Ongoing
4.2 (b)	Develop a Sandwell Communications and Promotion Plan with a clear brand for homelessness and rough sleeping support which is used in all future communications and promotion of the service	Sandwell Council	Strategy policy and performance – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	Medium	September 2023
4.2 (c)	Develop effective communication channels geared around demand i.e. targeted at the top reasons for homelessness specific to Sandwell	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager – Housing Solutions (People)		Within existing resources	Medium	Ongoing
4.2 (d)	Map partners and stakeholders and identify the role of each key partner in early intervention and prevention and in addressing the risk of homelessness	Partner volunteer required		Strategy policy and performance – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	October 2023
4.2 (e)	Identify the key communications and promotion messages based on an assessment of the intelligence gathered under 4.1 (b)	Partner volunteer required		Strategy policy and performance – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	May 2023

4.2 (f)	Introduce webchat service within Housing Solutions to enhance the access channels for customers, allowing more self-service advice and homelessness application	Sandwell Council	Business Manager - Housing Solutions			Low	January 2024
4.2 (g)	Review the Sandwell Council website and ensure it encompasses the new service design, consistent brand and robust information and guidance	Sandwell Council	Strategy policy and performance – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	Medium	June 2023
4.2 (h)	Develop a panel of customers with lived experience of homelessness/ rough sleeping to support reviewing customer satisfaction and to continually review the processes and information provided	Sandwell Council	Operations Manger – (People)		Within existing resources	Medium	June 2023
4.2 (i)	Ensure panel representation on the Sandwell Homelessness Partnership Board	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	High	June 2023

Theme 3 - Enhancing Housing Options

Ref:	Action	Lead Organisation	Lead Job Title	Supporting Organisations	Resources	Priority	Timescale
4.3 (a)	Develop a clear understanding of market demand and capacity with associated Gap Analysis	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions			High	September 2023
4.3 (b)	Develop a housing strategy and housing needs assessment	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions			Medium	January 2024
4.3 (c)	Petition national government around affordable LHA rates to increase allowance in line with market rent pressures	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions			Low	-
4.3 (d)	Enhance the current incentive model for the PRS to secure housing for people who are at risk of or already homeless – explore the option of a Social Lettings Agency or Lease Scheme	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager – Private rented sector	Landlord Steering Group		Medium	September 2023
4.3 (e)	Implement the new structure and operating model for PRS support and standards team and work within the sector to improve quality of stock and tenancy management to prevent evictions and unsafe properties	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager – Private rented sector			High	April 2023
4.3 (f)	Develop Housing Solutions Forum to help prevent homelessness and explore totality of stock options across the borough	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions			High	July 2023

4.3 (g)	Negotiate and implement a nominations Agreements in partnership with providers to increase the proportion of stock provided through nominations	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions			High	April 2023
4.3 (h)	Carry out a systems review of Supported Housing provision and processes to ensure rapid access to suitable accommodation, tailored to the needs of clients	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (Property)			Medium	June 2023
4.3 (i)	Utilise housing needs analysis data and intelligence gathered under 4.1 (b) to inform the property acquisition and new build programme	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (Property)			Medium	ongoing

Theme 4 - Improving partnership collaboration and whole system

Ref:	Action	Lead Organisation	Lead Job Title	Supporting Organisations	Resources	Priority	Timescale
4.4 (a)	Develop a Partnership Redesign sub group	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	High	September 2023
4.4 (b)	Build a picture of the whole system across all sectors to understand opportunities to intervene and design an end to end system	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	High	December 2023
4.4 (c)	Identify options to change the system to address issues and maximise opportunities – identify short, medium and long-term action plan	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	March 2024
4.4 (d)	Develop options to improve the system as a partnership body	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	June 2024
4.4 (e)	Pilot and test new ways of working as a partnership body based on the findings of 4.4 a-d	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	December 2024
4.4 (f)	Review pilot outcomes and roll-in any new ways of working	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	January 2025 onwards
4.4 (g)	Implement quick-wins from the Build a Picture phase above	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	Ongoing

4.4 (h)	Identify opportunities to remove/mitigate key risk points	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	Ongoing
4.4 (i)	Map out and understand the agencies involved in support for customers	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	June 2023
4.4 (j)	Establish cross partnership working and improve data sharing	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions			June 2023
4.4 (k)	Develop joint customer support plans	Partner volunteer required		Business Manager – Housing Solutions	Within existing resources	Medium	December 2023

Theme 5 - Eliminating rough sleeping

Ref:	Action	Lead Organisation	Lead Job Title	Supporting Organisations	Resources	Priority	Timescale
4.5 (a)	Promote the Rough Sleeper notification channels and ensure ease of access to report rough sleepers in the borough	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (People)		Within existing resources	Medium	June 2023
4.5 (b)	Enhance the current outreach provision through joint working with partnership increase coverage and share intelligence	Partner volunteer required				Medium	September 2023
4.5 (c)	Understand the cross-sector resources that can be utilised and map this shared capacity	Partner volunteer required				Medium	September 2023

4.5 (d)	Map out voluntary sector capacity to support rough sleepers with meeting their holistic support plan	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (People)		Within existing resources	Medium	November 2023
4.5 (e)	Identify gaps in provision and identify possible solutions/ provision	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (People)		Within existing resources	Medium	Ongoing
4.5 (f)	Develop partnership pathway for households with NRPF to ensure we make best use of resources whilst remaining in line with use of public resources	Sandwell Council	Adults Social Care TBC			Medium	June 2023
4.5 (g)	Mainstream the prison/probation move on pilot and provision	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (People)		Within existing resources	Medium	June 2023
4.5 (h)	Mainstream the hospital discharge pathway and move on provision	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (Property)		Within existing resources	Medium	June 2023
4.5 (i)	Develop the complex accommodation provision at Holly Grange and establish effective move on pathway	Sandwell Council	Operations Manager (People)		Within existing resources	High	March 2023
4.5 (j)	Consider the option of developing (in a controlled way) the Supported Exempt Accommodation market in Sandwell – where providers work in partnership with Housing Solutions Service	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions			High	September 2023

Theme 6 - Making best use of resources

Ref:	Action	Lead Organisation	Lead Job Title	Supporting Organisations	Resources	Priority	Timescale
4.6 (a)	Develop and embed the new strategy, policy and performance capacity, embedding this as part of the partnership governance arrangements	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	Medium	September 2023
4.6 (b)	Ensure horizon scanning for opportunities and identify opportunities for bids	Sandwell Council	Business Manager – Housing Solutions		Within existing resources	High	ongoing

Homelessness and Housing Options in Sandwell

For further help and support visit our website:

www.sandwell.gov.uk/housing

If you are using this document on paper, then use your search engine to search for 'Sandwell Council Housing Solutions'

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Introduction

This information pack has been put together to help you explore your housing options. If you need to move for any reason, are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless it can be a very stressful time.

The most important thing you can do is contact Housing Solutions as early as possible as the more time we have to help you, the greater the chance we can help secure housing without the need for temporary emergency accommodation.

Call us on 0121 368 1166 (option 2) or register directly to the service on <https://live.housingjigsaw.co.uk> as soon as you realise you need help

There are a lot of myths surrounding homelessness, council housing, private sector housing and temporary accommodation. This information pack aims to address these myths and to help you understand your choices and what help is available to you.

What to do if I am at risk of or already homeless?

The Housing Solutions Service is here to help you if you are at risk of or already homeless. In 2018 new legislation came into effect (Homelessness Reduction Act) and brought with it the biggest change to homelessness duties for councils in 30 years.

The intention of the Act was to ensure that prevention took priority over supporting at the point of crisis and as such, new duties were introduced:

- Improvements in the quality of advice and information,
- Prolong the period during which you are classed as being “threatened with homelessness” from 28 days to 56 days,
- An increase in the responsibility for councils with regard to tackling homelessness, and
- The development of personalised housing plans outlining the steps to be taken by you and us in order to secure accommodation

What does this mean for you?

This means we want you to contact us as soon as you realise you are at risk of becoming homeless. We are here to help and this information pack will talk you through some of the options you have to help yourself and the tools we will use to help either keep you in your current home or help secure a new home for you.

The best solution is for us to help keep you in your current home. This will be less disruptive for you, your family and those people who support you. It will also cost you less in moving costs, decorating and other associated costs. This is always our preferred approach if there is time to prevent your homelessness.

If we cannot help you stay where you are, we will work with you to secure alternative accommodation before you are made homeless from your current home. The last thing we want to do is to place you in emergency accommodation. The temporary accommodation (TA) we have can include hostels, some of our own flats and bed and breakfast, including those with shared bathrooms and kitchens. If you are placed in these, it will be for a short time period and will not be as comfortable as a more permanent home. Most will have less rooms than a longer-term home will have and B&B’s tend not to have cooking facilities. Furthermore, there is little choice over the TA available and you could end up placed in a completely different area from where you live now. The TA we have has basic furnishing and is not suitable for long periods of stay.

It is important to point out that being in TA will not necessarily increase your chance of getting a council house as there are a lot of factors that influence your banding. This is explained later on in this pack.

Call us on 0121 368 1166 (option 2) as soon as you realise you need help

How do I apply for council housing?

Before considering applying for council housing there are some things you need to understand and there are criteria you will need to meet to be eligible.

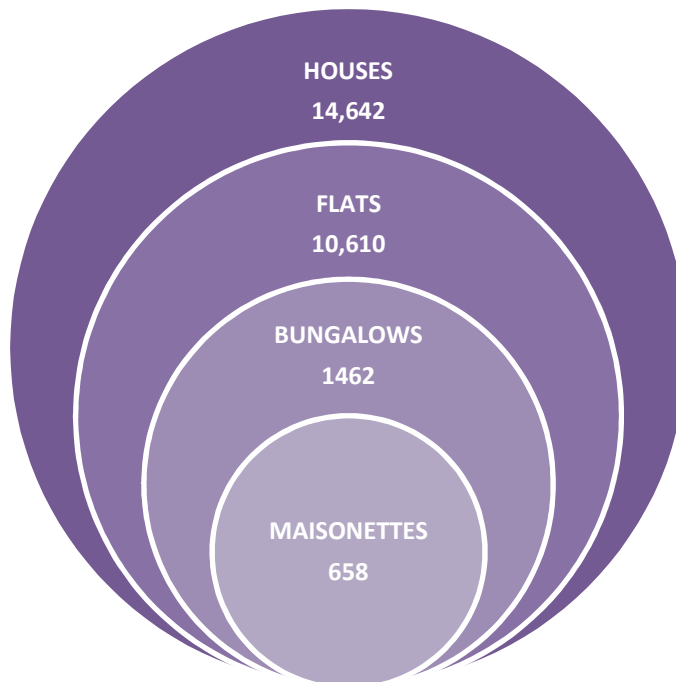
It is important you understand the likelihood of getting a council house and how long it may take. This may influence your decision around your housing options and if you are at risk of or already homeless, then it is not likely going to be a solution for you in the short term.

Sandwell Council, like most councils, does not have the same amount of properties it used to have. In 1980 the council had 55,000 properties and we now have less than half this number.

This section covers some key numbers that will help you understand the likelihood of getting a council property:

Council property profile

The council has just over 27,300 properties. The types of properties can be seen in the diagram/ table below:



Property profile by type and bedroom size

Property Type	Bedrooms								% of total properties
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	
BUNGALOW	2	1291	155	12	2	0	0	0	5%
FLAT	43	5929	4365	273	0	0	0	0	39%
HOUSE - DETACHED	0	0	3	27	8	1	0	0	0%
HOUSE - TERRACED	0	2	1372	5167	192	9	3	0	25%
HOUSE - SEMI	0	0	1609	5323	399	0	0	0	27%
MAISONETTE	0	1	389	268	0	0	0	0	2%
TOWN HOUSE	0	0	0	526	0	0	0	1	2%

40% of the council stock are flats

54% of the council stock are houses

5% of the council stock are bungalows

Whilst the council has 27,300 properties, there are **over 6370 households on the waiting list** and last year the **council let 1810 properties**.

The council waiting list by band can be seen below:

Band	Total
Band 1	462
Band 2	750
Band 3	1757
Band 4	36
Band 5	3371

There is a lot of demand for council housing and even if no new applicants came forward, **it would take 3 and a half years to clear the current housing waiting list**. We see around 90 new applicants apply every week, so this number rarely reduces.

Given the fact we have 6370 people on the register and only 1810 lettings in 2019, this significantly affects how many people bid on a property and how long it will take for you to get a council property.

The table over the page shows the average number of bids per property type:

Property Type	Average Bids Per Property Type
Bungalow	19
Flat	26
House	175
Maisonette	89
Other	60

The lowest demand for a property is for Bungalows at 19 bids (however, bungalows tend to go to a specific group/ need including over 55's and medical priority) and the highest demand we see is for houses. The lowest demand for houses is for an end terraced town house at an average of 102 bids. The highest demand is for a semi-detached parlour house at 194 bids. This means that when you first register you are likely to be in a queue of between 26 and 194 households (when excluding bungalows).

Now you understand how many bids each type of property has; the table below shows the average wait time for all bands for each property type:

Property Type	Average no. of weeks to secure property
Bungalow	39.63
Flat	20.94
House	87.07
Maisonette	24.29
Town House	85.84

It is important to note that these timescales are the average for all bandings. It is also important to note that bungalows and low-rise flats are more likely to go to band 1 and band 2 people with medical needs and this will be affecting the average wait times for these properties.

The average wait would be 1 year and 9 months for a house and is dependent on your banding*

Wait times for flats are shorter but are likely to be at least 6 months

If you are band 4 or 5 and are looking for a house, you will secure a house quicker in the private sector

*this is the average wait for a house and is likely to apply to those people in higher bandings. If you are in band 4 and 5 your wait will be significantly longer

BE REALISTIC ABOUT YOUR CHANCES OF SECURING A COUNCIL PROPERTY

- The shortest average wait time is 20 weeks and if you want a house, this increases to 1 year and 9 months.
- Large families – even in Band 2 will wait a few years to secure a council house
- All council properties are in great demand however houses are in greater demand than flats
- In some areas the average applicant will wait over 3 years to secure a property
- The average wait time is over a year for 11 of the 19 property types in the table above
- The lower your banding the longer the wait time will be and for those in band 4 and 5, it will be significantly longer than the table suggests

Am I eligible and what banding would I be in?

To be eligible under the new policy you will need to meet the following criteria:

- Aged 18 years or over and [meet the qualification rules](#) or aged 16 or 17 years in specific circumstances

Qualification rules:

- Two-year local connection with Sandwell, or
- A social housing tenant living in Sandwell, or
- Serving in regular forces now or in last 2 years, or
- Armed forces and in urgent housing need, or
- Divorced/separated spouse/civil partner required to move out by MOD, or
- Care Leaver, or
- Persons moving-on from supported or refuge accommodation who meet various requirements

Non- Qualification (you will not qualify if any of these criteria apply unless there are exceptional circumstances or a high level of risk. These exceptions will be on a case by case basis):

- Person subject to immigration control
- Owner occupiers with no reasonable preference
- Owner occupiers with a reasonable preference but with equity to meet own housing needs
- Serious unacceptable behaviour
- Current/former rent arrears or housing related debt
- False information/withholding information

- Deliberately worsened housing circumstances

The table at appendix 1 will help you understand what band you are likely to be placed in (subject to assessment and evidence).

The information above demonstrates that average wait times for council properties are exceptionally high and we have limited stock becoming available.

Please bear this in mind when looking at your housing options and if you are considering joining the council's housing register. Where possible you should keep your options open, and always consider Private Rented Sector (PRS) housing (discussed in the next section). You can remain on the council's housing register in the relevant banding if you accept a PRS property as long as you change your address and are eligible (e.g. have not accrued arrears).

What other options are available to me?

We have explored how to apply for a council property, whether you are likely to be eligible and the likelihood of securing a property quickly.

To have the best chance of securing a new home, especially if you are at risk of or already homeless, we have provided some useful tips and advice for finding accommodation in Sandwell.

The information includes:

- What other housing options are available to you?
- What is available in Sandwell and how to access it?
- How we can help and offer advice so you can make the right decision for you?

If you are at risk of homelessness, the council will provide you with help and support to source accommodation; and by working together with your Housing Solutions Officer you will be able to explore your full housing options.

When beginning your search for alternative accommodation it is important to remember that there is a shortage of affordable accommodation both locally and nationally; therefore, it is important that you approach your search with an open mind. You will greatly increase your chances of finding a suitable property by following the tips set out in this pack, creating a plan and keeping an open mind about your housing options.

Throughout this booklet we will refer to Private Rented Sector (PRS) properties, which mean properties that are owned by private individual(s) and rented out to single people and/or families. The term 'Social Rented Housing' refers to properties that are owned and rented out by housing associations or the council.

It is important that you keep this booklet as it contains useful information and will form part of your Housing Needs Assessment and Personal Housing Plan.

If you have any questions about the information in this booklet please contact Housing Solutions for further help and support please visit our website at: www.sandwell.gov.uk/housing or call us on 0121 368 1166 (option 2)

Private Rented Sector Options

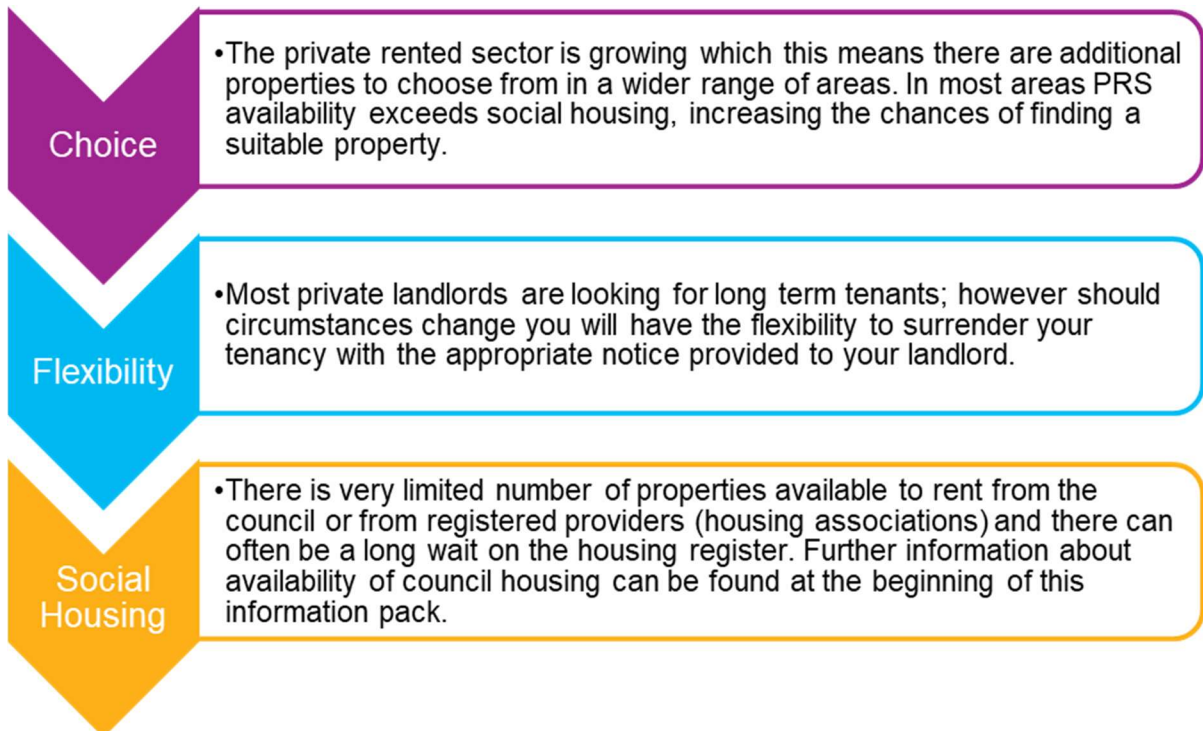
A Private Rented Sector property could be any type of residential property such as a house, flat, maisonette or bungalow. The property is owned by an individual or private company who then allows someone to live in it for a rental payment. In Sandwell we have a good supply of private rented properties.

It is often easier, quicker and more convenient to secure a private rented property rather than experiencing a long wait on the councils waiting list. You can remain on the councils housing register in the relevant banding if you accept a PRS property as long as you change your address and are eligible (e.g. have not accrued arrears).

There are many factors to consider when searching for a new property, the main three are:

1. Affordability
2. Location
3. How you will find a property

Why Rent Privately?



Deposits

Most Landlords or Estate Agents will require a deposit and a month's rent before you move into a property.

If you need help with a deposit, there are a couple of options which may be available to you:

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

Discretionary Housing Payment is a payment you may receive at the discretion of the local authority to help towards housing costs; however, you can only get it if you are entitled to Housing Benefit/Universal Credit (housing costs element). It is available to people who are not receiving enough to cover their rent.

It is also available for costs like a rent deposit, rent in advance or removal costs to help you move into a new home. DHP cannot be used to cover an increase in rent due to arrears or to make up the difference if an overpayment is being recovered.

For more information including how to apply please visit:

http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200154/housing_benefit/2170/problems_with_paying

You can apply for a DHP via the Sandwell Council Website and creating a My Sandwell Account. Further information can be found in the DHP Factsheet later in this pack

<https://my.sandwell.gov.uk/ssauth/register>

Homeless Prevention Fund

You may be able to access the Homeless Prevention Fund if you are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Homeless Prevention Fund can assist with preventing your homelessness by helping you remain in your current accommodation, or with securing new accommodation for example by contributing towards a deposit. For further information about the Homeless Prevention Fund please speak to your Housing Solutions Officer.

Your landlord must put your deposit in a government-backed tenancy deposit scheme (TDP).

In England your deposit can be registered with

- Deposit Protection Service
- MyDeposits (including deposit that were held by Capita)
- Tenancy Deposit Scheme

The Tenant Fees Act 2019

The Tenant Fees Act came into force 1st June 2019 and applies to new or renewed tenancy agreements since this date.

From 1st June 2019, Landlords or letting agents can only ask for the following:

- Rent in advance up to 5 weeks
- A deposit up to 5 weeks
- A refundable holding deposit (to reserve a property) capped at no more than 1 week's rent
- Payments associated with early termination of the tenancy, when requested by the tenant

Affordability

When considering renting a property you will need to work out how much you can afford to spend on rent each month. If you are on a low income you may be entitled to financial help with your renting costs through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

The amount of Housing Benefit paid to private tenants is capped at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates; and your LHA rate is worked out against your bedroom allowance (see table below).

The following bedroom entitlement is based on Local Housing Allowance rates:

- Two people over 10/under 21 are expected to share a room if they are the same sex;
- Two people under 10 are expected to share a room regardless of their sex;
- You are entitled to one bedroom for each single person or couple aged over 21.

The table below summarises current Local Housing Allowance room rates, valid until 31 March 2020. Please note that this is the maximum amount of LHA you will get – your actual benefit may be less depending on the amount of money you have coming in and if other adults apart from your partner live with you.

Number of Bedrooms	Category	Weekly Amount	Monthly Amount
1 bedroom with shared facilities	A	£60.00	£240.00
1 bedroom self-contained	B	£86.30	£345.20
2 bedrooms	C	£104.89	£419.56
3 bedrooms	D	£123.90	£495.60
4 or more bedrooms	E	£151.50	£606.00

These rates sometimes change so please follow the link below to see what the latest figures are <https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/search.aspx>

Remember, if you are struggling with a shortfall you can apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment from the Housing Benefit department. Please see earlier section in this booklet for further information.

Other Costs

Your Housing Solutions Officer will complete an income and expenditure form with you which can be used to help you take control of your financial situation. Once you know where you're spending your money, you can start to alter and prioritise what you do with your money to enable you to stick within your means and budget effectively.

Renting a home involves more than just being able to pay your rent. Below is a list of the most common bills you should expect to pay as a tenant:

- Water bills (usually paid monthly)
- Service charges (in some properties – paid monthly or annually)
- Council Tax

- Gas and Electricity bills (either by a pre-payment meter, monthly by Direct debit)
- TV Licence – monthly or Direct Debit

How to Search For a Property

Below is a list of some online websites which could help you begin your property search:

www.rentswellinsandwell.co.uk

www.mlas.org.uk

www.gumtree.co.uk

www.connells.co.uk

www.rightmove.co.uk/

www.zoopla.co.uk

www.dssmove.co.uk

www.spareroom.co.uk

You can also visit a Lettings Agents who advertise homes for rent on property websites and in their offices.

Try the local high street in the area of Sandwell you would like to live for Estate/Letting Agents.

You can also try shop windows or noticeboards for rooms or properties to rent. Landlords sometimes advertise their properties in local newspapers.

The council may also be able to help put you in contact with landlords.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE COUNCIL CAN DISCHARGE ITS HOMELESSNESS DUTY TO YOU THROUGH THE OFFER OF A SUITABLE PRIVATE RENTED PROPERTY AND WE WILL DO THIS WHERE IT IS APPROPRIATE.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) are payments made by the council to people who need extra help with their 'housing costs'. DHP's are not Housing Benefit or Housing Costs (Universal Credit), but you must be in receipt of one or both of these benefits to be able to claim.

DHP's are paid for a limited period and are intended as a short-term measure to alleviate poverty or difficult circumstances. You may be able to get DHP to help with a deposit for a private tenancy or towards removal costs to relocate. Awards are made on individual circumstances and you will be expected to fully explain your finances, debts and any other reasons why you are finding it difficult to meet your housing costs. You cannot claim DHP to cover the shortfall due to benefit sanctions or reductions, or suspended payments of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit.

DHP does not cover services such as heating or water rates charges which may be added to your rent.

Who can apply?

If your Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit does not cover your full rent or council tax, leaving you struggling with an amount to pay, you may be able to get a 'top up' of DHP. If your Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit covers all your rent and council tax then you will not qualify for any DHP. If you are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (both care and mobility components), Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Allowance and Carers Allowance this income will be fully disregarded when assessing your claim. If you are a claimant in receipt of these benefits who is applying for a DHP due to bedroom tax, you will be awarded a DHP equal to the bedroom tax reduction (i.e. 14% or 25% of the eligible rent). Each application is considered on its own merits.

How do I apply?

You can claim DHP via an online form at www.sandwell.gov.uk.

Eviction – Section 21 2 minute Guide

I am being evicted, what do I do?

If you live in a private rented property and your landlord has said you have to leave, in most cases they have to serve what is called a section 21 notice. This is the notice that can start the legal process to end an assured shorthold tenancy – which most people in a private rented property have.

A section 21 notice should be issued to you on something called a form 6A (a copy of a form 6A is attached to this guide so you know what to look out for).

It will set out your tenancy address, your name and should be signed and dated. The landlord cannot just send you a text, letter or email telling you that you have to leave and cannot specify just any date. They have to follow the rules set out below about your notice period.

Your landlord doesn't need to give a reason for wanting you to leave but they must follow certain rules if they want to give you a section 21. For example, protect your deposit and give you a gas safety certificate.

Notice periods have changed several times because of coronavirus and how much notice you're entitled to depends on when you were given notice:

When you were given notice	Minimum notice period
On or after 1 October 2021	2 months
Between 1 June 2021 and 30 September 2021	4 months
Between 29 August 2020 and 31 May 2021	6 months
Between 26 March and 28 August 2020	3 months
Before 26 March 2020	2 months

From 1 October 2021 all section 21 notices must give at least 2 months' notice and your landlord can only apply to court after the notice period ends.

I haven't had a section 21

If you have not had a section 21 (or a section 8) from your landlord and they are asking you to leave, you must not leave the tenancy or hand the keys over unless you have somewhere else to go. If you do, you may be classed as intentionally homeless when you come to us for help.

Instead, contact your landlord or agent and advise them that they must follow the section 21 process and any notice aside from this is not valid. If the landlord or agent wants to speak to us about it, we have a team dedicated to helping landlords meet their requirements. Please pass on the mobile number to them 07586 622202.

Eviction – Section 21 2 minute Guide

It's an illegal eviction if you're forced to leave without the legal process being followed and we would advise you not to leave the property or hand the keys in before the date of the notice expiring. If you do, you could be making yourself intentionally homeless and may struggle to get further help.

If they attempt to carry out an illegal eviction, call the mobile number above and a member of the team will help by contacting the landlord – do not leave the property or hand over keys until you have spoken to us. If the landlord still proceeds with an illegal eviction, we will consider prosecuting them.

I have had a section 21

If you have been served with a section 21, your notice should be in line with the table above.

The first thing you should do is go on to a **search engine and search for Housing Jigsaw Sandwell. Once you find the site, you can register as at risk of homelessness with Sandwell council.** This is the quickest way to let us know you are at risk of homelessness and will ensure that your case comes through to us. This will create a case with us and ensures that we have more time to help prevent your homelessness and to help find you a new home if you cannot stay where you are. The sooner you come to us for help, the more chance we have of preventing your situation from getting worse.

If you do not have access to the internet, then please call us on 0121 368 1166 and select option 2.

What happens if I do not leave by the section 21 notice date?

Your landlord can apply for a possession order if you stay past the date on the notice and in this case, the landlord will have to take the case to court. This will incur court costs but legally, you do not have to leave before the case has been seen.

There may not be a hearing if your landlord uses the 'accelerated procedure' so it's important to return a defence form should you not agree with the reasoning for eviction. The relevant defences are quite complex so we would advise seeking help from your local Citizens Advice or Shelter office if you need help with this.

The court can only stop an eviction if there's a problem with the section 21 notice

Section 8 of Housing Act 1988

A landlord will be able to use this ground for possession if you owe rent lawfully due of an amount equal to or more than :-

- 8 weeks rent if rent is payable weekly or fortnightly
- 2 months unpaid rent if rent is payable monthly

This ground can be used to claim possession of an assured short-hold tenancy including during a fixed term.

The landlord must serve a notice seeking possession and it must contain the correct information:-

- The landlord is seeking possession under ground 8
- The landlord will not start possession proceedings earlier than 2 weeks from the date the notice was served

A notice is valid for a period of 12 months from the date it has been served.

If you receive a Notice Seeking Possession from your landlord you do not have to leave the property. After the notice period has passed your landlord must apply to the Court to start a claim for possession of the property. The Court will decide whether to make a possession order requiring you to leave the property.

House Hunting Tips

Looking for private rented accommodation in Sandwell can seem quite daunting, so we have put together some tips below to help you with your search. Always bear in mind that landlords and lettings agents will be looking for reliable tenants; who will pay the rent on time and keep the property in good condition.

Reliable
To Pay Rent on
Time

Resilient
In your Search

Ready
To Move In

- Phoning landlords and lettings agents can be time consuming and it is likely you will need to make several calls before you will have properties to view.
- Wherever possible visit lettings agents in person; they are working on behalf of the landlord.
- Present yourself well and be prepared to tell them a little about yourself and show them any references you may have.
- Don't just contact one or two lettings agencies. Keep regular track of all the agencies that serve the areas you want to live in, and make sure you're checking local newspapers, websites, community noticeboards, shop windows etc. The wider your search is, the more likely you will be successful.
- When you have viewings of properties be on time, be friendly, look presentable and make sure you have your particular questions written down and ready to ask; also take ID with you such as a passport, driving licence or utility bill.
- If you have previous landlord references or something similar to show that you're a good tenant, make copies of them and provide them to landlords and agents.
- Before signing anything, always view a property and raise any questions or concerns you have, making sure these are answered.
- You should select as wider range of areas as possible when considering where you would like to live to give yourself a better chance of finding somewhere suitable. Consider areas on the outskirts of Birmingham that have good transport links.
- When your tenancy begins you should be provided with: a gas safety certificate, energy saving certificate, details of your deposit scheme and a copy of your tenancy agreement.
- Where possible pay your rent by card or bank transfer and clearly label the transaction. If you do not have access to this, your landlord should provide a rent book. Please ensure that payments are signed.

Owning Your Own Home

If you have savings or a suitable deposit, you should consider whether buying a property is an option for you. There is a range of support available to help people buy their own home through Help to Buy schemes.



If you can't quite afford the mortgage on 100% of a home, there are government schemes that can assist you. For example, 'Help to Buy: Shared Ownership' is a part-buy, part-rent scheme which allows you to buy a percentage of your home (between 25% and 75% of the home's value) and pay rent on the remaining share. You can then buy the rest of the new home if and when you want to.

You could buy a home through Shared Ownership in England if:

- your household earns £80,000 a year or less;
- you are a first-time buyer, you used to own a home but can't afford to buy one now, or you are an existing shared owner looking to move.

With 'Help to Buy: Shared Ownership' you can buy a newly built home or an existing one through resale programmes from housing associations. You'll need to take out a mortgage to pay for your share of the home's purchase price, or fund this through your savings.

An alternative scheme is 'Help to Buy: Equity Loan' which could be suitable for you if you want to own a newly built home in England. Through this scheme you could borrow up to 20% of the purchase price from the government and you'd only need a 5% deposit.

The link below will walk you through a number of simple questions/stages to help you review the best option for you if you are considering owning your own home: <https://www.ownyourhome.gov.uk/>.

You may be able to get financial help from the government to buy a home.

These options include:

- Help with Savings through a help to buy ISA
- Assistance with a low interest equity loan
- Buying a home through shared ownership
- Buying your council or housing association property

More detailed information regarding these options is available at www.gov.uk/affordable-home-ownership-schemes

Coping with Mortgage Arrears

If you find yourself falling behind with your mortgage or you think you might have difficulty paying your mortgage because of a change in circumstances then you need to act quickly. Your mortgage is a 'priority' debt which means you should consider paying your mortgage before paying other 'non-priority' debts.

Changes such as:

- Illness
- Relationship breakdown
- Losing your job/Reduction in hours
- Reduction in your income may leave you struggling to pay your mortgage

The first thing to do is speak to your lender. Your mortgage lender will have procedures for dealing with cases like yours.

- Negotiating with your lender
- Refer you to Money Advice
- Refer you to Welfare Rights
- Preparing for court
- What to do in court

DO NOT ignore mortgage arrears – keep your lender informed and get some help.

Useful web sites:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

www.direct.gov.uk

Standard mortgage court process

The process:

Summons for Possession

This is the first stage in the repossession process. A date and time is given for the hearing. The basic details of the lender's claim are given. The papers are issued by the court, and include a reply form which can be completed and returned to the court. Shortly before the hearing, the defendant (borrower) will receive an affidavit (again sent by the court) in which the lender details the full particulars of their claim (amount outstanding, arrears, details of payments, interest rates etc.)

The Hearing

Mortgage possession hearings tend to be held in private. This means the only people present are the judge, the defendant and the plaintiff's solicitor. The hearing is taped and **one of the following orders are made:**

1. Adjournment

In most cases an adjournment will be for a 4 – 6-week period, with a new hearing set for the first available date after that time has lapsed. A judge will normally adjourn a case where one side (usually the defendant) is asking for information or time to negotiate with the other party

2. 28-day Possession Order

This is the usual outcome where the defendant does not turn up at the hearing or submit any kind of proposal to the court. If vacant possession has not been given to the plaintiff at the end of the 28 days, then they can apply to the Court for a Bailiff's warrant.

3. 56-day Possession Order

Where the defendant has no long-term proposal for the court, but is asking for more time, or is perhaps hoping to sell then the court has the discretion to extend the time. Although the most usual is 56 days (2 months), they are sometimes prepared to give up to 6 months. At the end of the specified period if the plaintiff has not given vacant possession then they can apply for a Bailiff's warrant.

4. Suspended Possession Order

This is the most common type of order made by the court at the hearing. Basically, the defendant puts a proposal to the plaintiff/court to make certain payments on a regular basis. The court orders that as long as these payments are made no further action can be taken by the plaintiff. If the defendant misses even one of the agreed payments, then the plaintiff has the right to apply to the court for a Bailiff's warrant.

5. Bailiffs Warrant/Warrant for Possession/Eviction Order

This is the stage at which someone could be forcibly removed from their home by the Court Bailiff. Defendants are usually given about 14 days notice of the appointment.

Your parents or relatives have asked you to leave

If your parents or relatives have asked you to leave you should contact us as soon as possible.

We will contact your parents or relatives to ask them their side of the story. If you do not want us to contact your parents or relatives we will need to know why.

We can refer you to our mediation service. Our mediators have lots of experience of dealing with family relationships and they may be able to help you remain at home, or at least negotiate staying at home whilst you find somewhere else to live.

If you are aged between 18-25 years old and would benefit from supported housing we may be able to refer you to suitable accommodation. If you are aged 16 or 17 we may need to refer you to Children's Social Services for support and assistance.

Getting your first home is a big step and we know that if the move to your first home is planned you will be in a better position to enjoy it. We can give you advice on where best to find accommodation and how to get help with the costs of setting up and keeping a home.

Non-violent relationship breakdown housing advice

Housing rights in a relationship breakdown can be complicated and you may need to seek legal advice.

If you have a joint tenancy or own a property with your ex-partner you may still have rights to occupy the place you are living in together. Find a legal advisor in your area.

Where else can I go for housing help and advice?

There are several places you could visit:

- Shelter has produced a guide for people who have experienced a relationship breakdown and what their housing rights are after splitting up. Shelter can also be contacted by telephone: 0344 515 1944.
- Citizens Advice - for general and legal advice and help. Telephone: 08444 111 444.
- Sandwell's Housing Solutions Service - If you've decided that you need to find a new home, our website has information helping you with the different options for looking for a new home. The Housing Solutions Service can also be telephoned on: 0121 368 1166.

Social Housing

In Sandwell there is a lack of social housing and a massive demand for social housing stock as mentioned in the first section of this pack. The social housing stock is made up of blend of council owned homes and homes provided by housing associations and registered providers.

You can contact housing associations directly as not all of their properties are allocated through the councils registration/Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

Some associations also advertise properties to let on the Homes Direct website at <http://www.homesdirect.org.uk/> and we would strongly advise that you register on the site.

In Sandwell there are over 20 Housing Associations managing over 5000 houses. Some offer specialist accommodation to people with particular support needs.

A list of housing associations (to search for on google if you do not have this document electronically) and links to their webpages can be found below:

- [Accord Housing Association](#)
- [Anchor Trust](#)
- [ASRA Midlands Housing Association](#)
- [Black Country Housing](#)
- [Bromford Carinthia Housing Association](#)
- [English Churches Housing Group](#)
- [Family Housing Association Ltd](#)
- [Hanover Housing Association](#)
- [Harborne Parish Lands Charity](#)
- [Harden Housing Association](#)
- [Housing 21](#)
- [Jephson Homes Housing Association](#)
- [John Grooms Housing Association](#)
- [Mercian Housing Association](#)
- [Midland Heart](#)
- [Servite Homes](#)
- [Touchstone Heart](#)
- [Trident Housing Association](#)
- [Urban Heart Housing Association](#)
- [Waterloo Housing Association](#)

Supported Housing

Supported housing exists to ensure those with support needs can lead a healthy and fulfilling life within their own home and community. While the services range widely, they all play a crucial role in providing a safe and secure home with support for people to live independently.

This includes:

- Providing the support older people need to maintain their independence.
- Working with homeless people with complex and multiple needs to help them make the transition from life on the street to a having a settled home, education, training or employment.
- Supporting people with mental health needs to stabilise their lives, recover and live more independently.
- Supporting ex-servicemen and women to find a stable home, including support for those with mental health and physical disability needs.
- Supporting people with learning disabilities in the longer term to maximise their independence and exercise choice and control over their lives.

If you require supported housing your Housing Solutions Officer, can help you get in touch with supported housing providers.

Do you need further information or advice?

If you require any further information please visit our website http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200223/housing/2487/housing_help_and_advice or alternatively you can contact your Housing Solutions Officer.

If you have visited the Housing Solutions Team for support as you are homeless or threatened with homelessness, please remember to keep a copy of your Personal Housing Plan and work through the actions that were agreed with your Housing Needs Officer. It is important to keep in contact with your officer and let us know if your circumstances change.

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Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

23 March 2023

Subject:	Implementation of Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022-26
Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board Chair:	Chief Superintendent - Maria Fox West Midlands Police
Director:	Alice Davey Director of Borough Economy
Contact Officer:	Tessa Mitchell Business Manager Community Safety & Resilience tessa_mitchell@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Scrutiny Board considers and comments upon the work undertaken to deliver on the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board's Community Safety Strategy 2022-26 which outlines the partnerships key priorities and direction of travel over the next 5 years.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Sandwell's Community Safety Strategy is overseen by the multi-agency Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board (SSPPCB) who oversee the Boroughs approach to community safety. The Board



adopted a new partnership strategy in 2022, which built upon the work of the previous strategy, reinforced by feedback from residents obtained over the previous three years and Sandwell's annual strategic assessments.

2.2 The key priorities within the strategy are:

- The prevention of violence and exploitation
- Reducing offending, reoffending and serious organised crime
- Preventing crime & antisocial behaviour in our Neighbourhoods





2.3 The strategy also encompasses two other significant cross cutting themes: **tackling substance misuse to save lives and reduce crime**, aligned with the Government's new Drugs Strategy and **delivering on the new Serious Violence Duty**. The Duty is a key part of the Government's programme of work to prevent and reduce serious violence; taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focused on prevention and early intervention, and informed by evidence which requires a joined up holistic approach.

2.4 The golden thread running through all these priorities is our commitment to protecting and supporting vulnerable victims. We will deliver these priorities through adopting a public health approach, understanding that violence is preventable and identifying the reasons why people get drawn into crime. We will also support organisations to become trauma aware and embed such approaches into their practice and tackle these issues through the adoption of a 4 P Plan which aims to : prevent violence, abuse and exploitation; protect those affected; reduce harm and pursue those who perpetrate.

2.5 The strategy is driven through the work of the Boards 3 subgroups who oversee annual work plans which are regularly reviewed throughout the year and updated annually. This ensures the flexibility to predict and respond to any emerging trends in the fast paced and ever-changing arena that is community safety.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on prevention of violence and exploitation • Reducing opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour • Multi-Agency support for children and families • Delivery of awareness and resilience building work in our schools.
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on tackling substance misuse • Community Engagement
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place based tasking processes using evidence to focus on specific issues across each town • Community awareness work through our ASB, Community Safety and Prevent Teams • Tackling perpetrators
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of our CCTV stock to support community safety across our estates and towns

4 Context and Activities to address Sandwell’s key priorities

- 4.1 To ensure that the communities of Sandwell, feel safe, protected, and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods, it is important to take a comprehensive approach to community safety. This means working with a range of stakeholders, including residents, community groups, law enforcement agencies to develop and implement effective strategies that address the root causes of crime and social disorder.
- 4.2 One important element of a comprehensive community safety strategy is community engagement. This involves listening to the concerns and priorities of residents and working together to develop solutions that address their needs. In developing the strategy, a range of engagement opportunities were undertaken which are referenced on p14 of the strategy including a resident survey.



4.3 Respondents Top 5 Priorities were:

- Drug dealing (10.7%)
- Youth disorder (9.3%)
- Burglary (7.4%)
- Violent crime (7.2%)
- Littering/fly tipping (5.8%)

4.4 Respondents thoughts on improving safety:

- 91.5% respondents asked for an increased police presence
- More CCTV (69.5%) was the second most common solution
- Well maintained estates & streets (59.9%) were third

4.5 Partnership working is at the heart of Sandwell's community safety strategy, collaborating with residents and other organisations and agencies, such as schools, businesses, and community groups, to address safety issues in a coordinated and effective way.

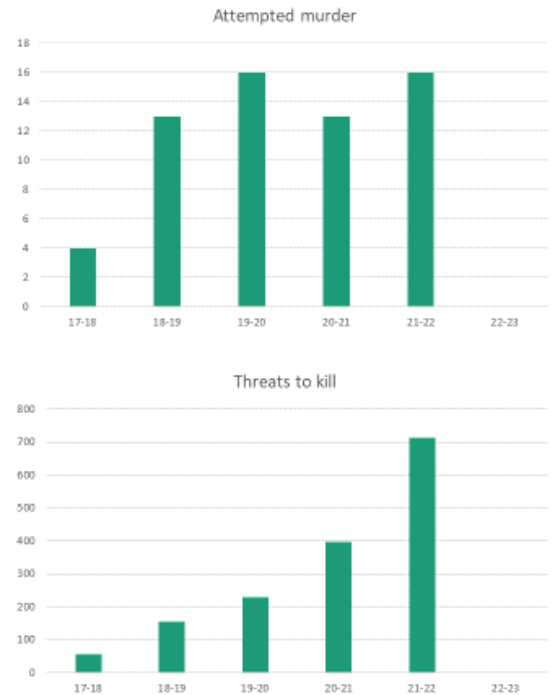
4.6 The community safety strategy highlights areas where we are investing in crime prevention measures, including targeted interventions such as increased police patrols in high-crime areas and preventative measures that address underlying factors such as poverty, mental health, or substance abuse. The strategy supports working together create safe and thriving communities where everyone can feel secure and confident. The key priorities and work to address these are outlined below.

5.0 The Prevention of Violence and Exploitation

5.1 Violence Against the Person

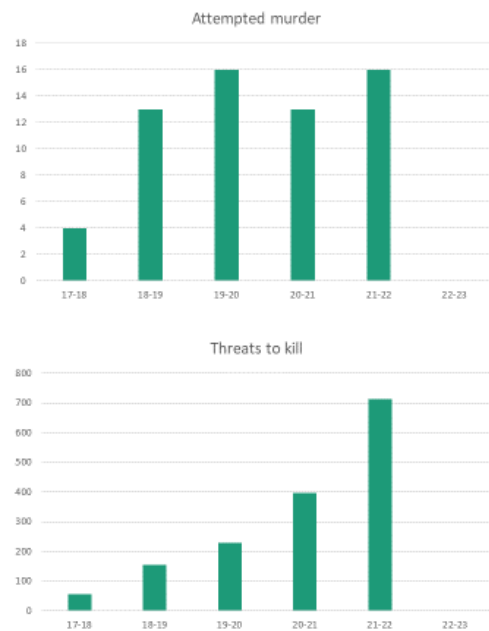
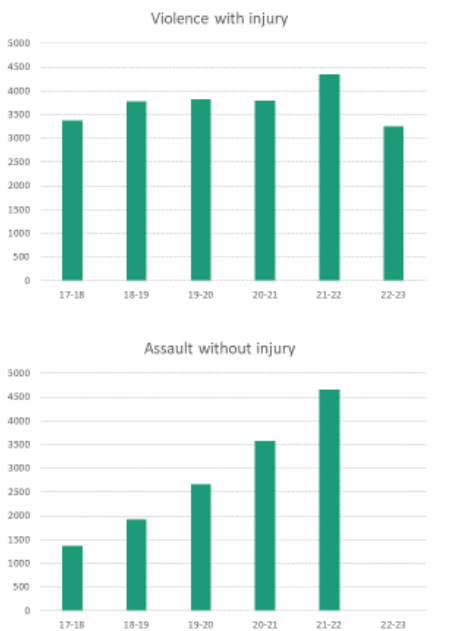
Evidence shows that after declining for approximately a decade, homicide, knife crime, and gun crime have been on the rise again in most police force areas in England and Wales since 2014. Some of this increase can be attributed to improved police recording but it is believed that some of the increases are genuine, including a rise in offences involving knives and firearms. Sandwell is generally in line with these national trends as shown below:





(Diagram 1)

These increases have been accompanied by a slight shift towards younger victims and perpetrators and an increase in threats to kill with over 700 incidents recorded last year.



(Diagram 2)



(Diagram 3 & 4)

Weapons Sandwell 2021-2022

Tipton

- ✓ 3 weapons identified on School children through police SLO
- ✓ 10 fire arms crimes reported to police
- ✓ 522 knife crimes reported to police

Oldbury

- ✓ 25 weapons identified on School children through police SLO
- ✓ 8 fire arms crimes reported to police
- ✓ 668 knife crimes reported to police

Rowley Regis

- ✓ 16 weapons identified on School children through police SLO
- ✓ 18 fire arms crimes reported to police
- ✓ 513 knife crimes reported to police



Wednesbury

- ✓ 3 weapons identified on School children through police SLO
- ✓ 6 fire arms crimes reported to police
- ✓ 603 knife crimes reported to police

West Bromwich

- ✓ 20 weapons identified on School children through police SLO
- ✓ 19 fire arms crimes reported to police
- ✓ 1341 knife crimes reported to police

Smethwick

- ✓ 4 weapons identified on School children through police SLO
- ✓ 13 fire arms crimes reported to police
- ✓ 768 knife crimes reported to police

90 Firearms incidents in Sandwell in 2021-2022

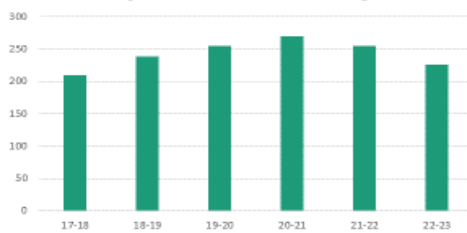
4415 knife crime incidents in Sandwell in 2021-2022

Proactive working through the Police Schools link officers they have identified and supported 71 children involved with weapons

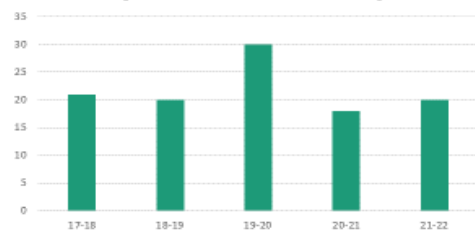
Highlights

- Oldbury has the highest levels of assaults
- Oldbury has the highest levels of weapons
- Wednesbury has the highest levels of drug incidents
- West Bromwich has the highest levels of sexting and sexual offences
- West Bromwich has the highest levels of thefts

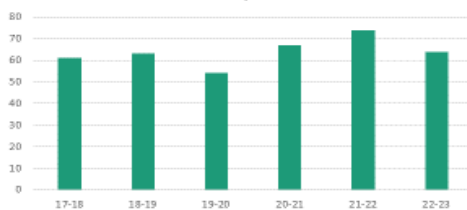
Reducing knife crime where victim is aged 18+



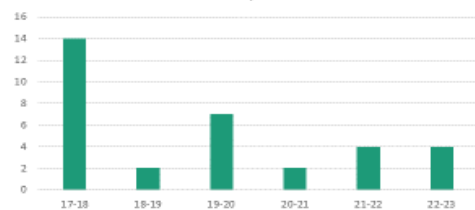
Reducing knife crime where offender is aged 18+



Reducing knife crime where victim is aged 10-17yrs



Reducing Knife crime where offender is aged 10-17yrs



5.2 Tackling Serious Violence in Sandwell

Considerable focus on early intervention and preventative work across the partnership including:



- Increased number of Police Officers working in schools and the Community Schools.
- Collaboration with the Violence Reduction Partnership through dedicated co-located Community Navigator and funding (£74,500) for a range of activities including 3 Step Together Routes in Sandwell; Mentors in Violence Prevention; trauma informed practice training; half term / summer holiday activity programmes; increased knowledge base in relation to what works in reducing violence
- Review of regional safeguarding policies and procedures undertaken and promoted
- Partnership Safeguarding Days in Local schools
- Safeguarding Champions programme in 14 Sandwell schools
- Around Midnight virtual training package being delivered in schools
- Partnership Days of Action in Impact Areas
- Support from Operation Guardian
- OPCC Community Safety funding utilised to support a number of projects working with young people at risk of offending
- Strengthened and targeted youth services provision
- Early Help Strategy and introduction of Children and Families Commissioning Group
- Introduction of St Giles Violence Intervention Project in local A&E department to engage with victims of violence (reachable moments)
- New Knife bin sited in Smethwick
- Launch of Multi-agency Decision Making Panel for out of court disposals
- Development of multi systemic therapies within youth justice
- Launch of the Serious Violence Duty and preparation of Sandwell's Serious Violence Needs Assessment

5.3 Domestic Abuse

Around one-third of violence against the person offences and one-fifth of all homicides are related to domestic abuse. Such crimes are on the rise in many areas including Sandwell. This may be due, in part, to better reporting and recording of these crimes but there is also believed that there has been a genuine increase in domestic abuse-related crimes. This has resulted in a significant increase in MARAC referrals, locally which is a positive trend as it means that more victims are being



identified and receiving the support, they need but does have an impact on local partnership resources.

As with all violence there is a clear move towards earlier intervention, with an increase in standard risk and medium-risk victims reaching out for help. This is an important trend as it means that victims are receiving support earlier, which can help to prevent abuse from escalating. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on domestic abuse, with some areas reporting an increase in incidents during lockdowns. The pandemic has also made it more difficult for victims to access support and for services to provide face-to-face support. The current situation in Sandwell is detailed below:



(Diagram 5)

5.4 Tackling Domestic Abuse in Sandwell

Work to address domestic abuse across the Borough over the past year has included:

- Implementation of the new Domestic Abuse Strategy including development of new Implementation Group to drive forward Partnership Work Plan



- Revisions to Sandwell’s Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership following visits to other well regarded areas
- £841,142 New Burdens Funding (22-23) allocated to Sandwell to provide safe accommodation services with further funding confirmed for the next 2 years
- New refuge contract successfully awarded for next 5 years to BCWA



(Diagram 6)

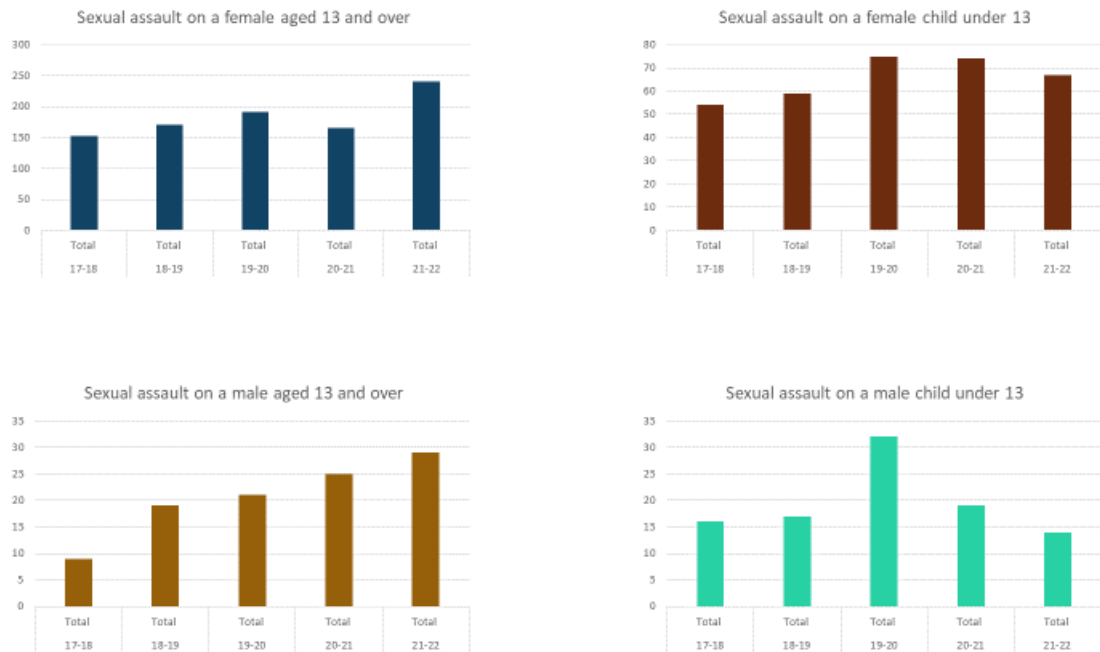
- Whole Systems Task and Finish group established to co-ordinate joined up and integrated interventions including IDVAs and family projects
- OPCC Community Safety Funding supports provision of A&E IDVA
- Regional Review of MARAC being undertaken by OPCC
- Funding secured to continue interventions over 3 years including pilot perpetrator intervention with The Children’s Trust
- Sandwell chosen by OPCC to submit a bid for the Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Intervention Programme
- Domestic Abuse Pledge signed during Annual Safer 6 Community Safety Campaign – committing all partners to a zero tolerance approach to all forms of abuse
- Continued roll out of IRIS scheme across Borough helping GPs identify domestic abuse
- Check with Me First Campaign rolled out across all Health professionals



- Ongoing programme of DA training including Learning from DHRs
- Domestic Homicide Review 13 published

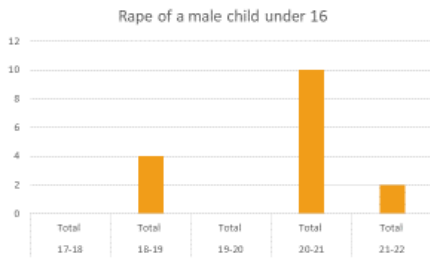
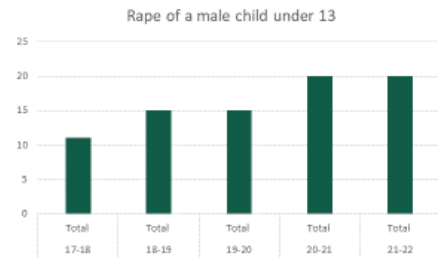
5.6 Sexual Assault and Abuse

The number of sexual offences recorded by the police has been increasing with 2021-22 seeing the highest ever recorded number of sexual offences recorded by the police within a 12-month period. This includes a concerning increase in sexual crimes against children. For example, the rape of female children under 16 has almost doubled over the last 12 months, while there have been year-on-year increases in the rape of males aged 16 and over.



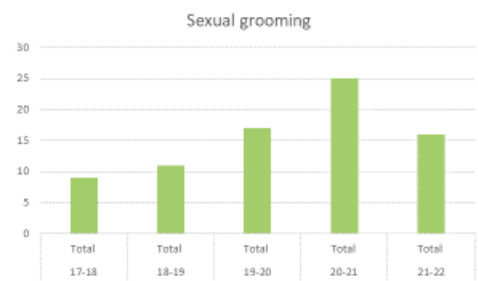
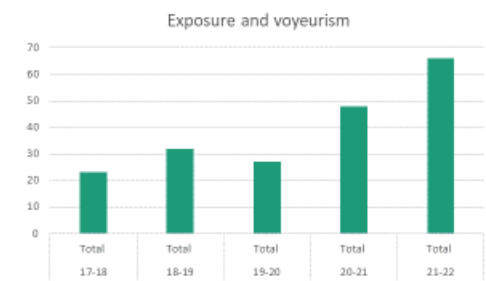
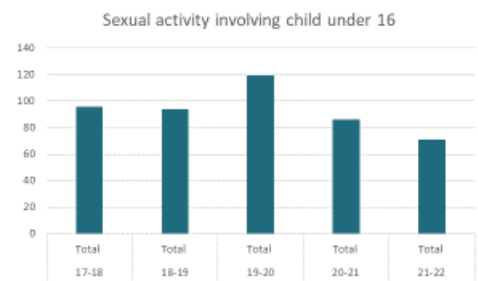
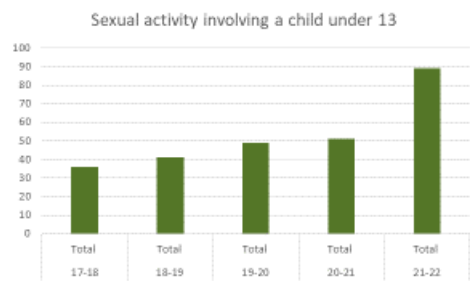
(Diagram 7)





(Diagram 8)

There have also been increased reports of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour and significant increases in exposure and voyeurism. 1 in 3 respondents to Sandwell’s Sexual Assault and Abuse Survey in 2021 said that they had experienced sexual abuse or assault.



(Diagram 9)



Advances in technology have also led to an increase in online sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation. This is a particularly concerning trend as it can be difficult to detect and prevent such crimes. Despite the increase in recorded sexual offences, it is widely believed that sexual assault and abuse are still vastly underreported. This highlights the need for greater awareness-raising, education and support for victims to encourage reporting.

These trends highlight the urgent need to progress this area of work under the newly formed Sexual Assault and Abuse subgroup that is focusing on a strategy and action plan to implement measures to prevent sexual offences and to support victims. It is essential to provide education and awareness-raising initiatives to prevent these crimes and to provide appropriate support and protection for victims. Additionally, effective prevention and intervention strategies should be implemented to identify and address the root causes of these crimes.

5.7 Tackling Sexual Abuse and Assault in Sandwell

Work to address sexual abuse and assault across the Borough over the past year has included:

- A Sexual Abuse and Assault Needs Assessment and Strategy have been developed and implemented with a Sexual Assault and Abuse subgroup to develop and drive the associated work plan
- Ongoing work to educate young people around healthy relationships and misogyny including funding from the VRP to provide 'Men at Work' training to support school staff in working with boys.
- Sandwell was awarded Safer Streets Round 3 Funding to tackle violence against women and girls in West Bromwich which included sexual harassment and bystander training and the introduction of a Safe Spaces Scheme with local businesses.
- New Sexual Assault and Abuse Training introduced delivered by The Haven
- Partnership Sexual Abuse and Assault / FGM Event 'Together We Move, Together We Change' held at The Hawthorns on 9th February attended by 147 delegates



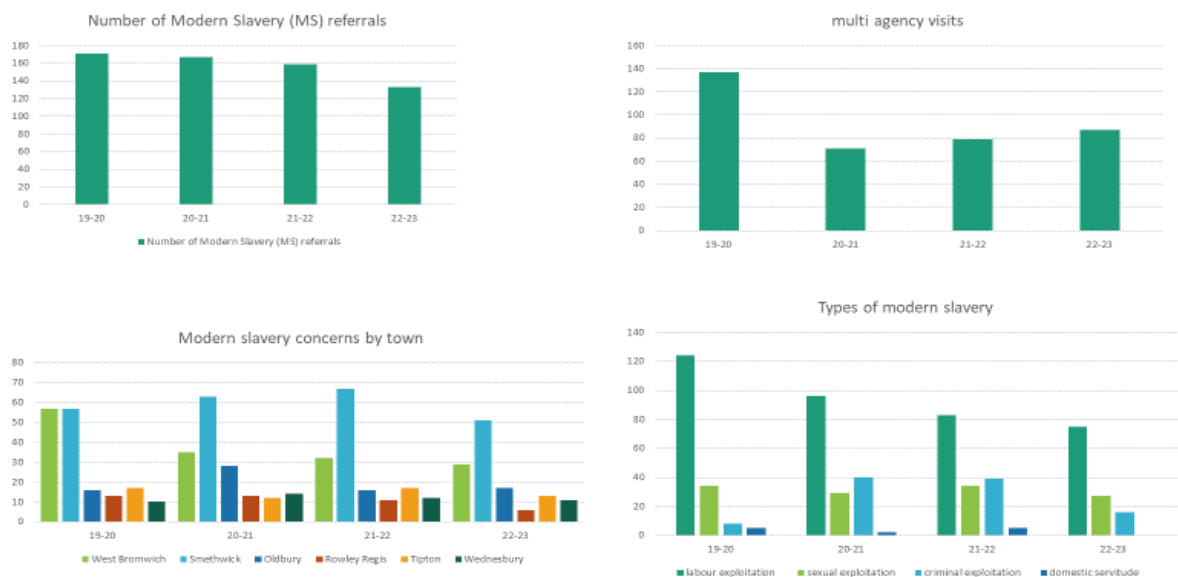
Respondents to Sandwell’s Sexual Abuse and Assault Survey in 2021 said that they would feel safer through awareness raising & education, safe spaces and more visible security/police presence. The work above has taken this forward and will continue into 2023-24.

5.8 Modern Slavery

Modern slavery cases are among the most challenging and complex to investigate and prosecute, as the hidden nature of modern slavery reduces the available evidence to make a charging decision.

Perpetrators also often exercise a high level of control and coercion over their victims

Sandwell has established strategic Anti-Slavery Partnership and a Slavery and Human Trafficking Operational Partnership (SHOP) to tackle modern slavery cases in a coordinated manner. Yearly referrals have been relatively consistent but there has been a significant decrease in labour exploitation following the first lockdown.



(Diagram 10)

There has been an increase in criminal exploitation, which suggests that many of these cases were dealt with outside of SHOP and modern slavery was not always recognised. Cuckooing cases have also increased, particularly in relation to vulnerable males being exploited by females. It is essential to work collaboratively across agencies to identify and prosecute modern slavery cases and to support and protect victims.



5.9 Tackling Modern Slavery in Sandwell

Work to tackle modern slavery across the Borough over the past year has included:

- Focused partnership activity on nail bars in conjunction with the National Crime Agency
- Regional Training offer updated
- Local Government Association Modern Slavery Maturity Matrix incorporated Sandwell work
- Sandwell Prevention Exploitation and Modern Slavery Lead presented best practice update at Local Government Association Annual Conference
- Sandwell's Modern Slavery Transparency Statement updated
- Sandwell Police appointed modern slavery SPOC
- Resettlement Pathways reviewed and updated
- Working with landlords in relation to reports of modern slavery in their properties. 106 properties reported in last 12 months.
- Modern Slavery Dashboard developed using Power BI

5.10 Child Exploitation

In 2020, there was a significant reduction in child exploitation referred to the police, most likely due to the impact of the pandemic. Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) has created new data sets for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which are being incorporated into the Partnership Value and Effectiveness (PoVE) scorecard. The Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) [VRP regional missing dashboard](#) enables monitoring of missing cases across the region. In the West Midlands, there were 4,487 missing people in 2021-2022, with 9,322 missing episodes, an average of 2.8 missing episodes per person. Of those missing people, 1,146 had flags for exploitation.

In Sandwell, there were 583 missing people, with 1,255 missing episodes, an average of 2.1 missing episodes per person. Of those missing people, 85 had an exploitation flag. Interestingly, Sandwell had more males missing than the regional averages, with 56% male compared to an average of 51%.





(Diagram 11)

5.11 Tackling Child Exploitation in Sandwell

- Embedding of Sandwell’s Child Exploitation Hub
- The Horizons Team works in partnership to promote awareness and tackle child exploitation across the Borough including changes made to Multi Agency Child Exploitation Meetings to discuss all high risk children every 4 weeks
- Work of the Horizons Team commended in OFSTED Report and the team won the 2022 West Midlands Team of Excellence award
- Engagement with young people to better understand concerns and issues
- Contextual Safeguarding Champions group
- Significant programme of youth activities delivered by Sandwell Youth Services
- Successful pursuit of perpetrators resulting in 11 years and 44 months sentences of imprisonment
- Increased cross border work
- DECCA work to raise awareness of the effects of drugs and alcohol
- Sandwell commended for partnership working during County Lines Intensification Weeks



The above gives a brief overview of some of the work being undertaken in relation to the prevention of violence and exploitation across Sandwell. A full annual update report will be presented to the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board later this year.

6.0 Reducing Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime

Across the nation there has been a 12.3% increase in total crime, for Sandwell this has been below the National Average with a 8.4% increase.

6.1 Reducing Adult Reoffending

Reducing reoffending sits at the heart of HM Prison and Probation Services work. Around 80% of people who receive cautions or convictions have offended before, so to cut crime, make communities safer and prevent people from becoming victims of crime, the focus needs to be on reducing reoffending. The HMPPS West Midlands Probation Region Delivery Plan, 2022-23 outlines the priorities to achieve this as: to ensure prisoners have the training and skills they need to secure employment on release; support to address substance misuse issues and opportunities to maintain family ties, and accommodation as they reintegrate into society. The outcomes being reducing the impact of crime on society, and helping to create safer, healthier and more inclusive communities.

6.2 Tackling Adult Offending / Reoffending in Sandwell

- Following the Probation Service restructure in June 2021 and subsequent objective of implementing a national Target Operating Model by 2024 the Sandwell team have now finalised their new team structures in relation to Integrated Offender Management (IOM) and young adults transitions (for 18-25 year olds).
- Significant national investment is being made into the Probation Service with 22 Trainee Probation Officers recruited to Sandwell, the largest intake ever. This will help address the significant resource pressures being experienced both locally and nationally.
- Cases are being prioritized according to risk in line with the Probation Delivery Unit being designated Amber in the Probation Prioritisation Framework, a nationally approved allowance of certain exemptions from National Standards.



- Seven commissioned rehabilitative service contracts are now available to support offenders accessing tailored interventions to address factors contributing to their offending. These are Accommodation; Education, Training and Employment; Women's Services; Well-Being; Neurodiversity; Dependency & Recovery; Finance, Benefit & Debt.
- A new Suite of nationally approved Structured Interventions and Toolkits have been implemented to address offending behaviour with offenders, to supplement Accredited Programmes
- Systems implemented to ensure speedy and effective information in relation to Domestic Abuse and Child Safeguarding checks between key partners.
- New CAS3 accommodation scheme, which will provide 84 days of funded accommodation to reduce homelessness on release from prison, is due to commence in the near future.
- Sandwell is part of new electronic monitoring scheme for licence variations being rolled out regionally.
- Integrated Offender Management has benefitted from dedicated partnership activity to address offending for those known offenders who have the most impact within communities i.e. acquisitive crime, across three core cohorts – Fixed, Flex and Free. This is being expanded to include Domestic Abuse perpetrators in the Free cohort.
- Community Payback scheme developing with teams co-located in Sandwell
- The supervised caseload in Sandwell is 1045, with 787 individuals in the community
 - Of those, 338 are eligible for the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
 - 103 are jointly managed through the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) program.
 - There are also 391 individuals identified as domestic abuse perpetrators
- Employment at 6 months 41% exceeding the national 38% target with a rate
- Accommodation at 3 months is also over target at 86% compared to the 80% target



6.3 Reducing Youth Offending & Reoffending

The Sandwell Youth Justice Plan overseen by the Youth Justice Partnership Board focuses on early intervention and prevention for children and young people who are at risk of or who have already engaged in offending behaviour. This plan includes working with partners to identify and support vulnerable children, providing diversionary activities and restorative justice approaches, as well as providing targeted interventions for those who have already offended. The plan also focuses on ensuring that the needs of children and young people are met, such as their educational and mental health needs, in order to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Overall, the aim is to support children and young people to turn their lives around and to prevent them from becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

Overall there has been a decline in youth offending in England and Wales over the past decade. The YJB data shows that the number of young people in the youth justice system has continued to fall over the pandemic.

An analysis of first-time entrants into youth justice in Sandwell reflects this trend, providing a positive indication that interventions being put in place to prevent young people from entering the justice system in the first place are having an impact. 2021-22 saw the lowest number of young people referred into the youth justice service during the past 10 years, with a 40% reduction in offending between 11-15 year olds and 61% reduction for 17-18 year olds.

6.4 Tackling Youth Offending / Reoffending in Sandwell

- Launch of multi-agency decision making panel to oversee out of court disposals
- Work with Safeguard to create a bespoke intervention for girls in the YJS in the form of a journal.
- Introduction of Turnaround Funding to support young people on cusp of entering youth justice system
- Clear pathways to Strengthening Families Service developed when a child is in OOC and needs ongoing support once YJS intervention ends
- Arts Youth Justice work embedded and ongoing
- Plain Speaking project supported by Community Safety Funding



- Work with Recre8 to have a bespoke intervention created for Sandwell around Peer on Peer violence
- Work with SafeLives to create a bespoke package to upskill workers in direct interventions with young people where DA behaviours are a concern
- Focus on disproportionality including cultural competence and intersectionality training for all pre-sentence report writers.
- All NEET young people have mentoring support
- Employment & Training - Monthly meetings and record keeping of career plans for all NEET Post 16
- Close working relationship developed with VRP
- Support development of Transitions Team in Probation Service to manage 18-25 year olds providing continuity and managed transitions
- Increased engagement with Magistrates – Bench Youth Chair invited to become member of YJPB
- New KPI Framework being introduced from April 2023

6.5 Serious Organised Crime

Serious organised crime is a complex and constantly evolving issue, making it difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of trends. Serious organised crime groups are involved in a range of criminal activities, including drug trafficking, firearms offences, fraud, money laundering, and human trafficking. As of the 30/01/23 Sandwell had 9 mapped organised crime groups, this is the 3rd highest in the West Midlands, next to the major cities of Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

6.6 Tackling Serious Organised Crime in Sandwell

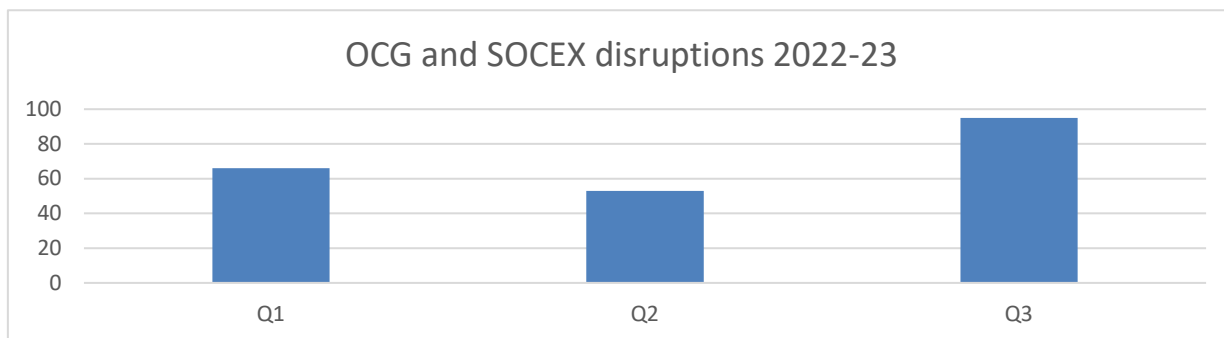
A range of work has been undertaken by the partnership to tackle organised crime effectively over the past year including:

- Development of a Sandwell Partnership Organised Crime Group



- Regular partnership disruptions to organised crime groups in Sandwell

(Diagram 12)



In January 2024 there were 24 such disruptions.

- Focus on increase in organised immigration crime
- Sandwell Partnership work around County Lines Intensification Weeks held up as exemplar of good practice across wider West Midlands Force. In October 2022 this included:
 - 22 Children and Adults Safeguarded
 - 6 Cuckooing Visits
 - 390 children engaged with through Schools
 - Targeted outreach session in Northampton
 - 34 visits to High/Medium risk young people
 - 10+ case reviews along with social workers
 - outreach on trains by youth workers and Horizons
 - 5 drop in sessions around Contextual safeguarding
- During 2022 in Sandwell:
 - 26 Warrants executed on OCG Nominals.
 - £181,000 of drugs recovered from OCG Nominals.
 - £63,000 cash seized from OCG nominals.
 - 4 live and viable firearms seized, 1 imitation firearm along with several rounds of live ammunition and shotgun cartridges.
 - 119 separate cannabis factories have been discovered through, warrants and calls for service etc with officers seized cannabis with a conservative estimated street value of £24 million
 - SMBC Cuckooing Video shared with staff and partners emphasising the roles of individual teams and the benefits of partnership working to protect vulnerable individuals.

RRSOC will continue to drive and develop this work over the forthcoming year.



6.8 Preventing Crime & Anti-social Behaviour in our Neighbourhoods

Preventing and reducing crime and ASB cannot be tackled by one single agency, but needs a multi-disciplined approach to provide a holistic response. By bringing partners together both strategically and operationally, there is a focus on problem solving and bringing together resources to prevent and tackle the issues at a local and boroughwide level.

This is achieved in Sandwell by partners coming together monthly through Borough Tasking and Town Tasking meetings where there is the opportunity for partnership data and intelligence to be shared so that an appropriate and proportionate response can be coordinated.

The meetings are used to discuss community and place based concerns as well as a closed element to the meetings to discuss individual cases that may involve vulnerable victims or perpetrators. At the Borough Tasking meetings, the membership focuses on the impact areas and look at issues such as Hate crime, community tensions, domestic abuse and the causes of crime in more detail. The OPCC also funds a number of Community Safety Analysts to provide data to inform the 7 partnerships across the West Midlands

6.9 Tackling Crime and ASB in Sandwell

Some of the key achievements over the past year have included:

- 72 Town Tasking Meetings held and 11 Borough Taskings
- Delivery of Borough Hate Crime Plan including:
 - Development and ongoing support to 42 Third Party Reporting Centres across Sandwell
 - Young People's Hate Crime Awareness Workshops & school sessions
 - Regular Hate Crime Awareness training for community members and professionals
 - No Place For Hate workshops across all 6 Sandwell towns culminating in Hate Crime Jam to develop Hate Crim

"The West Midlands has always been a breeding ground for social innovation, we do like to try new things and it really pricked my interest to hear that the project is looking to create training tools that organisations across The Black Country can access but co-designed by actual residents with help from a host of not-for-profits in each of Sandwell's six towns, and then supported by Sandwell Council and New Union to put them into action". (Andy Street – Mayor of the West Midlands)

- Implementation of new Boroughwide Nuisance Bikes Plan including:



- All out days in hotspot areas including seizure of bikes and tenancy warnings to those living in Council Properties
- Engagement with associated businesses including petrol stations and garages
- Introduction of new Force wide Bikes Team
- Use of CCTV in strategic locations to try and identify offenders
- Increased community awareness in relation to what to report and how
- Successful delivery of Commonwealth Games
- Successful delivery of annual partnership Safer 6 Community Safety campaign including:
 - Litter picks and ASB walkabouts in hotspots
 - Community Understanding Extremism training
 - Launch of Child Online Safety (Extremism Awareness) Guidance Booklet
 - Fire Safety checks
 - Illegal Trading operations
 - SHAPE Anti Bullying Roadshow
 - Drug and Alcohols Service Awareness and engagement
 - Launch of DA Pledge
 - Vehicle Nuisance Awareness Raising
 - Crime Prevention Awareness
- Successful bid and commencement for Safer Streets Round 4 Project in Bearwood incorporating:
 - CCTV installation on Bearwood High Street
 - Community and Business Engagement Officer to work with local residents and businesses on resilience and target hardening
 - Transitions work in 2 primary schools
 - Targeted youth work in Lightwoods Park and Warley Woods
- Evidence based deployment of Sandwell's deployable camera stock
- Focus on Sandwell's 3 impact areas and partnership interventions
- Focus on vehicle crime and input from Design Out Crime Officer
- 24 /7 CCTV Control Room and Concierge Service
- Revised Council wide ASB Policy
- Q1-3 - 387 new ASB Cases with outcomes including:
76 verbal / informal discussions; 16 voluntary agreements; 96 Warning letters; 17 CPN Warnings & 9 CPNs



As can be seen there is a considerable focus on locality based community safety and ensuring resources are deployed to maximise effectiveness using the available evidence.

7 Conclusion & Moving Forward

7.1 Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board has a statutory requirement under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, and subsequent legislative amendments, to develop and deliver a Partnership Plan which contains community safety priorities based on the current evidence base across the Borough of Sandwell. This strategy brings together this evidence base and sets the strategic direction for community safety across the Borough for the next 5 years subject to annual review

7.2 Community safety is an always evolving, complex huge multifaceted area. As can be seen significant partnership work has been undertaken across the partnership to deliver on the Sandwell's identified priorities as outlined in the Community Safety Strategy. An Annual Report will be provided to the Safer Sandwell Partnership and Police Board and updated 2023-24 PoVE / RRSOC and Tasking Plans have been developed with partners to build on the work outlined above and continue to progress work in relation to enhancing and strengthening community safety across Sandwell.

7.3 This will include:

- Publication of the Serious Violence Needs Assessment
- Implementation and embedding of the Serious Violence Duty
- Supporting the planned national review of Community Safety Partnerships
- Ongoing improvements to data provision and analysis to support the work of the partnership

7.4 As can be seen community safety requires effective partnerships with all partners accountable in supporting delivery to achieve Sandwell's community safety vision of: ***ensuring that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods.***



8 Implications

Resources:	The Community Safety Strategy is a partnership plan utilising existing resources deployed in accordance with the priorities identified. When available partners will tap into additional funding streams to enhance capacity and provision.
Legal and Governance:	Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board has a statutory requirement under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, and subsequent legislative amendments, to develop and deliver a Partnership Plan which contains community safety priorities based on the current evidence base across the Borough of Sandwell.
Risk:	<p>Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications</p> <p>Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour through partnership working is central to the delivery of the Community Safety Strategy 2022-26 and Strategic Assessment 2020. This is business as usual and adheres to all individual partner required risk assessments and mitigations.</p>
Equality:	<p>An EIA was completed as part of the strategy process with no negative implications recorded for protected groups.</p> <p>Tackling crime and disorder and enhancing community safety helps address disadvantage and disproportionality ensuring that the vulnerable are safeguarded and community resilience increased.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	Reducing and managing crime and anti-social behaviour, and protecting its victims has a positive impact on health and wellbeing.



	Engaging with and supporting people in relation to community safety and building resilience to prevent the most vulnerable becoming victims of crime and exploitation will also have a positive longer-term impact on their health and wellbeing.
Social Value	Engagement with local residents and strengthening civic pride. Provision of opportunities for involvement through volunteering, engagement and positive activities.

9 Appendices

- Appendix 1 Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022-26
- Appendix 2 Powerpoint slides



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Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022-2026



'ensuring that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods'



Introduction

The Sandwell Community Safety Strategy outlines our plans for 2022 – 2026, working as a partnership to ensure that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods.

The Plan is introduced by Chief Superintendent Ian Green who is the Chair of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board and Councillor Bob Piper the cabinet lead for Community Safety, who help set the context for the strategy, outline key progress, challenges and ambitions for the next 5 years.

The Community Safety Partnership in Sandwell have been working hard to get a consistent, co-ordinated approach to violence, abuse, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour, focusing on prevention and where needed reducing offending and serious organised crime.

Throughout the strategy, you will see some of the examples of current approaches, projects and initiatives that have been implemented during the last 3 years and areas of strengths and good practice.

You will also see some of the data and figures for crime in the region. Nationally there has been a 12% increase in total recorded crime and Sandwell has followed similar trends, with some areas being higher or lower than national averages.

What is important is context, behind every figure is a story, and an individual,. We want every person in Sandwell to feel safe, protected and confident in their own homes and their neighbourhoods and some of the work we have undertaken over the last 3 years to support this ambition includes:

- Raising awareness of crime, violence and exploitation in our communities, so our communities know how to recognise such offending, can respond and seek support as required.
- Training and educating young people in schools in protective behaviours, to understand signs of abuse, violence and exploitation.
- Equipping professionals to recognise and respond to a wide range of violence, abuse, exploitation crime and anti-social behaviour,.
- Encouraging a trauma informed approach, helping individuals to recognise the impact of trauma and respond in sensitive ways
- Targeted interventions to respond to a range of forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour

The plan sets out clearly our main priorities for the next five years and some key objectives to work towards, which can be summarised as:

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
Prevent Violence and Exploitation	Reduce Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime	Prevent and Reduce Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
<p>Priority areas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of Public Place Violence • Under 25 violence • Domestic Abuse • Sexual Assault and Abuse • Modern Slavery • Child Exploitation 	<p>Main priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing Adult Reoffending • Reducing Youth Reoffending • Serious Organised Crime • County Lines 	<p>Main priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing Hate Crime Reducing Crime Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour
<p>Cross Cutting Priority 1: Protect and Support Vulnerable Victims Cross Cutting Priority 2 Tackling Substance Misuse – saving lives and reducing crime Cross Cutting Priority 3: Serious Violence Duty</p>		

Community Safety Vision

To ensure that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods



I am pleased to be able to update you on Sandwell's new Community Safety Strategy 2022-26. The multi-agency Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board understands that issues of crime and community safety are very complex and require an integrated partnership response. Over the past 3 years we have developed our approach around these three key themes:

- The prevention of violence and exploitation
- Reducing offending, reoffending and serious organised crime
- Preventing crime & antisocial behaviour in our Neighbourhoods

While considerable work and progress has been made across these areas there is still always more to be done and these will remain our key priorities for the next 5 year.

There are also three cross cutting priorities, which are integral to the delivery of all of these areas: our commitment to protecting and supporting vulnerable victims; tackling substance misuse to save lives and reduce crime, aligned with the Governments new Drugs Strategy and delivering on the new Serious Violence Duty, which promotes a multi-agency approach to understanding the causes and consequences of serious violence, focused on prevention and early intervention.

Over recent years we have seen the significant challenges that youth violence and exploitation in particular, are having on our communities. These issues have also been exacerbated by COVID and its restrictions on all of our lives. Despite these extraordinary challenges, the partnership has remained robust and focused on delivering activities to enhance community safety across the Borough.

We will continue to deliver these priorities by adopting a place based, public health approach, understanding that violence is preventable and identifying the reasons why people get drawn into crime. We will also support organisations to become trauma aware, to embed such approaches into their practice and to tackle these issues through the adoption of 4P Plans, which aim to: prevent violence, abuse and exploitation; protect those affected; reduce harm and pursue those who perpetrate these offences.

Delivery of these priorities will be led by the Community Safety Partnership through a number of work streams involving the right partners (including community leads and third sector organisations) to influence service delivery and improvements. This 5-year plan is focused on current and future threats and will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains fit for purpose as we tackle new emerging threat areas and complex vulnerabilities across our communities. This approach ensures the flexibility to predict and respond to any emerging trends in the fast paced and ever changing arena that is community safety.



Chief
Superintendent
Ian Green

Chair of the Safer Sandwell
Partnership Police Crime Board

Community safety is a key priority for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council; tackling crime, ASB and exploitation to ensure our communities are and feel safe in their homes and neighbourhoods. As such it underpins much of our Corporate Plan; Big Plans for a Great Place. This Strategy builds on the work undertaken over the past 3 years and provides a direction of travel for the next 5 years

Community safety is not something that can be tackled by any single agency; it requires good and effective partnership work. In Sandwell this work is led by our Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board, working collaboratively with Sandwell's 4 other strategic boards. Much of this work is cross cutting and we have proactive and innovative partners across all sectors who are committed to reducing opportunities for crime to get a foothold in the Borough.

Involving those who live here, or come into the Borough for work or education, to help us develop our approaches has been central to developing this strategy and we have conducted a range of surveys and other interactions to understand what makes people feel safe and how we can build awareness and resilience to help achieve this.

We have good links with regional partners including the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, The Violence Reduction Unit and the West Midlands Community Safety Partnership. Our strategy recognises that crime often extends beyond geographic boundaries and through ensuring alignment with that of these regional partners we can ensure that we maximise the resources available to tackle these issues.

Over the past three years we have strengthened our approaches to Community Safety, working with partners to tackle violence and exploitation, to better support those experiencing domestic abuse, hate crime and ASB and have become a national exemplar of good practice for our modern day slavery work. These achievements are celebrated in this strategy, however there is a recognition and strong commitment to continue to address crime and disorder across the Borough.

The ambition going forward is for swifter information flow, earlier identification and support for those at risk, increased involvement and co-production with communities and a reduction in the risk of residents being victimised. The Safer Sandwell Partnership also recognises the unprecedented and significant impact across all our communities, businesses and partnerships brought about by Covid19. The impact of this will continue to impact upon us for the foreseeable future but despite the pandemic the partnership has continued to meet and progress its many and varied workstream to ensure that we continue to address these issues and work collectively to support all our residents including some who are amongst the most vulnerable in society.



**Councillor
Bob Piper**

Cabinet Member for Community
Safety, Sandwell Metropolitan
Borough Council

Community Safety Strategy - Plan on a Page

	Priority 1: Prevent Violence and Exploitation	Priority 2: Reduce Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime	Priority 3: Prevent and Reduce Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
Priority areas include Page 114	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prevention of Public Place Violence ✓ Domestic Abuse/ Sexual Assault and Abuse ✓ Violence where victims and offenders under 25 ✓ Child Exploitation ✓ Modern Slavery ✓ Preventing Extremism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reducing Adult Reoffending ✓ Reducing Youth Reoffending ✓ Serious Organised Crime ✓ County Lines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reducing Hate Crime ✓ Reducing Crime ✓ Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure robust, effective victims pathways, support and responses are in place ✓ Use data and analysis to develop an understanding of each type of violence, abuse and exploitation ✓ Understand and further embed a trauma informed approach ✓ Ensure effective training is in place to continue to educate and raise awareness of violence, abuse and exploitation ✓ Equip our young people / future adults to stay safe and make positive choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Support offending pathways ✓ Management of high-risk offenders and targeting of key cohorts to reduce rates and seriousness of offences committed ✓ Continue to strengthen and develop partnership approaches around tackling serious organised crime ✓ Confirming and being able to clearly articulate the Boroughs approach to prevention and diversion as it relates to youth crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase community awareness of how to prevent crime and maintain and/or improve safety ✓ Strengthen our approaches to tackling ASB ✓ Embed and build upon our approaches to tackling hate crime ✓ Better informed tasking and resource deployment ✓ Enhance community safety on our high rise estates ✓ Engage with our communities to help us work together in partnership to tackle crime and ASB
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ As part of the 'Protect' strand of the PoVE Plan ensure current victim pathways are reviewed and are working ✓ Ensure victim pathways are incorporated into training plans ✓ Ensure regional approaches in place through close working relationships with the OPCC and WMVRU. ✓ Ensure a robust dialogue and support from the data and analysis sub group from the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) ✓ Enhance data sets to measure, monitor and review all priority areas of violence, exploitation and abuse ✓ Review how effective trauma informed training has been ✓ Develop resources to support trauma informed practice in relation to violence, abuse and exploitation ✓ Develop a Prevention of Violence, Exploitation and Abuse Training Plan ✓ Develop a training data set including evaluation data ✓ Encourage and support funding bids to support priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthen pathways to prevent the cycle of reoffending ✓ Embedding new commissioned services to support offenders ✓ Embed new Integrated Offender Management ✓ Review ways of working with domestic abuse perpetrators/sexual violence/abuse ✓ Strengthen and develop the organised crime response through the OCG partnership ✓ Raise awareness of serious organised crime and organised criminal gangs with partners ✓ Development of a model which will provide early identification and interventions preventing offending and reoffending – with a particular emphasis on youth offending ✓ Specific focus on understanding data in relation to over-represented children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enhance and promote community safety and crime prevention information on the Council website ✓ Distribute community safety and crime prevention materials and resources on priority issues identified ✓ Development of a new council wide ASB Policy and new ways of working ✓ Co-produced Service Standards for anti-social behaviour ✓ Review and update the partnership Hate Crime Plan ✓ Strengthen engagement with communities ✓ Review and develop data sets and a new dash board ✓ Improve intelligence gathering ✓ We will work in partnership with Housing colleagues to deliver the CCTV / Concierge Services upgrade and expansion programme across our high-rise estate

Cross cutting priority 1: Protect and support vulnerable victims of abuse, violence, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour

Cross cutting priority 2: Tackling Substance Misuse – saving lives and reducing crime

Cross cutting priority 3: Serious Violence Duty

Priority 1: Prevent Violence and Exploitation

Over the past three years, we have worked to develop a holistic response to preventing, violence, abuse and exploitation which includes:

- Developing comprehensive training programmes to educate professionals on how to identify and respond to a range of violence, abuse and exploitation, including domestic abuse, modern slavery, and child exploitation
- We have developed and strengthened early interventions including a new Child Exploitation Hub who are leading the way in responding to child exploitation, with a 50% reduction in such offences reported to the police over the past 3 years
- We have undertaken targeted initiatives to address incidents of knife crime, training and educating young people, using proactive stop and searches and other knife crime initiatives. This proactive work means we have seen an increase in recorded knife crime and weapons seizures but we have intervened at the earliest juncture
- We have continued to deliver interventions throughout the pandemic and national lock downs. This included being proactive in responding to national increases in domestic abuse, ensuring effective interventions remained in place locally
- Proactive work around modern slavery, educating communities to recognise and respond to signs and concerns.
- Targeted communications to our communities to raise awareness around reporting

What are residents telling us?

143 people responded to our Sexual Abuse and Assault Survey carried out in 2021

- 1 in 3 said they had experienced sexual abuse or assault
- 51.2% said the abuse or assault took place in West Bromwich
- When asked what would make them feel safer, respondents told us – awareness raising & education, safe spaces, visible security/police presence

How will we respond?

We have worked to increase reporting for a number of types of violence and exploitation, and need to continue with raising awareness of these crimes and training and educating professionals and our communities.

The PoVE Strategy and Plan will be completed to ensure effective plans are in place to prevent violence and exploitation occurring, protect victims and pursue offenders.

From the Sexual Abuse and Assault Survey, 51.2% said the incidents took place in West Bromwich. We have been successful in obtaining Safer Streets funding to tackle violence against women and girls and are delivering a place based project in West Bromwich..

Objectives	Strategy
Ensure robust, effective victims pathways, support and responses are in place	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As part of the 'Protect' strand of the PoVE Plan ensure current victim pathways are reviewed and are working 2. Ensure victim pathways are incorporated into training plans
Use data and analysis to develop an understanding of each type of violence, abuse and exploitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure a robust dialogue and support from the Data and Analysis Sub Group from the VRU 2. Enhance data sets to measure, monitor and review all priority areas of violence, exploitation and abuse
Understand and further embed a trauma informed approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review how effective trauma informed training has been 2. Develop resources to support trauma informed practice in relation to violence, abuse and exploitation
Ensure effective training is in place to continue to educate and raise awareness of violence, abuse and exploitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a Prevention of Violence, Exploitation and Abuse Training Plan 2. Develop a training data set including evaluation data

Priority 2: Reduce Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime

Reducing Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime was a new priority set in the 2019 strategy. Over the last 3 years we have worked to develop the new Board Sub group who oversee and develop this area of work. Some of the main highlights include:

- Development of the Black Country Reducing Reoffending Strategy. The strategy outlines the strengthened commitment of partners to work jointly, to unblock barriers and to reduce reoffending
- Further development of the 7 pathways out of offending, ensuring robust support is in place for offenders.
- Working to reduce reoffending rates for young people, which in Sandwell have reduced from 47.55% to 42.64%
- While we have seen an increase in under the influence violence crimes, our award winning Blue Light project has worked with treatment resistant drinkers and has demonstrated a 74% reduction in reoffending and 82% reduction in the cost of crime
- We have worked to get upstream in addressing organised crime groups and now have 8 mapped groups in Sandwell where the partnership is proactively intervening and disrupting their activities.
- We recognise the importance of listening to the voice of our communities and have carried out a number of consultations over the last 3 years which have all provided valuable input into this new strategy

What are residents telling us?

It is important that we listen to the voice of the community, we carried out a community safety survey in 2021, we had 177 residents responded who told us that their top concerns in relation to violence, abuse and crime are:

- Drug Dealing
- Youth Disorder
- Burglary
- Violent Crime

How will we respond?

We will continue to take a robust partnership approach and encourage communities to get involved in helping to tackle these issues.

We will also seek to increase understanding of serious organised crime across the region.

Half of acquisitive crime, burglary and robbery are caused by substance misuse. We will be ensuring our strategies are aligned to the Government's Drug Strategy

Objectives	Strategy
Support offending pathways	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthening pathways to prevent the cycle of reoffending 2. Embedding new commissioned services to support offenders
Management of high-risk offenders and targeting of key cohorts to reduce rates and seriousness of offences committed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embed new Integrated Offender Management 2. Review ways of working with domestic abuse perpetrators/sexual violence/abuse
Continue to strengthen and develop partnership approaches around tackling serious organised crime	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen and develop the organised crime response through the Organised Criminal Gangs (OCG) partnership 2. Raise awareness of serious organised crime and organised criminal gangs with partners
Confirming and being able to clearly articulate the Boroughs approach to prevention and diversion as it relates to youth crime	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of a model which will provide early identification and interventions preventing offending and reoffending – with a particular emphasis on youth offending 2. Specific focus on understanding data in relation to over-represented children

Priority 3: Prevent and Reduce Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

Throughout the last three years we have really focused our efforts to adopt a consistent approach to prevent and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Some of our key achievements have included:

- Successful reintroduction of Town/Borough Tasking to bring partners together to problem solve and tackle crime and anti-social behaviour
- Ongoing service delivery throughout the Covid pandemic including increased enforcement in relation to Covid breaches
- The introduction of a dedicated ASB reporting portal to ensure reported ASB reaches the correct agency first time wherever possible
- Enhanced Reporting Metrics covering Domestic Abuse and Hate Crime enabling better drilldown in relation to figures, areas, trends and responses
- In 2019/20, Sandwell Council's ASB Team became the first Local Authority team in the country to meet the PLEDGE Standard for it's policy, practice and use of the ASB Community Trigger
- 2020/21 also saw the development of a new Noise Nuisance Triage Pilot, which made the ASB Team's 'Noise App' tool, available to selected Sandwell Locals staff to enable more timely interventions
- Boroughwide PSPOs covering Dog Fouling and Alcohol were renewed for a further 3 years along with the West Bromwich Town Centre one.

What are People telling us?

- 177 residents responded to the 2021 Community Safety Survey. We asked about personal experiences of anti-social behaviour and crime in Sandwell
- 77.4% (137) stated that they either been the victim or witness of this
 - 60 respondents had reported to the police
 - 71 of respondents said they had reported to Sandwell Council
 - 78% (43) were not satisfied with how their reports were dealt with

How will we respond?

- More than half of the people who have witnessed or experienced crime or ASB had not reported to the police. We need to continue to raise awareness of how to prevent crime and improve safety.
- It is difficult to measure data and get a true reflection on reductions in total recorded crime due to the national lock downs.
- With 78% of respondents stating they are not satisfied with how their reports were dealt with, we need to strengthen our approaches tackling these issues and engaging with our communities to develop trust and ensure positive outcomes are shared.

Objectives	Strategy
Increase community awareness of how to prevent crime and maintain and/or improve safety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance and promote community safety and crime prevention information on the Council website 2. Distribute community safety and crime prevention materials and resources on priority issues identified
Strengthen our approaches to tackling ASB	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of a new council wide ASB Policy and new ways of working 2. Co-produced Service Standards
Embed and build upon our approaches to tackling hate crime	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and update the partnership Hate Crime Plan 2. Strengthen engagement with communities
Better informed tasking and resource deployment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and develop data sets and a new dash board 2. Improve intelligence gathering
Enhance the community safety of our high rise estates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We will work in partnership with Housing colleagues to deliver the CCTV / Concierge Services upgrade and expansion programme across our high-rise estate

Cross Cutting Priority 1: Protect and Support vulnerable victims of abuse, violence, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour

The main vision behind the Community Safety Strategy is to ensure that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods.

Sandwell Council has a clear vision for what the Borough should look and feel like by 2030:

In 2030, Sandwell is a thriving, optimistic and resilient community. It's where we call home and where we're proud to belong - where we choose to bring up our families, where we feel safe and cared for, enjoying good health, rewarding work, feeling connected and valued in our neighbourhoods and communities, confident in the future, and benefiting fully from a revitalised West Midlands.

Safe and Protected in your Home

In the 2021 Community Safety Survey we asked about feelings of safety in relation to anti-social behaviour and crime, 34.4% of individuals reported feeling unsafe in their own homes, this is important as we know that abuse, violence, crime and anti-social behaviour can happen in places where we live.

Feeling safe at home and in your community is fundamental to living well and to strong community relationships. Although Sandwell's violent crime and anti-social behaviour levels are similar to the national average, residents are concerned and tell us that feeling safe is the most important thing for them and their families.

- Our focus throughout this strategy will be to continue to:
- Drive home key messages of safety and support into the homes of our residents. The Sandwell Herald, Community Safety Bulletin and our website / social media feeds provide a range of safety messages and support options available for victims.
 - We will promote awareness raising messages to enable people to report violence, abuse, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour.
 - We will continue to shine a light on abuse, violence and exploitation that is hidden behind closed doors.
 - We will continue to take action where concerns are reported; over the last three years the Anti-Social Behaviour team has responded to 29,638 incidents to reduce or manage ASB.
 - We will continue to disrupt locations where modern slavery and exploitation occur, raising awareness and enabling communities to report any possible concerns.
 - We will increase community awareness of how to prevent crime and maintain and/or improve safety

Safe and Protected in your Community

In the 2021 Community Safety Survey we asked about feelings of safety from anti-social behaviour and crime, 44.8% of people reported feeling fairly unsafe in public spaces in Sandwell such as in towns and parks

One of the ways people said that they would feel more safe would be to have a physical police presence on the streets. The Police and Crime Commissioner Simon Foster's top priority is to rebuild community policing in the West Midlands. Pledging 450 officers across the region of which 177 have already been recruited.

- In addition to make our streets safer we will continue to:
- Work with the Violence Reduction Unit to increase funding into detached youth work with young people.
 - Work with the Violence Reduction Unit to pilot a programme called Stepping Together that increases safety for young people on their journey to and from school
 - Implement Safer Streets funding to target safety concerns in West Bromwich
 - Use our PSPOs (Public Space Protection Orders) covering Dog Fouling, Alcohol, Nitrous Oxide and West Bromwich Town Centre to engage with those involved in anti social behaviour
 - Expand our CCTV and concierge service across our remaining high rise estate
 - Work closely with WMP on providing CCTV imaging and professional witnessing to secure convictions
 - Develop our restorative justice options

Cross Cutting Priority 2: Tackling Substance Misuse – saving lives and reducing crime

The chart below, outlines the governments plan on a page to implement the strategy

What is the data telling us?

- Drug Related Deaths: Sandwell has significantly lower number of drug related deaths than the regional and national average
- Continuity of Care rates (ensuring prompt access to treatment on release from prison): remains above the national average
- Successful Completion rates across all substance types are currently lower than the national average (16.3% v 21.1%), whilst representations (indicative of relapse) are better than the national average.
- Complexity levels of clients accessing treatment is higher than the national average: 63% of presentations to service have high/very high levels of complexity compared with 51% nationally
- A high level of need and unmet need exists locally: Sandwell has a higher estimated rate of drug and alcohol users than national levels; 85% of alcohol dependent individuals and 58% of opiate/crack users are not known to treatment services (both roughly in line with national levels)
- Sandwell remains statistically significantly worse than the national average for both alcohol specific and related mortality (now ranked second worst in the country for alcohol related mortality)

Drug Strategy

The Government has launched a ten-year plan, to combat illegal drugs with ambitions across 3 key areas:

- Breaking drug supply chains
- Delivering a world class treatment & recovery service
- Achieving a generational shift in demand for drugs

How will we respond

This strategy is an ambitious strategy which sits across all areas of preventing and reducing violence, abuse, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour.

To ensure this has the right attention, this area of work has been set as a cross cutting priority across all community safety priorities.

We have the Sandwell Drug and Alcohol Partnership (SDAP) with multiple workstreams already in place to address many of these concerns.

We will develop a task and finish group to review the partnership approach and develop an implementation plan for the strategy as a starting point linking this into our new PoVE / RRSOC and place based work streams.

Priority	Break drug supply chains	Deliver a world-class treatment and recovery system	Achieve a shift in the demand for recreational drugs
Why?	Drug supply chains are violent and exploitative, degrading neighbourhoods across the country and internationally	Drug addiction harms individuals and society: deaths have risen to record levels and almost half of acquisitive crime is linked to addiction	Use of recreational drugs has grown over a decade, particularly among young people, risking individual harm and fuelling dangerous markets
How?	We will continue to roll up county lines and strengthen our response across the drug supply chain, making the UK a significantly harder place for organised crime groups to operate	We will invest a further £780 million to rebuild drug treatment and recovery services, including for young people and offenders, with new commissioning standards to drive transparency and consistency	We will strengthen the evidence for how best to deter use of recreational drugs, ensuring that adults change their behaviour or face tough consequences, and with universal and targeted activity to prevent young people from starting to take drugs
Who?	Home Office and MoJ, working with international and intelligence partners, NCA, Border Force, police, courts, prison and probation	DHSC, DLLHC, DWP and MoJ working with NHSE, local authorities, treatment providers and people with lived experience	DfE, DHSC, Home Office and MoJ, working with local authorities, police, education providers, secure facilities and youth services
What?	Within three years: close 2,000 more county lines, disrupt 6,400 OCG activities and deny more criminal assets	Within three years: prevent nearly 1,000 deaths, deliver 54,500 new high-quality treatment places and prevent a quarter of a million crimes	Reduce overall drug use to a new historic 30-year low over the next decade

Cross Cutting Priority 3: Implementing the Serious Violence Duty

There are several asks of Community Safety Partnerships in responding to the Serious Violence Duty

What is the Serious Violence Duty?

- The Duty is a key part of the Government’s programme of work to prevent and reduce serious violence; taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focused on prevention and early intervention, and informed by evidence
- This was introduced as part of the Police Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill on 9 March 2021 alongside Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) and Homicide Reviews
- It is a key part of the Government’s wider programme of work to prevent and reduce serious violence; taking a whole-system approach to understand causes and consequences and focus on prevention and early intervention
- The Duty requires organisations to work together to: plan; share data, intelligence and knowledge; generate evidence-based analysis of the problem and solutions to prevent and reduce serious violence in local areas
- There is sufficient flexibility for relevant organisations to work together in the most effective local partnership for any given area

How will we respond

The Serious Violence Duty will help to provide targeted responses to serious violence in Sandwell. Through initial discussions, there have already been some broad principles adopted to take this work forward, which include:

- Rather than build an additional forum, we will use existing local structures including POVE/RRSOC/ Borough Tasking / SSPPCB and build the Serious Violence Duty into these new plans
- We will adopt the World Health Organisation’s definition of a public health approach, which can be summarised as follows:
 - Focussed on a defined population;
 - With and for communities
 - Not constrained by organisational or professional boundaries
 - Focussed on generating long term as well as short term solutions
 - Based on data and intelligence to identify the burden on the population, including any inequalities
 - Rooted in evidence of effectiveness to tackle the problem
 - Develop a small working group to start taking this work forward
 - Build in the three key success measures:
 - homicide rates
 - hospital admissions for knife/sharp object assault,
 - Police recorded knife crime

Objectives	
Understanding local issues:	To identify the kinds of serious violence that occur in our area and so far as it is possible to do so, the causes of that serious violence, the partnership will work together to establish a local ‘strategic needs assessment’ – identifying the drivers of serious violence in the local area and the cohorts of people most affected or at risk. This will require the sharing of relevant data and intelligence held by the individual organisations subject to the duty.
Understanding local issues: Preparation and implementation of a strategy:	In order to prepare and implement a strategy to prevent and reduce serious violence, the partnership must collectively develop a strategy which should outline the multi-agency response that the partnership will take to address the drivers identified in the strategic needs assessment and the work planned to prevent and reduce serious violence in the specified local area. The strategy should set out how the proposed actions will enhance and complement existing local arrangements responding to serious violence.
Review:	The duty requires that once a strategy has been prepared it must be kept under review. The partnership should review the strategy on an annual basis. A review should specifically consider how the interventions and solutions have impacted on serious violence within their area – considering for example crime statistics and accident and emergency data. The review may highlight the need for a refreshed strategic needs assessment and strategy, for example where new and emerging crime types are identified.

The Approach

Sandwell Community Safety Strategy for 2022 - 2026 sets out the approach we are taking to prevent and reduce, violence, abuse, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour

Public Health approach

This Means

Understanding that violence is preventable and the reasons why people get drawn into crime

We will do this by:

- ✓ Focusing on understanding the causes of violence,
- ✓ Understanding the reasons why people get drawn into a life of crime.
- ✓ Using data and evidence
- ✓ Asking the people involved "what has happened to you, to get to this point?"

Trauma Informed approach

This Means

Supporting organisations in becoming trauma aware and helping them to begin embedding trauma informed approaches into their practice

We will do this by:

- ✓ Ensuring robust training plans are in place to raise awareness of adverse childhood experiences
- ✓ Embedding trauma informed practice to reinforce the strengths and relationship-based practice many professionals already engage in.
- ✓ Supporting organisations to be trauma informed organisations
- ✓ Continuing our journey to establish consistency in the use of a trauma-informed approach

Four P approach

This Means

We will prevent violence, abuse and exploitation, protect those affected, reduce harm and pursue those who perpetrate

We will do this by:

- ✓ Maximising prevention opportunities and targeting resources to be effective
- ✓ Ensure robust, effective victims pathways, support and responses are in place
- ✓ Maximising opportunities to disrupt locations where there is violence, abuse and exploitation and use joint enforcement opportunities
- ✓ Reducing the harms caused by violence, abuse and exploitation through improved victim identification and support

Our engagement with local people and partners in developing this Community Safety Strategy has been invaluable in helping the partnership to shape our responses to ensure communities of Sandwell “feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods”

Consultations carried out included:

- Annual WMP Community Safety Partnership Survey
- SSP Community Safety Survey (2021)
- Shape Survey (2020)
- Young Peoples Hate Crime Survey (2020)
- Sexual Abuse and Assault Survey (2021)
- Thank you to everyone who contributed

In the 2021 Community Safety Survey we asked about personal experiences of anti-social behaviour and crime in Sandwell

- 77.4% stated that they either been the victim or witness of this
- 60 respondents had reported to the police
- 71 of respondents said they had reported to Sandwell Council
- 78% were not satisfied with how their reports were dealt with

Review of Young People’s Experience of Hate Crime

- 73 young people responded
- 1 in 4 respondents told us that they had either been a victim or witnessed hate
- 44% told us they had not received any education on hate crime
- 38% told us they had been impacted by online hate

Sexual Abuse & Assault Survey

- 143 people responded
- 1 in 3 said they had experienced sexual abuse or assault
- 51.2% said the abuse or assault took place in West Bromwich
- When asked what would make them feel safer, respondents told us – awareness raising & education, safe spaces, visible security/police presence

In the 2021 Community Safety Survey we asked about feelings of safety from anti-social behaviour and crime

- 28.7% of people felt fairly unsafe and 5.7% very unsafe at home
- 44.8% of people reported feeling fairly unsafe in public spaces in Sandwell such as in towns and parks
- 40.3% of individuals expressed feeling very worried about becoming the victim of a crime in Sandwell
- 40% felt worried about organised crime and exploitation in Sandwell
- 24% of individuals perceived there to be an ineffective response to anti-social behaviour and crime by authorities

In the 2021 Community Safety Survey we asked about what would help you feel safer from anti-social behaviour and/or crime in Sandwell,

- 91.5% respondents asked for an increased police presence
- More CCTV (69.5%) was the second most common solution
- Well maintained estates & streets (59.9%) were third

In the Community Safety Survey we asked about priorities for the new Sandwell Community Safety Strategy

The top 5 issues highlighted were:

- Drug dealing (10.7%)
- Youth disorder (9.3%)
- Burglary (7.4%)
- Violent crime (7.2%)
- Littering/fly tipping (5.8%)

“Frankly the most violent and serious of the crimes above should always be top of the list but if you address the social issues also as a priority I'd hope that the number of serious crimes decreases”

“Difficult to pick top 5 as some of these such as DA, stalking and harassment and rape or sexual assault, forced marriage, slavery and hate crime should all be priorities but not necessarily a safety priority for the general vote as there is a smaller percentage that would experience these types of behaviours and therefore require those specific services”

Place Based Responses to Community Safety

Tipton

- ✓ 35% of children live in poverty
- ✓ Tipton is young with a higher than average proportion of young residents and lower than average proportion of older residents
- ✓ In 2020-21 overall total recorded crime increased in Tipton Town with an additional 246 offences.
- ✓ 136.6 crimes per 1000 people
- ✓ Stalking and Harassment had the highest increase with 200, (63.2%), additional offences
- ✓ Over the last 3 years, of 31 modern slavery concerns reported 61% were labour exploitation and 30% criminal exploitation with 24% of victims are Polish

Oldbury

- ✓ 26% of children live in poverty
- ✓ In 2020-21 overall total recorded crime decreased with a reduction of 311 offences.
- ✓ 80.9 crimes per 1000 people
- ✓ Over the last 3 years, of 41 modern slavery concerns reported 72% were labour exploitation and 19% criminal exploitation. 69% of victims are Romanian

Rowley Regis

- ✓ 28% of children live in poverty
- ✓ In 2020-21 overall total recorded crime has decreased with 8 less offences.
- ✓ 80.4 crimes per 1000 people
- ✓ Over the last 3 years of 26 modern slavery concerns reported 63% were labour exploitation and 24% criminal exploitation

Wednesbury

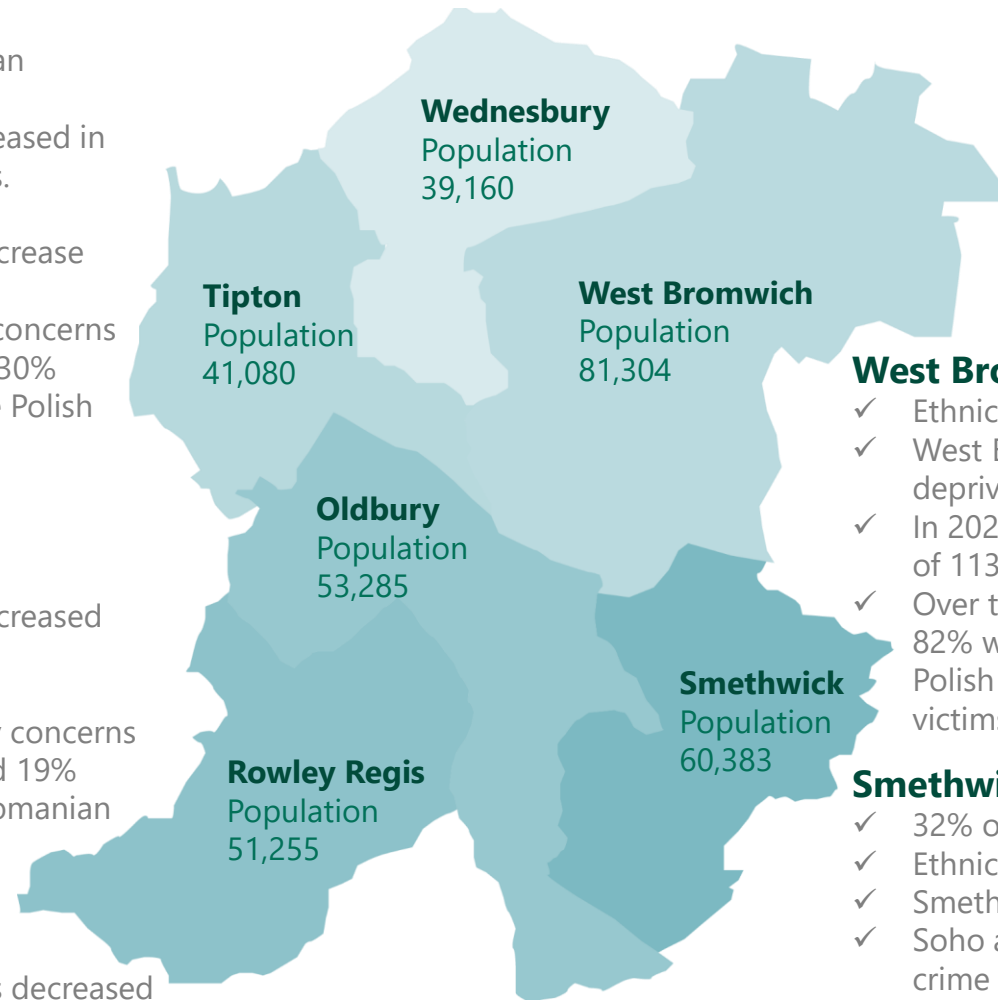
- ✓ 32% of children live in poverty
- ✓ The population is slightly older than the Sandwell average
- ✓ In 2020-21 overall total recorded crime has increased with 188 additional offences
- ✓ 92.5 crimes per 1000 people
- ✓ Over the last 3 years, of 24 modern slavery concerns reported, 62% were labour exploitation and 32% criminal exploitation. 50% of all victims were Albanians

West Bromwich

- ✓ Ethnic Minorities account for 35.5% of the population
- ✓ West Bromwich's deprivation score puts it in the 20% most deprived areas of England
- ✓ In 2020-21 there was an overall increase in total recorded crime of 113 offences.
- ✓ Over the last three years, of 98 modern slavery concerns reported 82% were labour exploitation and 10% criminal exploitation. Polish and Romanian communities had the highest incidences of victims with 27% each respectively

Smethwick

- ✓ 32% of children live in poverty
- ✓ Ethnic minorities account for 55.9% of the population.
- ✓ Smethwick has the highest proportion of young people
- ✓ Soho and Victoria had just under 50% more than the average crime levels
- ✓ In 2020-21 overall total recorded crime decreased in Smethwick with a reduction of 305 offences
- ✓ Over the last 3 years, of 101 modern slavery concerns reported 63% were labour exploitation and 28% criminal exploitation. 49% of all sexual exploitation also occurred in Smethwick. 45% of modern slavery victims are from the Indian population



Priority 1

**PREVENT
VIOLENCE
and EXPLOITATION**



PoVE

(Prevention of Violence and Exploitation)

The PoVE Sub Group is a strategic Sub Group of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board. It is responsible for co-ordination of the work of partners to ensure that the Safer Sandwell Partnership Community Safety Strategy and Action Plan for Prevention of Violence and Exploitation (PoVE) is effectively delivered in close co-operation with Sandwell's Health and Wellbeing, Adult Safeguarding, Children's Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Boards.

The partnership group is responsible for directing activities and resources aimed at prevention and early help to address violence and exploitation and overseeing performance against a series of objectives, targets and performance indicators laid out in the Prevention and Violence and Exploitation Strategy & Delivery Plans.

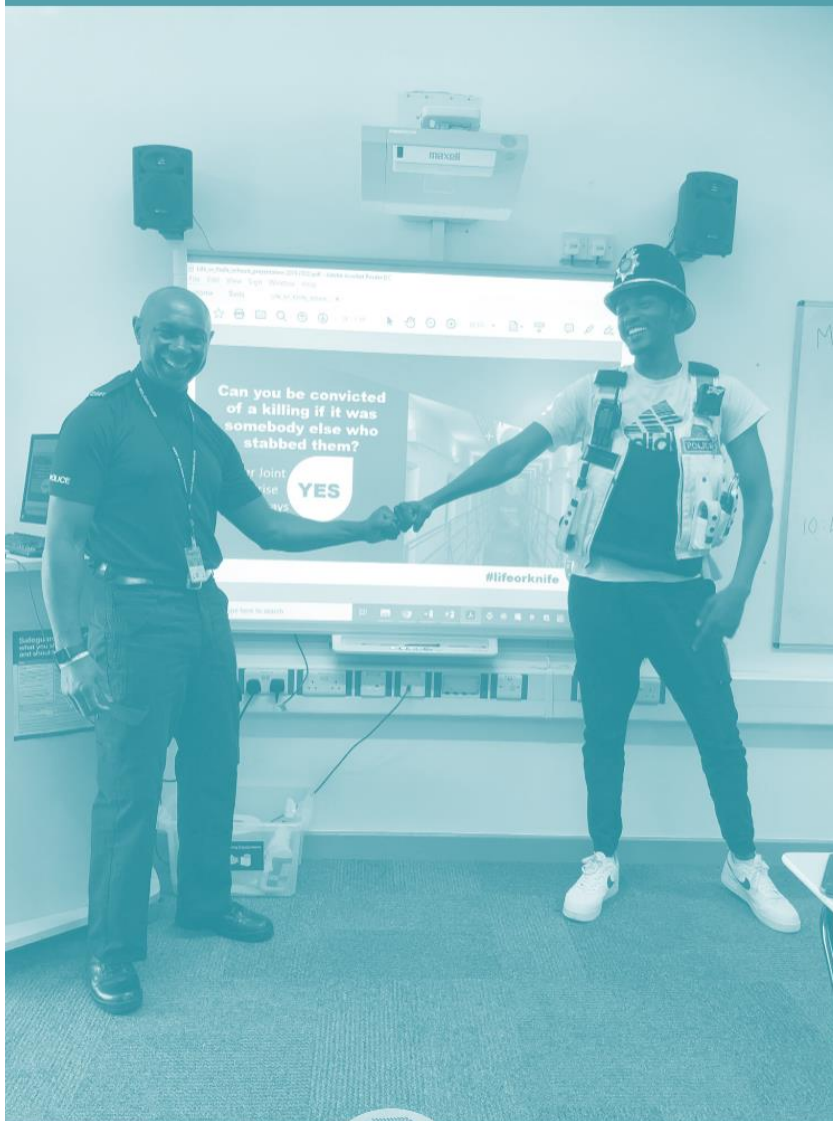
Key Prevention Priorities for PoVE include:

- Prevention of Public Place Violence
- Domestic Abuse
- Knife Crime
- Violence where victims and offenders under 25.
- Child Exploitation
- Modern Slavery

There are several cross-cutting priorities which have an additional focus including

- Addictive Behaviours
- Trauma informed practice
- Preventing radicalisation

We will prevent violence, abuse and exploitation, protect those affected, reduce harm and pursue those who perpetrate abuse, violence and exploitation



Progress

The PoVE Plan was developed with partners and is regularly reviewed at each PoVE meeting. Key achievements over the past 12 months have included:

Developing a regional approach to preventing violence, abuse and exploitation

- Embedded the VRU governance structures locally across all 4 Boards
- Agreed effective information exchange between the regional Boards and the LA / Partnership Boards.
- Aligned a range of joint priorities across the 4 regional Boards

Developing a Sandwell Prevention of Violence, Abuse and Exploitation Strategy and Plan

- The strategy and plan were both launched in April 2020 and underpin Sandwell's partnership approach to preventing and reducing violence, abuse and exploitation

Understanding the strategic landscape

- We worked with the Violence and Vulnerability Unit to undertake a Locality Review to help develop the response to violence, abuse and exploitation.
- VRU Regional Exploitation Framework – this was sent for consultation; the final framework is being pulled together and will need to be embedded across Sandwell

Other developments during the year have seen the VRU establish their 4 Boards: Domestic Abuse; Rape & Serious Sexual Offences, Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery and Criminal Exploitation & Missing. Sandwell is represented on all 4 which feed into our Prevention of Violence and Exploitation Work.

In October 2020 the VRU appointed a Community Navigator role to Sandwell to better link the VRU into local areas. The Navigator sits within the VRU and the Community Safety Team and one of her key tasks has been to co-ordinate a pilot project to reduce opportunities for violence and exploitation in one of Sandwell's Impact Areas. This developed into the Smethwick Against Violence Initiative (SAVI) which brought together a range of partners, including new groups, to develop resources and information to reduce opportunities for violence and exploitation and hate crime in this area

Local Picture

Between 2017 – 2020 Sandwell has seen a :

- 63% increase in domestic abuse reported to the police
- 55% increase in high risk domestic abuse

April 2018 - March 2021 data

- Sandwell MARAC offered support to 1973 high risk domestic abuse victims
- Black Country Women’s Aid were funded to provide specialist support to at least 5466 victims of domestic abuse and their families
- 422 victims supported through the A&E IDVA service funded through the OPCC
- Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG have now fully trained a total of 46 GP practices
- 505 victims of sexual violence and abuse supported by BCWA
- 24,118 children have been referred to MASH due to domestic abuse
- Women and girls in our community are at disproportionate risk of a wide range of crimes

Domestic Abuse

In the year ending March 2019, an estimated 2.4 million people aged 16 to 74 years reported experiencing domestic abuse. The true figure is much higher. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone but is disproportionately perpetrated by men towards women and children.

According to the ONS, figures indicate that the number of domestic abuse-related crimes in England rose by 6% in the year ending March 2021. In Sandwell we have seen a 30% increase in Domestic Abuse reports compared to data last year and a 10% increase in high risk MARAC cases. Due to the volume of referrals, an extra MARAC was held in February 2021 to deal effectively with the volume of cases being referred.

Nationally, there has been a 22% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline in England. We have also seen this demand locally with a 52% increase in contact with domestic abuse support services compared to last year and a 4% increase in referrals to Sandwell Children’s Trust.

Domestic abuse continues to be a priority for the Partnership and the work we have undertaken this year demonstrates how the partnership has managed increased demands, continued service delivery despite the he impact of Covid and responded to national policy changes.

In the 2019-21 strategy the following objectives in relation to domestic abuse were agreed

What We Said	What we Did
We will build on the success of the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP), giving more focus to several ‘hidden’ types of violence and exploitation	Domestic abuse continues to be a high priority, DASP is now a statutory board and leads the way in the response to DA in Sandwell.
Establish the DRIVE programme to change the behaviour of perpetrators	The DRIVE programme, funded by the OPCC was delivered in Sandwell with 53 perpetrators completing work in 2020-21.
Review arrangements for MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)	A regional review and relaunch of MARAC took place in 2019. There has been a 10% increase in high risk cases, with extra MARAC meetings held to meet the demand

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Completion and publication of 3 Domestic Homicide Reviews and delivery of Learning Events
- Several new groups established to tackle specific abuse including Child to Parent Abuse and Sexual Assault & Abuse.
- FGM multi-agency procedures agreed and published and promoted through a community launch event
- 2410 professionals attended domestic abuse training
- £841,000 of New Burdens Funding secured

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Production of new Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment and summary
- Development of new DA Strategy 2021-24
- Implementation of Delivery Plan for support in safe accommodation
- 3-year DA/SAA training programme to be commissioned 2022-25
- Commission bespoke community-based support for children experiencing DA

Learning

★ Coercive and controlling behaviour is a key factor in domestic abuse

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★ Abusers often use counter-allegations, including allegations of child abuse/neglect, to divert attention from their own abusive behaviour

★ Children lived in family where 20 years of DA wasn't reported or disclosed

★ Importance of encouraging adult victims to report / seek help

★ Looking for potential signs of DA in both adults and children



What we have done following these cases?

- We have actively promoted domestic abuse awareness via the annual '16 Days of Action Against Domestic Abuse' campaign, sharing regular messages on social media about different types of abuse and how to seek support, Safer 6 campaigns; Adult Safeguarding weeks as well as regular messages throughout the year
- We have developed a Learning from DHRs training module and multi-agency domestic abuse training sessions
- We have produced a domestic abuse information leaflet for friends, family and work colleagues
- We have produced information on domestic abuse victim support services in various languages
- We produced and launched 'Tina's Story' a video to promote awareness of domestic abuse and prevent further domestic homicides

Learning from Domestic Abuse Homicides

A Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) is a multi-agency review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a person to whom they were related or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship, or a member of the same household as themselves. Since 13 April 2011 there has been a statutory requirement for local areas to conduct a DHR following a domestic homicide that meets the criteria.

Over the last three years, 3 Domestic Abuse Homicides Reports have been published in Sandwell:

Miriam

• 'Miriam was a 26-year-old mother of three children who was killed by her ex-partner in 2015. The relationship began when she was 14 and he was 50. A key theme of the DHR was how professionals did not recognise how the relationship began, including potential CSE, and the impact of this on the family dynamics.

Eve.

• 'Eve' was a 54-year-old woman who was murdered by her long-term partner. He was jailed for a minimum of 24 years for her murder. She was a mother and grandmother who had struggled to provide a loving home to her children and step-children despite her partner's abusive and controlling behaviour. During their twenty year relationship, she experienced repeated physical, emotional and psychological abuse but did not report him to the Police for fear of his retribution on her and their family. Read her story [here](#)

AB

• AB was murdered by her partner in 2017 who then committed suicide. The review highlighted the importance of professionals and others being able to recognise coercive and controlling behaviour and know what to do and where support can be accessed for victims-survivors

Integrated management of domestic abuse serial perpetrators in Sandwell is working well, data submitted to the Home Office demonstrates a 87% reduction in repeat domestic abuse incidents and an 86% reduction in the cost of domestic abuse crime for those subject to management.

The DRIVE perpetrator programme reported a 96% reduction in repeat domestic abuse incidents and a 94% reduction in the cost of crime.

Since 2015 there have been 3384 recordable offences relating to sexual assault and abuse in Sandwell. (Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) data).

This includes adult and child victims, with the majority of victims being female. Black Country Women's Aid's (BCWA) quarterly reports indicate that after a spike in 2019/20 to 197 referrals, there has been a noticeable decrease to 153 referrals in 2020/21 which could be attributed to the COVID lockdown and victims feeling unable to report. This is backed up by the fact that the majority of referrals (41%) were self-referrals in 2018/19. This decreased dramatically to 29% in 2019/20 and reduced again to 25% in 2020/21.

Sexual Assault (88%) and Rape (56%) continues to be the primary reason for referral into BCWA's Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) service.

The Children's and Young People's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) supported 46 victims of SAA in the last year specifically in Sandwell, 70% of which were young women and girls. Of all the referrals, 29% were from a minority background. 4% were from LGBTQ community.

The Adult SARC were only able to provide West Midlands wide data. They have supported 272 adult victims of SAA from April 20 to Mar 21. 92% of those supported were female. 45% of those were from a minority background. (significantly higher than the percentage of ethnic minority across the West Midlands of 16.5%)

Sexual Assault and Abuse

Sexual Assault and Abuse are hidden crimes that often go unreported so it is sometimes misleading to rely on police data to estimate the prevalence of the issue. It is estimated that 773,000 adults aged 16-73 experienced Sexual Assault and Abuse in the year ending March 2020.(Crime Survey England and Wales)

Nationally sexual assault and abuse disproportionately affects women and girls, with 1 in 5 females estimated to experience sexual assault and abuse from the age of 16 years old and 1 in 25 males estimated to experience sexual assault and abuse within the same age bracket (CSEW, 2018). The prevalence of sexual assault and abuse experienced by children under 16 years is estimated to encompass 7.5% of the current adult population (CSEW, 2020). To caveat this, it is important to recognise that under-reporting means the true prevalence of sexual assault, abuse and exploitation is not fully understood.

Currently only 1.4 percent of reported rape offences are prosecuted in England and Wales (Home Office 2020). The difficulties that the criminal justice process faces are starkly seen by the calls for reform and the work ongoing within government.

SAA Aims for 2022 -25

Victim Pathways - We will provide an appropriate pathway for victims to access support that is effective, robust and follows best practice. We will use victims' feedback to improve services and outcomes.

Tackling Attitudes -We will implement robust preventative measures from early childhood to adulthood

Raising Awareness - We will raise awareness of SAA across all partners and ensure that all organisations fulfil their responsibilities to address SAA and provide appropriate responses to victims

Challenging Perpetrators - We want perpetrators of sexual assault and abuse to be held accountable for their actions and supported to change their behaviours

2018-21 Achievements

- Multi-agency Sexual Assault & Abuse group established in late 2020 which reports to DASP
- SAA needs assessment produced and presented to DASP in Dec 2021
- 2022-25 Strategy drafted – key priorities
- Workshop with partners January 2022 to develop implementation plan
- FGM Clinic established

2022 - 25 priorities

- Strategy presented to DASP in March 2022 for approval
- Implementation plan 2022-25 developed by SAA group and approved by DASP
- Check With Me First campaign rolled out across frontline health professionals
- Improved training for professionals around SAA
- Work to improve referral pathways between grassroot organisations and specialist agencies

Local Picture

The Sandwell Anti-slavery Strategic Partnership continue to lead the way in responding effectively to modern slavery

SHOP (Slavery and Human Trafficking Operational Partnership) continues to lead the operational response around modern slavery

The year has seen a continued uplift in operational activity, particularly amongst those who are homeless and destitute. 20 partners are consistently at SHOP, sharing intelligence and data to effectively detect, prevent and disrupt modern slavery

Since April 2019 there have been 450 reports of modern slavery in Sandwell

- 1017 potential victims screened
- 306 safeguarding visits completed
- 149 victims referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)
- 247 locations disrupted
- 56 perpetrators arrested
- Sandwell has identified more male victims of modern slavery across the West Midlands region

Modern Slavery

Sandwell’s response to modern slavery has continued to develop over the last 12 months and our four main objectives are to:

1. Ensure victim pathways are robust, effective and aligned to best practice
2. Further understand threats, risk and harm modern slavery and human trafficking poses
3. Raise awareness across agencies, businesses and communities, to address modern slavery
4. Disrupt incidents of modern slavery in Sandwell, working collaboratively to target perpetrators

Sandwell’s commitment to having designated roles focused on modern slavery and exploitation are really helping to lead the way in this work nationally as reflected in two recent reports: The Anti-Slavery Commissioner’s Annual Report and a report on modern slavery partnerships.

[It still happens here: Fighting Slavery in the 2020s Independent anti-slavery commissioner annual report 2019-2020](#)

In June 2019 leaders of the council signed a Modern Slavery Pledge, making a firm commitment to doing everything in our power to make our Borough slavery free.

In the 2019-21 strategy the following objectives in relation to exploitation and abuse were agreed

What we Said	What we Did
We will work closely with Children and Adults Safeguarding Boards and Health and Wellbeing Board to deliver a series of actions to prevent exploitation and abuse	The new Horizons Hub was developed to lead on exploitation for children. A new Exploitation Strategy was developed for children and a regional exploitation framework developed
New co-coordinator will strengthen and join up work to prevent and tackle slavery and human trafficking	The Modern Slavery Programme Manager came into post in December 2018 and developed a plan of work to tackle modern slavery
PoVE Action Plan to be strengthened around child exploitation.	PoVE Action Plans and score cards were further developed, there has been a 50% reduction in child exploitation reports to police

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Development of Modern Slavery Delivery Plan
- Development of an effective data set to understand the modern slavery landscape across Sandwell enabling development of Town Profiles Council leaders signed a pledge to make Sandwell a Slavery Free Borough
- Embedded a new Slavery Adult Safeguarding Case Conference (SASCC)
- National Modern Slavery Conference on sexual exploitation reached over 1000 delegates
- 241 First Responders trained
- 950 have attended safeguarding briefings on modern slavery

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Review and refresh victim pathway and safeguarding responses for victims of modern slavery
- Review modern slavery training in line with Modern Slavery Training Standards Framework and refresh Modern Slavery Training Plan
- Embed a regional modern slavery dash board and implement locally
- Develop a new Modern Slavery Delivery Plan

Local Picture

Between April 2017 – March 2020 there have been:

- 90056 incidents of public safety or welfare
- 13393 incidents of violence with injury
- 105 gang related non-crimes
- A 39% increase in reported knife crime
- 764 incidents of knife crime with victims over 18
- 184 incidents of knife crime where the victim is aged 10 – 17 years
- 11 incidents of knife crime where the offender is aged 10 – 17
- 234 incidents of gun crime
- 55 markers for gangs related crimes
- A 21% increase in sexual offences
- A 98% increase in stalking and harassment
- A 42% increase in violence against the person

Prevention of Public Place Violence

Ensuring our communities feel safe, protected and confident in their neighbourhoods is a key part of our vision, and we all need to work together to achieve this.

We have launched three specific place based approaches to help respond to violence, including:

- **SAVI** (Smethwick Anti-Violence Initiative) was set up as part of a place-based pilot to prevent violence in Smethwick funded by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU). SAVI is a unique alliance of organisations, each with a commitment to serving disadvantaged, excluded and isolated communities
- **West Bromwich Place Based Pilot**, funded by the VRU, is running with local providers offered the opportunity to attend a training course and engage with the train the trainer programme as part of an accredited mentoring framework. Detached youth work and intensive support to Sandwell College also funded alongside capacity for specialist mentoring and family support, including work with primary schools.
- **Safer Streets Funding Round 3 (focusing on VAWG)**
Home Office Safer Streets funding secured in October 2021 to deliver a place based project in West Bromwich focussing on the prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The project consists of delivering messages through education working with boys to tackle attitudes and prevent perpetration, one to one mentoring for young people who are displaying sexualised behaviour, interactive theatre productions in schools, bystander training delivered to Sandwell College and some of the businesses in West Bromwich and piloting a safe space scheme in West Bromwich town centre.

Impact Areas are a focus of Tasking and plans were put in place to reduce violence using Project Guardian resources when the team arrived in Sandwell in July 2021 focusing resources in two of Sandwell's impact areas was very successful in a short space of time.

Weekly partnership risk and threat meetings were developed as an opportunity to share intelligence and respond in real time to emerging threats or risk.

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Full dedication of the Op Guardian Task Force for 10 weeks in 2021
- Knife Arch initiatives introduced across Borough
- Partnership meetings set up to tackle breaches of Covid legislation have helped develop and strengthen working relationships across this area
- Developed and launched Community Safety Licensed Premises Safeguarding Risk Assessment
- Adopted the West Midlands Vulnerable Adults Risk Management procedures

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Delivery of the Safer Streets project
- Support the West Bromwich Town Centre PSPO to engage and work with vulnerable individuals.
- Learn from Operation Guardian and continue to work with the Guardian Task Force
- Develop approaches to public place violence as part of the serious violence duty
- Operational delivery of the stepping together programme

Local Picture

From April 2017 – March 2020

- 184 incidents of knife crime where the victim is aged 10 – 17 years
- 17 incidents of knife crime where the offender is aged 13 – 17
- During Operation Aident County Lines Intensification Week 2021 14 young people were safeguarded
- 73% of people linked to county lines activity between April 2018 and November 2020 were young people aged 25 or under
- 15 to 24 year olds attend A&E following an assault at a rate of 53 per 10,000 of the population, which is higher than any other age group
- 15 to 24 year olds also have the highest rate of inpatient hospital admissions for assault (an indicator of more serious injuries having occurred)

U25 violence

The [VRU Strategic needs assessment](#), analysed a range of different data sources for under 25 violence. One of the recommendations they will be taking forward is to explore opportunities to reduce risks linked to children in care, missing, school exclusion and county lines. Based on the evidence of risk from this assessment and outlined below, the recommendation is to work with Sandwell Local Authority.

- Smethwick and East Sandwell have high rates of hospital admissions for assault with a sharp object
- Police recorded involvement in County Lines from Smethwick and East Sandwell
- Increase in the rate of Children in Care from 70 per 100,000 in 2016 to 109 per 100,000 in 2019
- Much of the Local Authority area showing relatively high in the Risk Index
- Schools with high three-year permanent exclusion rates

In the space of five years, knife crime has more than doubled in the West Midlands, from 1,558 incidents in the year to March 2015, to more than 3,400 in the year to March 2020, according to the Office for National Statistics. The West Midlands has the third highest rate of Knife Crime in England and Wales, with 108 reports per 100,000 population. Sandwell has more incidents in the East of the Borough (especially Smethwick) but also stands out as having above median levels of Violence Against the Person offences in most of the local authority area

Over the last 12 months, there have been a number of initiatives to prevent and reduce under 25 violence, and knife crime which include:

- Working with the Op Guardian Task Force to reduce knife crime
- Supporting Families Against Youth Crime universal support to reduce knife crime
- Community safety funded projects focused on raising awareness in schools
- Universal protective behaviours projects working with 3 local primary schools
- A project run by young volunteers for children aged 12-18 in the Polish community educating them on issues related to hate crime, discrimination, racism, xenophobia
- Funding for projects that support prevention and disruption interventions with young people who have been identified as on the cusp of being exploited and/or entering gang activity
- The Early Intervention Youth Fund project taking a tiered approach through disruption; engagement; diversion and prevention. The providers worked with Youth Offending Service, the Horizons Team, Sandwell Community school and schools across the borough

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Created a consistent approach for reporting weapons and violent offences
- 5 year reduction plan in place to reduce children taking weapons into schools
- 3 School Liaison Officers allocated to all high schools within the 3 impact areas; overall objective to reduce under 25 violence
- NPU worked closely with the Op Guardian Task Force
- Supporting Families Against Youth Crime universal support to reduce knife crime
- Section 60 Implemented in West Bromwich Town Centre.
- Over 200 young people benefited from the EIFY funding

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Continued schools inputs around knife crime/county lines
- Continued hi-vis patrols in towns with partners
- Develop a five-year strategy to reduce children taking weapons into schools.
- Further embed the weapons and violence pathways in schools
- Delivery of the Step Together pilot in Sandwell focusing on Smethwick and Oldbury

Local Picture

During the last 3 years:

- Sandwell has seen a 50% reduction in reports to the police for child exploitation,
- 1,489 professionals completed training on child sexual exploitation
- 789 practitioners attended exploitation training
- Supporting Families Against Youth Crime programme supported young people in years 6 and 7 in transition from primary to secondary school in two of our impact areas West Bromwich and Smethwick
- Nearly 600 one to one mentoring sessions were delivered to over 120 young people
- 3,000 young people and their carers benefited from universal sessions delivered via assemblies
- 73% of all the people linked to county lines activity between April 2018 and November 2020 were young people aged 25 or under
- In the first year of the launch of the Exploitation Hub,
 - 130 young people were discussed and supported
 - 114 high risk victims received targeted support

Child Exploitation

In response to child exploitation, The West Midlands Criminal Exploitation Board has begun to coordinate partners' responses and approaches to child exploitation and developed a regional exploitation framework to support statutory safeguarding partners in developing and embedding a robust local response to exploitation.

Sandwell Children's Trust has established The Horizons Team to focus on exploitation. It operates a 'Co-Working Plus Model' to help improve practice across the Trust.

This assists with:

- Mapping locations of concern and ensuring information analysis will be more meaningful
- Young people receiving a consistent response from a centralised team that will co-work alongside social workers.
- Manages those at high risk of exploitation and MACE processes for partnership working around vulnerable young people

In the 2019-21 strategy the following objectives in relation to child exploitation were agreed

What we Said	What we Did
We will improve the response to young people at risk of gangs or exploitation	We established a working group to respond to gangs and exploitation, this was a successful piece of work and helped us to adopt early intervention approaches for young people at risk of joining gangs
Develop our approach to children who have experienced ACES	A lot of work has been completed around the trauma informed approach, robust training and now working with the VRU on this area of work
We will explore the concept of a complex safeguarding hub with partners	This work resulted in the development of the Child Exploitation Hub which brings partners together to reduce the impact of exploitation and provide targeted support

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Early Help Exploitation Champions Group launched
- Successful Hub step downs have increased with young peoples risk levels being reduced
- Multi-agency approaches to Operation Aidant intensification weeks
- Development of Horizons Team to respond to child exploitation
- Launch of an Exploitation Strategy
- 15 schools enrolled in Sandwell Safeguarding Champions programme
- Updating of Project 12, Sandwell's PSHE programme

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Continued Schools inputs around knife crime/county lines
- Continued hi-vis patrols in towns with partners
- Develop a five-year strategy to reduce children taking weapons into schools
- Further embed the weapons and violence pathways in schools
- Continue to improve our response to knife crime
- Embed roll out of Sandwell's PSHE programme Project 12

Local Picture

- 61 individuals vulnerable to Extremism have been supported by Prevent over the last 3 years
- 7036 young people have engaged with Prevent through schools work led by the Prevent Education Officer
- Monthly Prevent Newsletter for partners distributed
- Developed Twitter page – tweeting weekly messages to the wider community
- Delivery of focussed project work to over 2000 children during 2020-21
- Pro-active Safer 6 involvement, delivering a mixture of face to face 'pop up' events with partners/communities and online awareness sessions
- Focussed work in Tipton (an area of risk) with partners
- Delivery of training sessions to foster carers and increased staff sessions for Sandwell Childrens Trust
- Effective adaptation to online delivery during COVID including adapted REWIND resources for schools
- Partner working with West Midlands VRU/SAVI including Prevent delivery during 2021 'exploitation week'

Preventing Terrorism

As a partnership we are all under the statutory Prevent Duty (2015) to work together to prevent terrorism. The Local Authority has strengthened our Prevent Team in the areas of education, community engagement and in developing an improved awareness across the Local Authority and partners through an excellent training and resource offer.

Strengthening our Prevent Offer

- Sandwell Safeguarding Champions (peer mentor scheme) launched in primary schools, secondary schools and Sandwell College
- Developed partnership work and awareness raising to support people with learning difficulties/autism where there have been concerns regarding Extremism/Radicalisation
- Prevent (online safety) information booklet created for Parents, Teachers and implemented for use in the wider community
- Completion and distribution of a Prevent 'Teachers Booklet' providing information, practices and processes to Designated Safeguarding Leads and teachers
- 'Building Resilience Against the Far-Right' pilot programme undertaken in Sandwell
- Development of Artemis, a Prevent on-line training package for professionals
- Pilot of Community 'Understanding Extremism' training launched with initial sessions delivered
- Delivery of annual CTLP briefing event for partners and seniors at Oldbury Council House and developed a series of sanitised CTLP sharing webinars for DSLs



2018 – 2021 Achievements

- In 2020 we launched a new Artemis Prevent training module. 880 professionals have completed this training
- 3844 people have attended WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) training over the last 3 years
- 712 professionals have attended 'Understanding Extremism' training
- 950 professionals have attended safeguarding briefings on hate crime
- 89 parents / individuals attended our new online safety community training briefings
- Home Office funding secured to recruit a Prevent Community Engagement Officer in 2021-22

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Deliver Prevent Delivery Plan through Prevent Delivery Group
- HO benchmarks and tool kit fully achieved
- Develop PCEO role and engage hard to reach communities to improve awareness of Prevent
- Continue with high standard of Prevent support to schools via PEO
- Continue to develop VRU partnership working
- Regular updates to training and projects.

Priority 2

**REDUCE
OFFENDING,
REOFFENDING**



& SERIOUS



ORGANISED CRIME

RRSOC

(Reducing Offending, Re-offending and Serious Organised Crime)

The Reducing Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime Strategic Sub Group is responsible for co-ordination of the work of partners to ensure that the Safer Sandwell Partnership Community Safety Strategy and Action Plan for reducing offending, reoffending and serious organised crime is effectively delivered in Sandwell.

Key Priorities include

- Repeat Offending
- Serious Organised Crime
- County Lines

Statistics show that almost half of all crime is committed by individuals with previous convictions. Police and Probation Services use statistical and clinical risk assessments to focus resources on those most likely to reoffend. The introduction of the Reducing Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime subgroup to the SSPPCB in 2019 has strengthened partnership approaches across this area and supported the delivery of the 7 pathways out of offending.

Significant work has been taken across all these areas over the past 3 years including;

- Working to introduce creative arts into work with young people engaged with the Youth Offending Service.
- Development of an online space for Sandwell YJS called The Sandwell Hub to provide key information about services, private space for young people and their families and a media gallery to promote work
- Getting to Know' booklet has now been fully integrated into the service, allowing a creative method to be applied to those fundamental pieces of work at the start of an order
- Introduction of the Homelessness Prevention Taskforce during lockdown ensured all offenders could secure temporary accommodation and avoid homelessness. This was exceptionally successful locally whilst more stable accommodation was sought.
- Joint working with the Local Authority and Probation re co-located post to help support offenders in securing and maintaining stable tenancies.
- National review and update in relation to Integrated Offender Management, we have now identified three cohorts of offenders causing the most crime and having the most impact across Sandwell who will be jointly managed and supported away from criminal behaviour using a partnership approach. This is in line with the newly refreshed national IOM strategy.
- In June 2021 the newly formed Probation Service contracted Maximus to provide a holistic approach to supporting ETE opportunities, with a particular focus on employment. Referrals have been much higher than expected and some very positive outcomes achieved so far.

Highlights

Creative Service

First YJS in the country to achieve a Silver Arts Mark Award from the Arts Council in recognition of work undertaken by Youth Justice Partnership to make the YJS more creative. Summer Arts Programme awarded a second Platinum Award through Koestlerin for two years running

HMIP Inspection

HMIP Inspection Rating of Good for Sandwell Youth Justice Service.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

The Probation Service's Personality Disorder Team have expanded and every offender is screened. Where needs are identified offenders receive enhanced, dedicated psychology and probation intervention and support.

PCC funded posts have been established in Black Country Courts to identify and support increased numbers of referrals to receive this specialist intervention which addresses mental health issues linked to substance abuse and offending.

The Sandwell Afro-Caribbean Mental Health Foundation, have been commissioned to provide dedicated intervention and support to suitable offenders from BAME backgrounds

Black Country Reducing Reoffending Strategy

The strategy was developed 2019 – 2022 and helps to develop a model which will provide early identification and interventions with emphasis on preventing and reducing offending and reoffending, and reducing risk of harm (See Below)

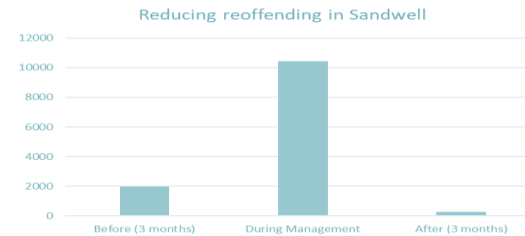
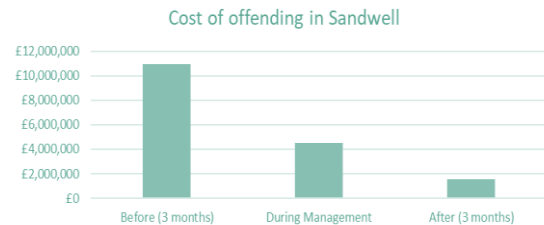


Local Picture

- Sandwell average adult reoffending rate is 29.5%
- Sandwell average youth reoffending rates is 42.64% which has reduced from 47.15%
- Sandwell has higher rates of reoffending than the Black Country trend for 18-21
- Home Office data shows there are 1165 offenders (1089 males, 68 females) committing 1978 offences between them

Repeat offending

Sandwell has the second highest volume of offenders in the West Midlands with 1165 offenders (rolling Home Office data). There have been some key indicators to show that integrated offender management is working with an 86% reduction in both offences and costs.



Significant work has been undertaken in developing the 7 pathways out of offending including accommodation, employment and training and mental health and wellbeing work. Over the next five years we will work to further embed the pathways and priority areas which are included in the chart opposite.

In the 2019-21 strategy the following objectives in relation to repeat offending were agreed

What we Said	What we Did
We will track reoffending rates for those released from custody to establish whether we are more effective in helping to transition young people from custody to the community	Reoffending rates have reduced since 2017 with adult offending dropping to 29.52% and young people to 42.64%
We will improve engagement with our young black offender cohort through bespoke mentoring support.	Task and Finish groups have been convened to understand disproportionality and this work will be taken forward into the new plan
We will evaluate the impact of the Kitchen Table Talks to establish whether there has been improved engagement with, and information to, parents	Kitchen Table Talks, piloted in Sandwell were evaluated and are now supported by the Violence Reduction Unit to be embedded across the region

Pathways and priority areas of delivery



Accommodation and support

- Stable accommodation can reduce the likelihood of reoffending by more than a fifth
- It provides building blocks to gain employment and access support services



Education, Training and Employment

- Employment reduces the risk of reoffending between a third and a half
- There is a correlation between offending and low achievement, poor literacy, numeracy and language skills



Health

- Adult offenders are disproportionately more likely to suffer from mental and physical health problems.
- 31% of adult prisoners have been found to have emotional wellbeing issues linked to their offending behaviours.



Substance Misuse

- Two thirds of adult prisoners use illegal drugs in the year prior to imprisonment
- Intoxication by alcohol is linked to 30% of sexual offences, 33% of burglaries, 50% of street and violent crimes



Finance, benefits and debt

- Having a lawful income is vital to offenders' rehabilitation
- Approximately 81% of offenders claim benefits on release from prison



Children and Families

- Maintaining a strong relationship with families and children strongly assists in helping adult offenders sustain changes and avoid reoffending
- Custody can place added strain on family relationships



Attitudes, thinking and behaviour

- Offenders are more likely to have negative social attitudes and poor self-control
- Addressing attitudes and thinking behaviour during custody can reduce reoffending by up to 14%

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Refresh of the Black Country Reducing Offending Strategy and development of new NPS Strategy
- National and regional structural realignment of NPS
- Commissioning of services to support offending pathways undertaken
- Moved from a YOS Management Board to a Youth Justice Partnership and Youth Justice Service.
- Clear focus of becoming a more creative service
- First YJS in the country to achieve a Silver Arts Mark Award from the Arts Council

Summer Arts Programme

★ Summer Arts college in both 2019 and 2020 won platinum Koestler awards (for creative work in a criminal justice setting)

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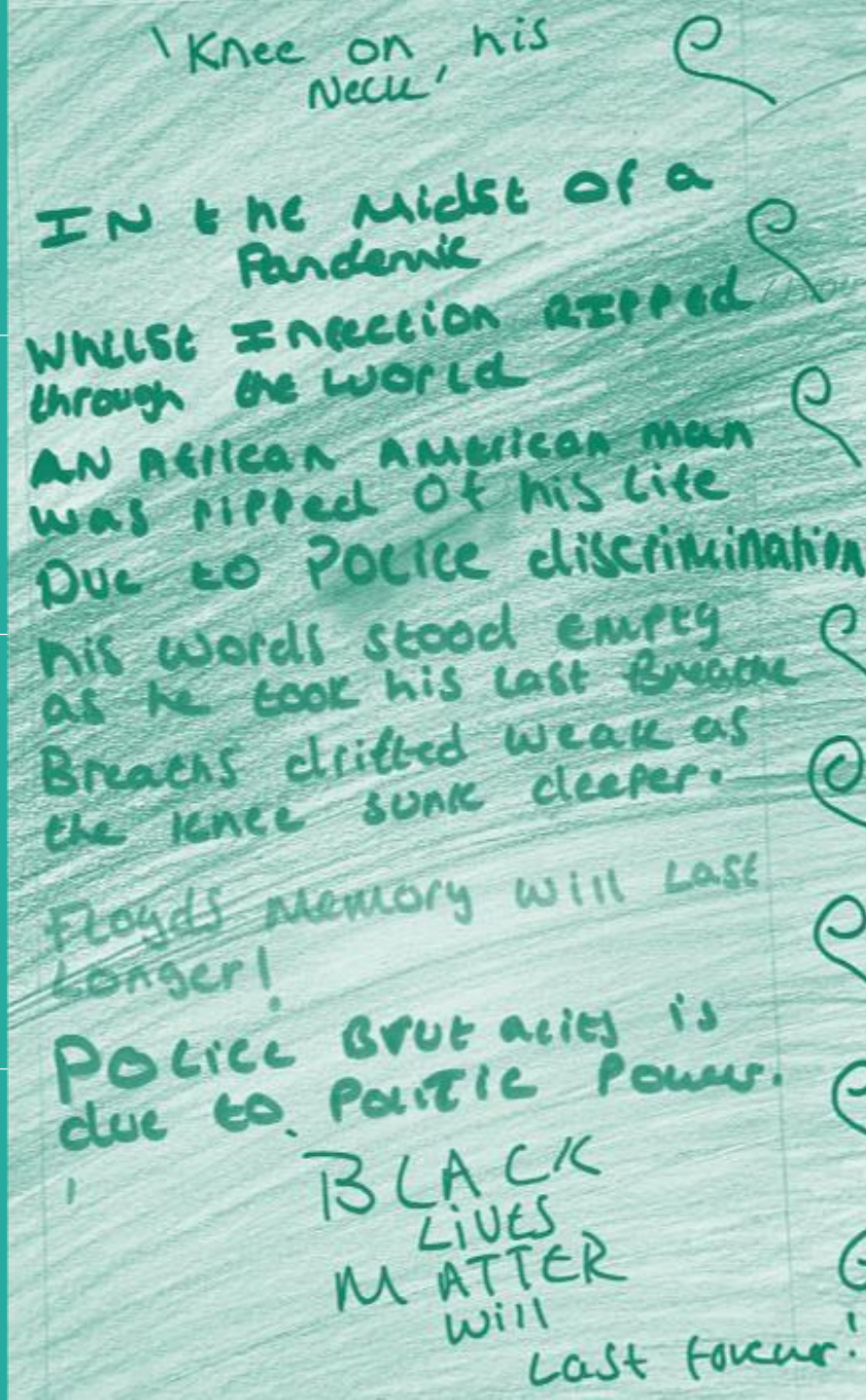
Ongoing funding

★ second year running the Summer Arts College funded by Unites

★ Special under 25's award for a portrait created by a young person, also chosen and featured in Koestler's annual art exhibition at the Southbank Centre, London

National Award

★ Bronze award for VR County Lines video



A MORE CREATIVE SERVICE

One of the priority areas of work for the Youth Justice Service was to work towards making services more creative for young people.

For the second year running they ran a summer arts college funded by Unitas. Virtual creative sessions, were run in partnership with Gazebo Theatre. The content of the sessions was planned alongside the artists who provided a list of materials that the young people would need to participate in the sessions. Alongside the technology, each young person was also provided with an arts kit containing these materials

Young people participated in several virtual workshops including: Creative Writing, Podcasts, Magic, Balloon modelling, poetry, digital illustrations, film making, music and watched a specially adapted live theatre performance.

Given that this was the first time a piece of work on this scale was being completed using a virtual approach, the success of the project could not be anticipated. However this proved to be extremely positive with 8 young people achieving at least 1 arts award with 7 young people gaining 3 arts awards each.

Given the success of the Summer Arts College, Sandwell YJS were invited by Unitas to apply for additional funding to deliver a Silver Arts award aimed at young people who had previously achieved the Bronze Arts Award.

Giving young people a safe space to explore feelings around the murder of George Floyd

Local Picture

From April 2018 – March 2021 there have been

- 8 Organised Crime gangs mapped in Sandwell
- 1393 incidents of violence with injury
- 764 incidents of knife crime with victims over 18
- 194 incidents of knife crime where the victim is aged 10 – 17 years
- 68 incidents of knife crime where offender is over 18
- 11 incidents of knife crime where the offender is aged 10 – 17
- 234 incidents of gun crime
- 55 markers for gangs related crimes
- 105 gang related non-crimes

Serious Organised Crime

Serious violence has a devastating impact on victims and their families, instils fear within communities and is extremely costly to society. Preventing and reducing organised crime has been introduced as a Sandwell priority because of the increased threat posed by organised crime and the pressure on vulnerable people who are often exploited.

Our focus in Sandwell is to enable more joined up working around protecting local people and businesses by making it hard for SOC gangs to operate effectively in Sandwell. We are doing this through ensuring enhanced collaborative working in relation to known locations of organised crime, sharing intelligence to strengthen procurement across Sandwell and strengthening partnership approaches to preventing sale of illegal counterfeit goods. All of which requires a strong partnership approach.

The government have carried out several consultations and are introducing the Serious Violence Duty. This is a key part of the Government's programme of work to prevent and reduce serious violence; taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence and focus on prevention and early intervention, informed by evidence. In addition to tough law enforcement we need to understand and address the causal factors that cause someone to commit violent crime in the first place. The Duty aims to ensure that agencies are focussed on their activity to reduce serious violence whilst also providing sufficient flexibility so that relevant organisations will engage and work together in effective local partnerships.

In the 2019-21 strategy the following objectives in relation to organised crime were agreed:

What we Said	What we Did
We will use tactical and operational groups to manage and monitor offenders	A new organised crime group meeting was formed to provide a multi-agency response to serious organised crime
We will use existing MAPPA, GODOC, ODOC, Deter and other mechanisms to manage offenders	These structures continue to operate and we will use data more effectively going forward

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Funding from Home Office for SW NPU around SOC Violence
- Development of partnership Organised Crime Group to share intelligence and tackle and disrupt organised crime in Sandwell.
- Development of offender employment pathways with DWP including Community Youth Hub
- Homelessness and Complex Case Referral Pathway into accommodation services through the Local Authority

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Raise awareness of serious organised crime and organised criminal gangs with partners through the OCG
- Protect local people and businesses by making it hard for SOC gangs to operate effectively in Sandwell
- Share intelligence to strengthen procurement across Sandwell,
- Strengthen partnership approaches to preventing sale of illegal counterfeit goods

Local Picture

- For the past three years we have worked to embed a partnership approach to the County Lines intensification weeks
- In October 2021 County Lines week work included:
 - 32 people arrested
 - 11 warrants executed
 - 77 Wraps of Heroin recovered
 - 396 wraps of Crack confiscated
 - £237,000 worth of cannabis found
 - £8305 cash seized
 - 19 weapons recovered
- 73% of people linked to county lines activity between April 2018 and November 2020 were young people aged 25 or under
- The overwhelming conclusion is that young males with Black ethnicity, most often from the most deprived parts of the West Midlands, are hugely over-represented in police information about County Lines activity

County Lines

West Midlands Police data includes markers for people involved in County Lines as victims, perpetrators or suspects. This includes information on where individuals reside and a significant proportion are from inner-city Birmingham and Smethwick. 41% of people identified in this data as involved in County Lines activity – as a victim, perpetrator or suspect – were recorded as being of black ethnicity. This is significantly higher than the data for the wider West Midlands population, which has a 6% black population.

Multi-agency practitioners have also identified concerns that there are low levels of recognition and identification across the sector regarding the ways in which women and girls are exploited through County Lines drugs distribution.

Sandwell continues to work with the **Regional Strategic Criminal Exploitation and Missing Board** which through good multi-agency representation and attendance is facilitating and enabling the development of new and innovative policy and practice to improve our single and joint responses to criminal exploitation and missing including County Lines.

A regional Child Exploitation Data Framework has been created by the WM VRU analysts who have produced an interactive dashboard which sets out the various types of data collected from the Police, Local Authority Children's Services, Education and Health to start to understand what exploitation looks like across the region.

County Lines Intensification Weeks are run on an annual basis and serve as an opportunity to focus on the 4 P approach to tackling, disrupting and preventing criminal exploitation.

County Lines Rescue and Recovery project Launched in September 2021, this is funded until March 2022 and supports young people involved in County Lines and gangs across all local authority areas in the region. Through the provision of flexible support from case workers with "lived experience", young people can exit County Lines drug networks, reconnect with families and begin to build positive lifestyles away from crime.

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- County Lines Intensification Week; October's enrichment activity was focused on the 4 P approach to tackling, disrupting and preventing criminal exploitation of C/YP and vulnerable adults. 800 people across the region attended training sessions over the one week,
- During Operation Aident County Lines intensification week 2021 14 young people were safeguarded

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Strengthen and develop the organised crime response through the OCG partnership
- Raise awareness of serious organised crime and organised criminal gangs with partners
- Learn from the evaluation of the County Lines Rescue and Recovery Project



National award

Royal Society for Public Health: Health and Wellbeing Awards 2019



Ongoing funding

The team have secured funding through the Better Care Fund to expand this programme



Evaluation

Evaluation of this project shows this approach reduces offending and acute health service demand

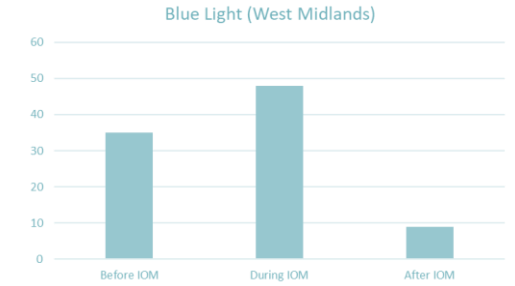
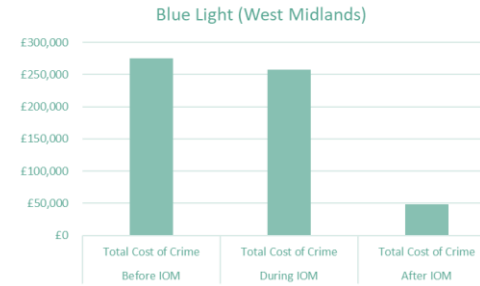


National Award

Blue Light won the Guardian Public Service Awards

Blue Light Project

We are starting to understand the landscape and now have a clear local picture to respond to treatment resistant drinkers. Data shows a 74% reduction in reoffending and 82% reduction in the cost of crime.



As a response the partnership adopted a multi-agency **'Blue Light' approach to supporting high impact, change-resistant problem drinkers** with a view to prevent and reduce alcohol dependency and transform the lives of some of the Borough's most disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

The multidisciplinary team incorporates public health, ambulance, police, probation, fire, local GP services, mental health professionals, the alcohol treatment provider and NHS professionals. These liaise together for monthly reviews to assess the progress of these clients through their interactions with them.

Feedback from the judging panel

" Focus is client centred and supports harm reduction and the social return on investment is considerable. The programme is an exemplar of integrated public health interventions to address critical public health problems and the learning is transferrable to other sectors and issues."

Feedback from a service user who was supported through Blue Light

"The Blue Light project helped me in a very big way and saved me daily physical and psychological abuse . They supported me to address my alcohol misuse, took me to my medical appointments to address my physical and mental health as well as stopped me from experiencing further abuse. I am grateful for all they have done for me. Thank you very much."

Priority 3

PREVENT and REDUCE

**CRIME and
ANTI-SOCIAL
BEHAVIOUR**

IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Intro

Preventing and reducing crime and ASB cannot be tackled by one single agency, but needs a multi-disciplined approach to provide a holistic response. By bringing partners together both strategically and operationally, there is a focus on problem solving and bringing together resources to prevent and tackle the issues at a local and boroughwide level.

This is achieved in Sandwell by partners coming together monthly through Borough Tasking and Town Tasking meetings where there is the opportunity for partnership data and intelligence to be shared so that an appropriate and proportionate response can be coordinated.

The meetings are used to discuss community and place based concerns as well as a closed element to the meetings to discuss individual cases that may involve vulnerable victims or perpetrators. At the Borough Tasking meetings, the membership focuses on the impact areas and look at issues such as Hate crime, community tensions, domestic abuse and the causes of crime in more detail.

The OPCC currently funds a number of Community Safety Analysts to provide data to inform the 7 partnerships across the West Midlands. The provision of this data is currently being reviewed as changes such as the introduction of the VRU and adoption of public health approaches to violence have come into place.

The development of new and more consistent data provision will support tasking and ensure that actions are demand led and evidence based ensuring proportionality and more appropriate use of resources.



Highlights

Hate Crime

Over the last 3 years Sandwell's response to hate crime has been strengthened by the development and delivery of the Partnership Hate Crime Plan which is monitored at Borough Tasking.

Keeping our residents safe and secure

Streamlined, evidence based, accountable and efficient deployment process for the deployment of mobile CCTV camera's managed through Town Tasking

Place Based Approaches

Joint partnership approaches involving police, CCTV team, SMBC Environmental Protection Officers (EPOs), Youth Services, SMBC ASB team, DECCA and the voluntary sector in tackling emerging ASB issues such as nuisance bikes; youth ASB and knife crime; nitrous oxide canisters and covid breaches.

Strengthening our ASB Responses and Capacity

SMBC appointed a dedicated ASB Manager in December 2018. During the last 3 years we have moved to end to end case management, significantly invested in training staff and increased our use of the 2014 ASB Powers. We also reintroduced Town Tasking Meetings, each Chaired by Town ASB Leads and local Police Sergeants.

Borough Tasking

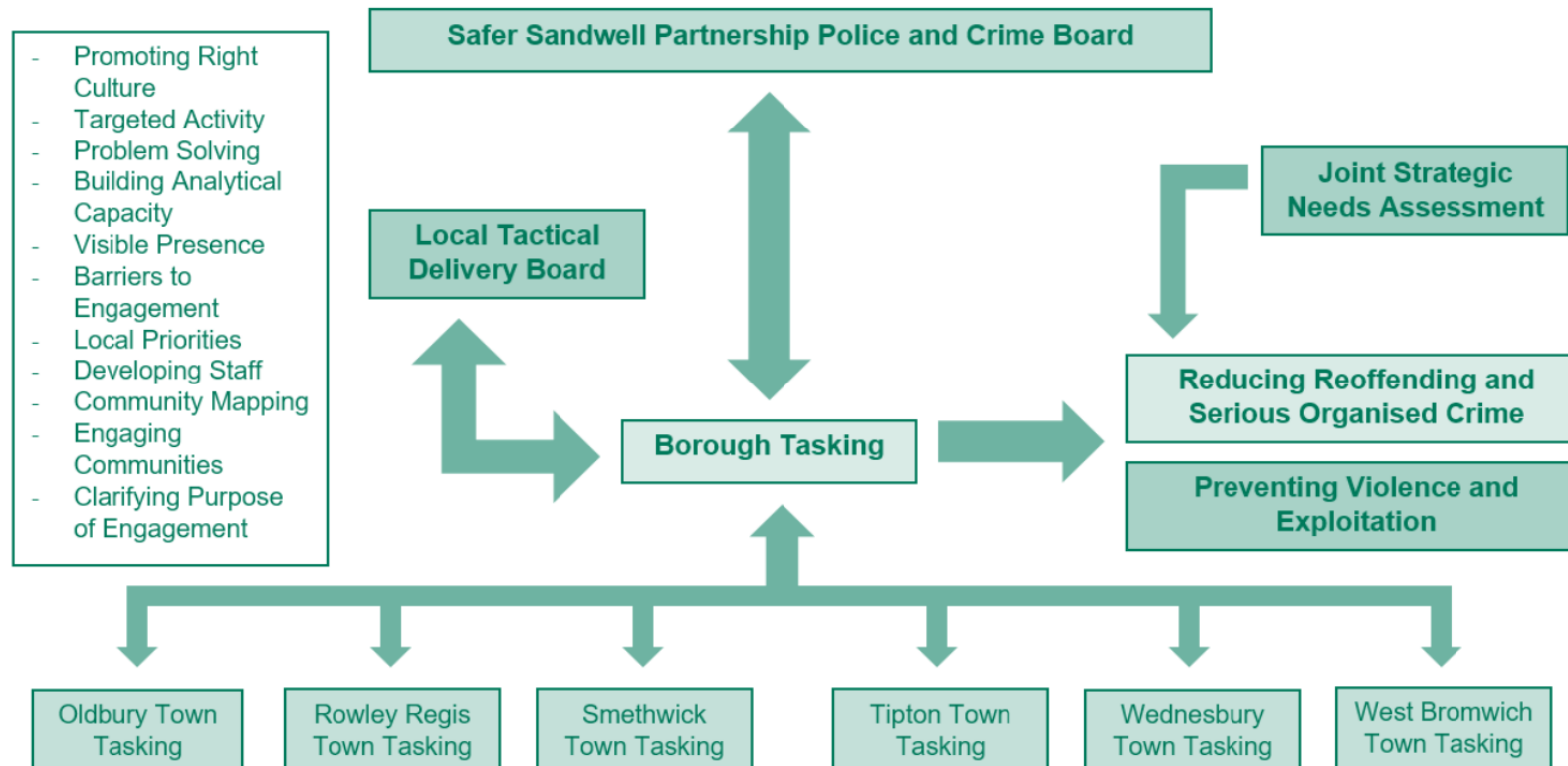
Borough Tasking is one of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board's (SSPPCB) sub groups connecting Town Tasking with borough wide strategic issues and decision makers. It is a single forum where partners come together and have an overview across the borough of Tasking to reduce crime, ASB and protect vulnerable communities.

This is achieved by looking through various lenses to identify new and emerging trends including exploitation, crime, ASB and community tensions. The group work together to look at root causes and problem solving, focusing on high impact areas and bringing resources together to prevent, tackle, and manage these issues.

Town Tasking

Town Tasking is the key mechanism in Sandwell by which partners work together to tackle incidents, identify trends in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) and facilitate inter-agency collaboration at a local level.

It also enables preventative and responsive actions to be taken to protect vulnerable people from threats to their safety and wellbeing. This is particularly important with emerging and increasingly sophisticated types of criminality including exploitation and organised crime. This localised approach to problem solving in Sandwell involves a multi-agency process designed to find the most effective and efficient solution for any identified problem.



- Promoting Right Culture
- Targeted Activity
- Problem Solving
- Building Analytical Capacity
- Visible Presence
- Barriers to Engagement
- Local Priorities
- Developing Staff
- Community Mapping
- Engaging Communities
- Clarifying Purpose of Engagement

The agenda focuses on (but not exclusively):

- ✓ Police Demand Impact Areas
- ✓ ASB demand areas
- ✓ Hate crime, community tensions and extremism (including overseeing the Hate Crime Plan and scorecard)
- ✓ Overview of the monthly Town Tasking meetings identifying trends and understanding the town nuances
- ✓ Spotlight on Tasking on a town basis
- ✓ CCTV deployable cameras
- ✓ Emerging trends across the borough identified by feedback from partner agencies, intelligence and shared analysis
- ✓ Deep dives into new and emerging boroughwide issues
- ✓ Identify ways of preventing, disrupting and deterring crime, ASB and exploitation by using partner powers and maximising resources
- ✓ Share best practice and successful outcomes as part of continuous improvement
- ✓ Discuss community issues escalated where a resolution has not been effective or found at Town Tasking
- ✓ Closed meeting to discuss individual cases that are escalated from Town tasking meetings where a resolution has not been found or a case has been stuck

Local Picture

- 144 Town Tasking Meetings and 36 Borough Tasking Meetings held during the last 3 years
- A robust town tasking process where local and relevant issues can be referred for discussion and action
- 140 individual cases discussed through tasking and agreed partnership approaches instigated with positive outcomes
- Remedi is funded by OPCC to provide support to all victims of hate crime
- Launch of 46 Third Party Reporting Centres across Sandwell representative of all the hate crime strands
- Article to raise awareness of hate crime included in the Sandwell Talking News, a weekly audio newspaper for visually impaired people
- A robust partnership approach to tackling Nitrous Oxide Gas Canisters issues that led to the implementation of a Boroughwide PSPO
- Focus on tackling local issues at a town level drawing on local resources including the voluntary sector

Reducing Crime and Anti-Social behaviour

Reducing Crime and Anti-Social behaviour remains a priority and we recognise that one single agency cannot tackle this alone.

We have strengthened this by making the Chairs of our Town Tasking meetings the local ASB Town Leads and the Borough Tasking meetings are chaired by the police. Our Borough Tasking group oversee and scrutinise our partnership work across the borough

Safer 6

Sandwell's annual autumn Safer 6 campaign celebrated its 12th anniversary in 2021. Safer 6 promotes a wide range of community safety initiatives and awareness raising across the six towns of Sandwell,. This is delivered by partners through a range of medias, training and events. Themed weeks included – Hate Crime; Violence against Women and Girls; Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime; Substance Misuse; Under 25 Violence and County Lines, Exploitation as well as various activities carried out in the six towns.



Support for victims of crime in Sandwell is provided by Victim Support which is a national independent charity. During 20/21 there were 6068 referrals for support and 3105 referrals so far 21/22

In the 2019-21 strategy the following objectives in relation to reducing crime and ASB were agreed:

What we Said	What we Did
We will use current intelligence and knowledge of partners and communities to identify and take prompt actions needed to keep communities safe from crime and ASB	Tasking was reviewed and strengthened to enable effective information sharing and data capture to enable place based effective interventions
We will fully embed the new tactical assessment and borough tasking model and create strong connections with town tasking and COGS	Tasking is now firmly embedded across each of Sandwell's 6 towns with a monthly Borough Tasking also established. These have run throughout the pandemic ensuring a strong local problem solving focus. .
We will renew and strengthen the contribution of partners to Tasking	Achieved through consistent agendas and enhanced data

2018 – 2021 Achievements

- Joint partnership approaches tackling emerging ASB issues such as nuisance bikes; youth ASB and knife crime; nitrous oxide canisters and covid-19 breaches
- Streamlined, evidence based, accountable and efficient deployment process for the deployment of mobile CCTV camera's
- Development of the Sandwell Commercial Centres Group tackling street dinking and street homelessness
- Developed work on hate crime
- Operation Hercules and ongoing work around car cruising

2022 – 2026 priorities

- Develop our partnership data to enable us to focus on the most pressing issues
- Review and further develop our approach to hate crime
- Strengthen our engagement with communities to encourage reporting, provide intelligence and develop solutions
- Target partnership resources at a local level to tackle emerging issues that is impacting on individuals and whole communities

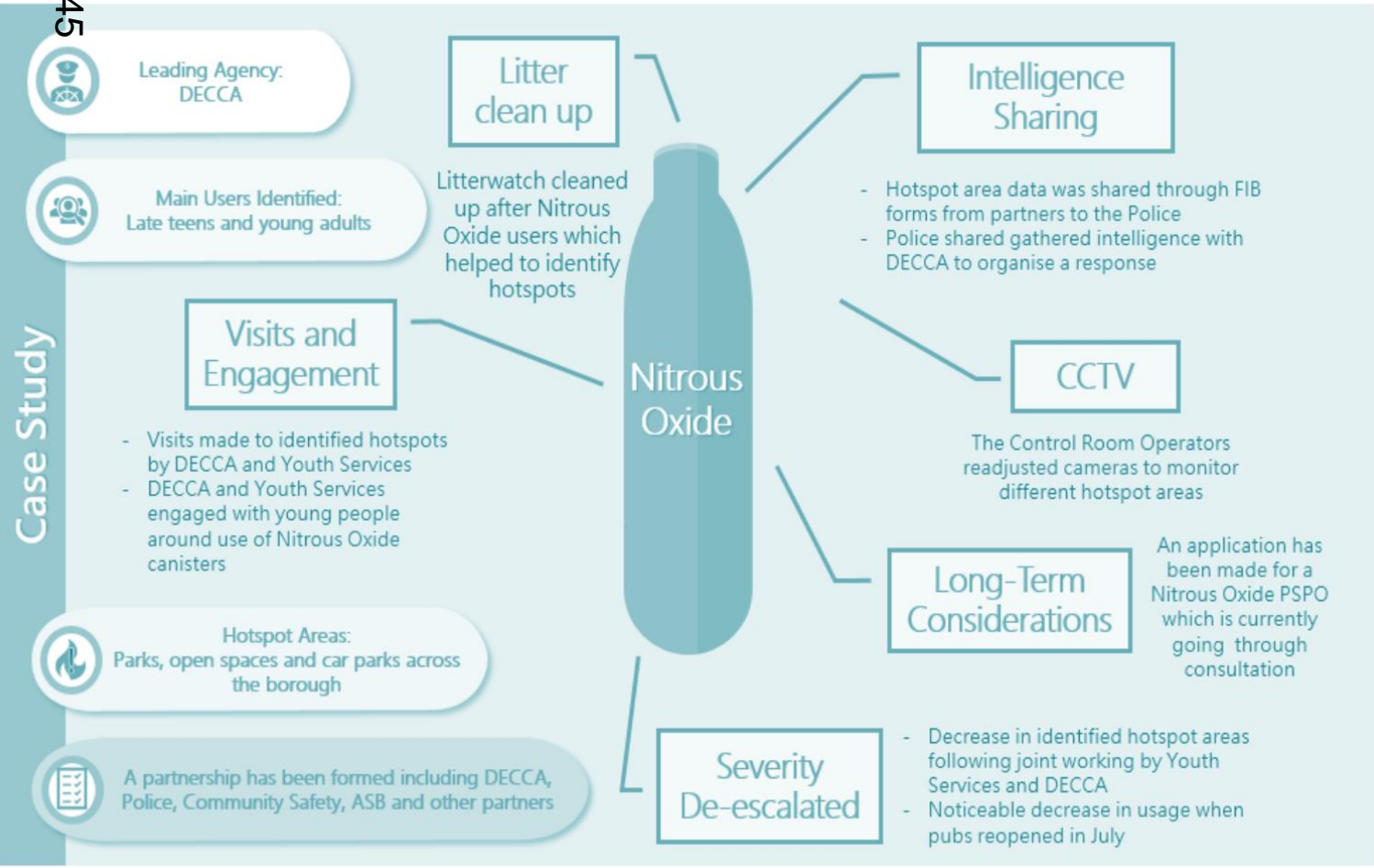
CASE STUDY

Borough Wide Partnership Approach to Nitrous Oxide Gas Canisters

Borough Wide Partnership Example of Successful Partnership Working

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Case Study



The litter and the associated ASB of nitrous oxide gas canisters was recognised as a borough wide issue.

- Concerns of health impact on young people
- The number of canisters discarded in public places and impact on environment
- The associated ASB – people congregating in groups and causing nuisance.

Approach

Discussed at Borough and Town Tasking meetings and agreed a Boroughwide partnership approach to tackle the issue.

Feedback from public consultation regarding proposed PSPO

Feedback from 95% of respondents demonstrated support for the proposed PSPO

The littering of discarded canisters was most commonly pointed out as the reason for why individuals were in favour of the proposed PSPO (68%). This was followed by the anti-social behaviour that was believed to be linked to the inhalation of Nitrous Oxide (22%) and worries around children coming across discarded canisters (18%)

The Community Safety Team administers and manages the annual CSF grant allocated by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPPC). Last year Sandwell was awarded £165k which was used to fund 10 projects that contribute to the Community Safety Partnerships priorities

Project 12

Project 12 (P12) is delivered in universal and targeted settings to build resilience and minimise harm. It can be used as part of PHSE lessons and all resources are online, so it can be easily accessed by anyone, and updated centrally to ensure its relevance. Grant funding was allocated to develop resources for Key Stages 2 and 3

Black Country Women's Aid – Domestic Abuse Advocates (DAA)

The grant provides one fifth of the specialist support to victims of domestic violence and abuse (DVA), categorised as medium and standard risk. The last 12 months has seen an increase in Domestic Abuse nationally during lockdown, and 402 victims have been supported by this service during this period.

TSA

Delivery of one to one mentoring sessions with young people identified by the Children's Trust Horizons Team who are at high risk of exploitation. TSA have worked successfully with 13 young people over the last 12 months using innovative ways of engaging in one to one interactions during lockdown

CSKN

Delivery of one to one mentoring and skills development to gang-entrenched young people identified by the Youth Justice Team. Two 12-week sessions were delivered to 10 young people.

A&E Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDVA)

Two IDVAs working at Sandwell and City Hospital A&E departments respectively, and an Information Officer capturing data across both sites as well as contributing to MARAC research in; 241 victims have been identified and referred to the IDVA over the last 12 months

Creative Academies

Funding for a multi-media programme which focuses on engaging and re-engaging disadvantaged and vulnerable young people from Sandwell Community Schools depicting their stories and helping to divert them away from negative behaviour.

Krunch

Funded to deliver one to one mentoring sessions to 9-13 year olds who have family or peers involved in violent acts or gang affiliation, successfully delivered mentoring to 13 children this year.

Rewind

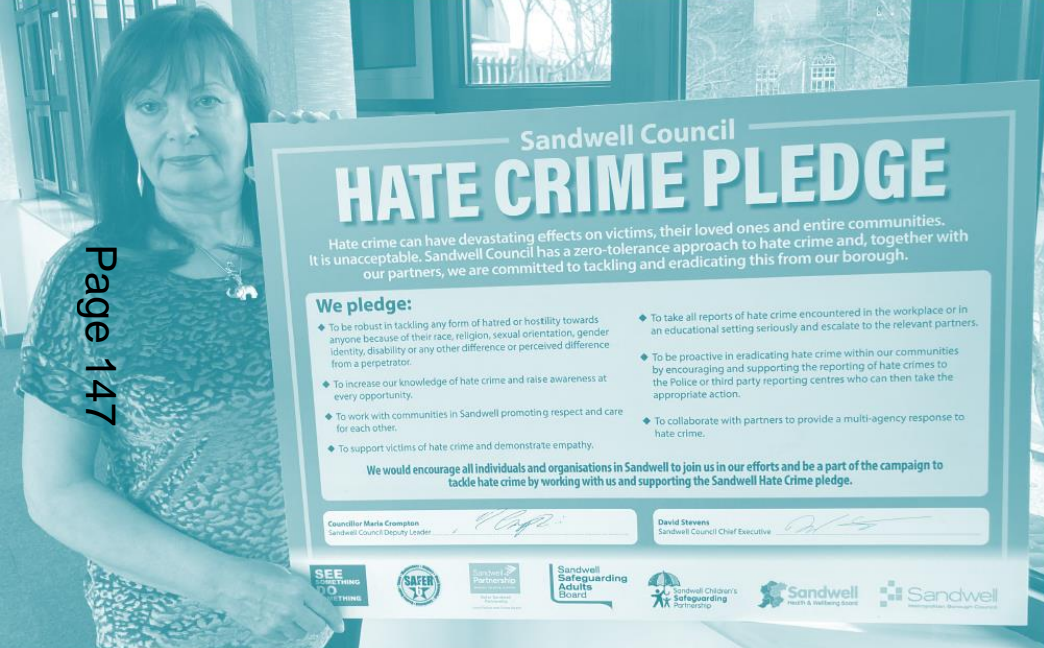
Grant funded to provide In-depth training to support practitioners in understanding all forms of extremism, including Al Qaida and Daesh inspired ideology and Far Right ideology. 9 sessions were delivered to a total of 139 delegates.

Modern Slavery

Grant funding to support Slavery Free Communities. A range of materials were sourced from the Modern Slavery Helpline in different languages, which consisted of posters, pens and keyrings. The partnership delivered a conference regarding sexual exploitation to raise awareness of sexual exploitation, over 1000 delegates attended

Albion Foundation

Delivery of positive activities to young people within the Sandwell area while working in partnership with West Midlands Police to deliver a group mentoring programme through sport..



Hate Crime

Over the last three years we have developed and delivered a Sandwell partnership Hate Crime Plan, our achievements include:

Increase awareness of hate crime and the impact that it has amongst the Sandwell workforce and communities

- Developed and launched online hate crime training
- Developed and launched a 7-minute briefing which has been shared with organisations to brief their employees and volunteers
- Developed and delivered awareness training for Sandwell MBC employees
- Delivered Hate Crime Awareness to elected members
- Delivered Hate Crime Awareness to the third sector
- Delivered various activities during hate crime week to raise awareness

Engage and raise hate crime awareness amongst young people.

- Conducted a Hate Crime Youth Survey with young people in schools,. The findings led to hate crime education being incorporated into the new RSHE school curriculum and lesson plans
- Just Youth Webpage Updated to Include Hate
- Hate Crime Awareness Training has been delivered to over 50 youth workers in Sandwell
- Delivered a Hate Crime Awareness session for SHAPE Youth Forum

Building confidence in local communities to report instances of hate crime/ incidents.

- Conducted a review of Third Party Reporting Centres (TPRCs)
- Launched 46 new TPRCs across Sandwell, representative of all strands of hate crime to increase ways to report and support for victims
- Developed a communications plan to promote messages throughout the year via social media
- Article included in the Sandwell Talking News, a weekly audio newspaper for visually impaired people, to raise awareness of hate crime, Third Party Reporting Centres and to encourage reporting

Victims supported

- Standby Me Bystander training delivered to 23 active citizens
- Victims supported through Victim Support and more recently REMEDI

[Further information on hate crime can be found here](#)

National Recognition

The programme won national recognition in 2021, winning the APSE Annual Service Award for Best Community and Neighbourhood Initiative



Supporting Families Against Youth Crime iTrust

Amazing Reach

3,000 young people and their carers benefited from universal sessions delivered via assemblies, transition evenings, events and group sessions.

Early Interventions

The programme provided early help and interventions with the aim of having a longer-term impact on the prevention of youth crime

The Supporting Families Against Youth Crime (SFAYC) programme, rebranded as iTrust was launched in April 2019, following a successful bid for funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Some of the funding paid for a small dedicated team who worked with young people, parents/carers, schools and voluntary sector organisations to deliver a menu of prevention interventions to young people in years 6 & 7 transitioning from primary to secondary school. Working in two of our police impact areas West Bromwich and Smethwick, this early help approach equipped our young people to make positive choices at this key transition period with the focus on reducing future youth crime and violence

Mentoring

Over 600 one to one mentoring sessions were delivered to over 120 young people by 12 voluntary sector organisations.

Feedback from the MCHLG included "it was particularly refreshing to see such an innovative 'home grown' approach to serious youth violence"

[Read evaluation here](#)



Links to other reports used

[Strategic Needs Assessment - West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit \(westmidlands-vru.org\)](https://www.westmidlands-vru.org/)

[Home | data.police.uk](https://www.data.police.uk/)

[2020 UK annual report on modern slavery \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1027878/Draft_Guidance_-_Serious_Violence_Duty.pdf)

[Police & Crime Plan - West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner \(westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk\)](https://www.westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk/)

<https://www.westmidlands-vru.org/app/uploads/2021/06/WM-REGIONAL-STRATEGIC-EXPLOITATION-FRAMEWORK.pdf>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1027878/Draft Guidance -
_Serious Violence Duty.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1027878/Draft_Guidance_-_Serious_Violence_Duty.pdf)

[Corporate Plan | Sandwell Council](#)

**PREVENT
VIOLENCE
and
EXPLOITATION**



**REDUCE
OFFENDING,
REOFFENDING**



& SERIOUS



ORGANISED CRIME

PREVENT and REDUCE

**CRIME and
ANTI-SOCIAL
BEHAVIOUR**

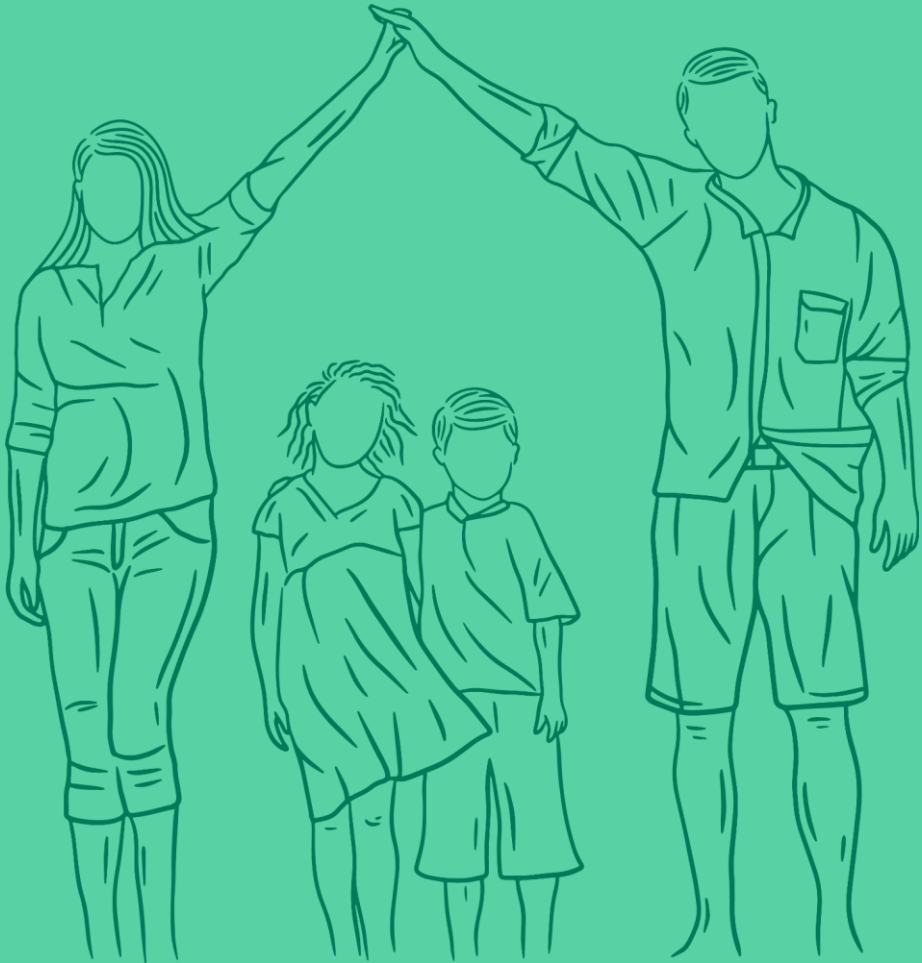
IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS

**PROTECT and
SUPPORT**

**VULNERABLE
VICTIMS**



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Safer Sandwell Community Safety Strategy

Delivery 2022-23

To ensure that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods

Introduction

- The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of the key priorities and actions identified in the strategy for enhancing and strengthening community safety across Sandwell
- Community safety is a complex and multifaceted area and effective partnership working is crucial in achieving Sandwell's community safety vision of ensuring that the communities feel safe, protected, and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods
- The Safer Sandwell Partnership has a statutory obligation to develop and deliver a Partnership Plan, which contains community safety priorities based on the current evidence base across the Borough.
- In this presentation, we will discuss the evidence base that informs the Community Safety Strategy, the priorities and actions identified in the strategy, progress to date and the next steps for implementation and ongoing review

Safer Sandwell Partnership Overview

- The Safer Sandwell Partnership is a collaborative initiative between the local authority, the police, and other key agencies to enhance community safety across the Borough of Sandwell. The partnership was established in line with the statutory requirements under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and subsequent amendments to the legislation.
- The Safer Sandwell Partnership facilitates the development and delivery of a Partnership Plan that outlines the community safety priorities based on the current evidence base across Sandwell. The partnership is responsible for setting the strategic direction for community safety across the Borough subject to annual review.
- Key partners involved in the Safer Sandwell Partnership include the Sandwell Council, West Midlands Police, Fire and Rescue Service, National Health Service, Probation Service, and other voluntary and community organisations.
- The partnership plays a crucial role in enhancing community safety by working collaboratively to prevent and tackle crime and disorder, addressing community safety concerns to deliver on the community safety vision for Sandwell

Community Safety Vision

To ensure that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods



Community Safety Strategy - Plan on a Page

	Priority 1: Prevent Violence and Exploitation	Priority 2: Reduce Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organised Crime	Priority 3: Prevent and Reduce Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
Priority areas include Page 155	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prevention of Public Place Violence ✓ Domestic Abuse/ Sexual Assault and Abuse ✓ Violence where victims and offenders under 25 ✓ Child Exploitation ✓ Modern Slavery ✓ Preventing Extremism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reducing Adult Reoffending ✓ Reducing Youth Reoffending ✓ Serious Organised Crime ✓ County Lines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reducing Hate Crime ✓ Reducing Crime ✓ Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure robust, effective victims pathways, support and responses are in place ✓ Use data and analysis to develop an understanding of each type of violence, abuse and exploitation ✓ Understand and further embed a trauma informed approach ✓ Ensure effective training is in place to continue to educate and raise awareness of violence, abuse and exploitation ✓ Equip our young people / future adults to stay safe and make positive choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Support offending pathways ✓ Management of high-risk offenders and targeting of key cohorts to reduce rates and seriousness of offences committed ✓ Continue to strengthen and develop partnership approaches around tackling serious organised crime ✓ Confirming and being able to clearly articulate the Boroughs approach to prevention and diversion as it relates to youth crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase community awareness of how to prevent crime and maintain and/or improve safety ✓ Strengthen our approaches to tackling ASB ✓ Embed and build upon our approaches to tackling hate crime ✓ Better informed tasking and resource deployment ✓ Enhance community safety on our high rise estates ✓ Engage with our communities to help us work together in partnership to tackle crime and ASB
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ As part of the 'Protect' strand of the PoVE Plan ensure current victim pathways are reviewed and are working ✓ Ensure victim pathways are incorporated into training plans ✓ Ensure regional approaches in place through close working relationships with the OPCC and WMVRU. ✓ Ensure a robust dialogue and support from the data and analysis sub group from the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) ✓ Enhance data sets to measure, monitor and review all priority areas of violence, exploitation and abuse ✓ Review how effective trauma informed training has been ✓ Develop resources to support trauma informed practice in relation to violence, abuse and exploitation ✓ Develop a Prevention of Violence, Exploitation and Abuse Training Plan ✓ Develop a training data set including evaluation data ✓ Encourage and support funding bids to support priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthen pathways to prevent the cycle of reoffending ✓ Embedding new commissioned services to support offenders ✓ Embed new Integrated Offender Management ✓ Review ways of working with domestic abuse perpetrators/sexual violence/abuse ✓ Strengthen and develop the organised crime response through the OCG partnership ✓ Raise awareness of serious organised crime and organised criminal gangs with partners ✓ Development of a model which will provide early identification and interventions preventing offending and reoffending – with a particular emphasis on youth offending ✓ Specific focus on understanding data in relation to over-represented children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enhance and promote community safety and crime prevention information on the Council website ✓ Distribute community safety and crime prevention materials and resources on priority issues identified ✓ Development of a new council wide ASB Policy and new ways of working ✓ Co-produced Service Standards for anti-social behaviour ✓ Review and update the partnership Hate Crime Plan ✓ Strengthen engagement with communities ✓ Review and develop data sets and a new dash board ✓ Improve intelligence gathering ✓ We will work in partnership with Housing colleagues to deliver the CCTV / Concierge Services upgrade and expansion programme across our high-rise estate

Cross cutting priority 1: Protect and support vulnerable victims of abuse, violence, exploitation, crime and anti-social behaviour

Cross cutting priority 2: Tackling Substance Misuse – saving lives and reducing crime

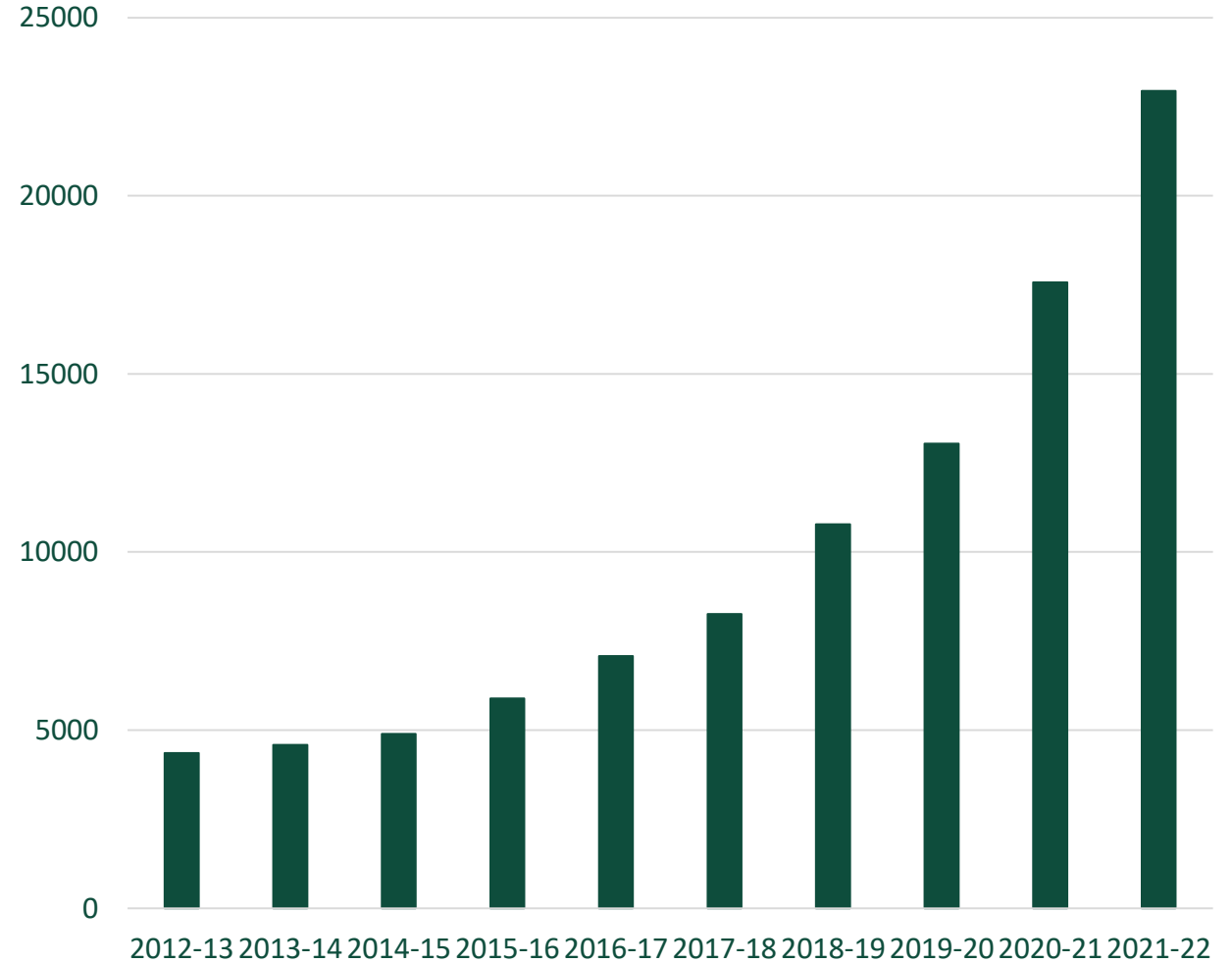
Cross cutting priority 3: Serious Violence Duty

Serious violence is rising

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- Over the last ten years, local, national and international data all show the same picture – incidents of violence are rising
- Better recording systems, increased awareness, targeted interventions, multi-agency partnerships are all positive contributions to that picture
- Ten years ago, just over 4000 incidents of violence were reported
- Today, that number is five times higher with over 20,000 incidents reported

Reports of violence in Sandwell



Sandwell is committed to tackling serious violence, with a range of strategies and initiatives in place to address this issue.

The partnership will continue to work collaboratively with key stakeholders to develop and implement effective solutions.

Tackling Violence Against the Person in Sandwell

Challenges: The increases in serious violence have been accompanied by a slight shift towards younger victims and perpetrators and an increase in threats to kill with over 700 incidents recorded in Sandwell last year

Approaches: Increased focus on early intervention and preventative work across the partnership, including increased police presence in schools and community schools, collaboration with the Violence Reduction Partnership, and targeted youth services provision

Recent work: Launch of the Multi-Agency Decision Making Panel for out of court disposals, development of multi systemic therapies within youth justice,. Launch of the Serious Violence Duty. Introduction of the St Giles Violence Intervention Project in the local A&E department to engage with victims of violence. Placement of a new knife bin in Smethwick. Promotion of regional safeguarding policies and procedures,. Partnership safeguarding days in local schools and a Safeguarding Champions program.

Future direction: Preparation of Sandwell's Serious Violence Needs Assessment, continued collaboration with the Violence Reduction Partnership and utilising OPCC Community Safety funding to support projects working with young people at risk of offending

Domestic abuse is a serious and ongoing issue in Sandwell and tackling it remains a top priority for the partnership.

Domestic abuse-related crimes continue to account for a significant proportion of all violence against the person offences and homicides in the area.

Tackling Domestic Abuse in Sandwell

Challenges: Increase in domestic abuse crimes and decrease in non-crimes, as legislation is tightened, i.e., cohesive control. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult for victims to access support and for services to provide face-to-face support

Approaches: The Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership leads on this work. There is a clear move towards earlier intervention, with an increase in standard risk and medium-risk victims reaching out for help. Work to address domestic abuse across the Borough includes implementing the new Domestic Abuse Strategy and revising Sandwell's Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership

Recent work: £841,142 New Burdens Funding allocated to Sandwell to provide safe accommodation services with further funding confirmed for the next 2 years. 5 year refuge contract awarded. Whole Systems Task and Finish group established to co-ordinate joined up and integrated interventions including IDVAs and family projects. Domestic Homicide Review 13 published and ongoing learning and training delivered.

Future direction: Ongoing interventions including new pilot perpetrator intervention with The Children's Trust. Sandwell also chosen by OPCC to submit a bid for the Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Intervention Programme. Roll out the Check with Me First Campaign across all health professionals.

Sexual assault and abuse is a serious problem in Sandwell, with the police recording the highest ever number of sexual offences in 2021-22, including a concerning increase in sexual crimes against children.

Advances in technology have led to an increase in online sexual harassment, abuse.

Sandwell's Sexual Assault and Abuse Survey in 2021 revealed that one in three respondents reported experiencing sexual abuse or assault.

Tackling Sexual Assault and Abuse in Sandwell

Challenges: Sexual assault and abuse are still vastly underreported crimes, highlighting the need for greater awareness-raising and support for victims. Difficulties in detecting and preventing online sexual crimes.

Approaches: The Sexual Assault and Abuse subgroup was established to ensure a specific focus on sexual assault and abuse given the increases in numbers. A Sexual Abuse and Assault Needs Assessment and Strategy has been developed and implemented. Education initiatives to prevent sexual crimes and provide appropriate support and protection for victims. Prevention and intervention strategies to address root causes.

Recent Work: "Men at Work" training for school staff to educate young people around healthy relationships and misogyny. Safer Streets Round 3 Funding to tackle violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment and bystander training and new Safe Spaces Scheme with local businesses. New Sexual Assault and Abuse Training delivered by The Haven. Partnership Sexual Abuse and Assault / FGM Event "Together We Move, Together We Change" attended by 147 delegates

Future Direction: Continued work on education initiatives, safe spaces, and visible security/police presence to address the concerns of survey respondents and prevent sexual assault and abuse in Sandwell

Modern slavery is a pervasive and complex issue that is prevalent in Sandwell, affecting individuals from all walks of life. It is estimated that there are tens of thousands of potential victims of modern slavery in the UK, with many cases going undetected. To address this issue, the Sandwell partnership has developed a comprehensive approach to tackling modern slavery, which includes a range of strategies aimed at identifying and supporting victims, as well as prosecuting perpetrators.

Challenges: The hidden nature of modern slavery reduces the available evidence to make a charging decision. Many modern slavery cases may not be recognised or dealt with, particularly in relation to criminal and cuckooing exploitation

Approaches: Sandwell has an established strategic Anti-Slavery Partnership and a Slavery and Human Trafficking Operational Partnership (SHOP) to tackle modern slavery cases in a coordinated manner. It is essential to work collaboratively across agencies to identify and prosecute such cases and to support and protect victims

Recent work: Focused partnership activity on nail bars in conjunction with the National Crime Agency. Best practice update given at Local Government Association Annual Conference. Modern Slavery Dashboard developed using Power BI. Sandwell Police appointed a modern slavery SPOC. Work with landlords in relation to reports of modern slavery in their properties, with 106 properties reported in the last 12 months. Ongoing training and awareness raising. Sharing best practice with other LAs.

Future direction: Sandwell will continue to work collaboratively across agencies to identify and prosecute modern slavery cases and to support and protect victims. Sandwell will continue to review and update its Resettlement Pathways to provide appropriate support for victims. Sandwell will continue to increase awareness of modern slavery in the community and train more individuals and organisations to recognise and report cases. Sandwell will continue to incorporate best practices and update its modern slavery transparency statement to promote transparency and accountability. Sandwell will work to improve its data collection and analysis to enhance understanding across the area.

Tackling Modern Slavery in Sandwell

Child exploitation, including child sexual exploitation, is a significant issue that requires attention in Sandwell.

In 2020, there was a significant reduction in child exploitation referred to the police, most likely due to the impact of the pandemic. However, it is important to note that the pandemic may have also contributed to an increase in vulnerability for children, making it even more important to address the issue.

Tackling Child Exploitation in Sandwell

Challenges: One of the biggest challenges in tackling child exploitation is the hidden and complex nature of the crime, which can make it difficult to detect and prosecute. Another challenge is that perpetrators often exercise a high level of control over their victims, making it difficult for victims to speak out or seek help

Approaches: The Child Exploitation Board (CEB) leads on this area of work. Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) has created new data sets for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which are being incorporated into the Prevention of Violence and Exploitation (PoVE) scorecard. The Horizons Team works in partnership to promote awareness and tackle child exploitation across the Borough, including changes made to Multi Agency Child Exploitation Meetings to discuss all high-risk children every 4 weeks. The Sandwell partnership has also established a Child Exploitation Hub to embed a coordinated approach to identifying and tackling child exploitation cases

Recent work: The work of the Horizons Team has been commended in an OFSTED report and they were the winners of a West Midlands Team of Excellence award. Sandwell Youth Services has delivered a significant programme of youth activities to engage young people and raise awareness of the risks of exploitation. Successful prosecution of perpetrators has resulted in lengthy prison sentences, including 11 years and 44 months. Sandwell has also been commended for its partnership working during County Lines Intensification Weeks, which aim to tackle the exploitation of vulnerable children by criminal gangs

Future direction: Going forward, it will be important to continue to work collaboratively across agencies to identify and prosecute child exploitation cases and to support and protect victims. There is also a need to continue to raise awareness of the risks of exploitation and engage young people to better understand their concerns and issues. Sandwell can also continue to work on cross-border cooperation to better address child exploitation cases which often cross regional or national borders

Reducing offending / reoffending is crucial to making communities safer and to preventing individuals from becoming victims of crime.

To achieve this, the HMPPS West Midlands Probation Region Delivery Plan, 2022-23 prioritises providing prisoners with the necessary training and skills to secure employment on release, supporting them in addressing substance misuse issues, and facilitating opportunities to maintain family ties and secure accommodation as they reintegrate into society.

Reducing Offending, and Reoffending – Adults

Challenges: Addressing the root causes of offending, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, and lack of education and job skills. Ensuring sufficient funding and resources for rehabilitative services and support for offenders both in prison and in the community

Approaches: The Reducing Offending, Reoffending and Serious Organisation Crime group (RROSOC) leads on this area of work. HMPPS commission training and education programs for offenders to acquire job skills and re-enter the workforce upon release. Alongside substance abuse treatment programs and support for maintaining family ties to address underlying issues. Temporary accommodation upon release is also available to reduce homelessness and increase stability

Recent work: Implementing a national target operating model by 2024 and finalising new team structures in relation to Integrated Offender Management and young adults' transitions. Offering several rehabilitative service contracts to support offenders accessing tailored interventions to address factors contributing to their offending. Implementing nationally approved structured Interventions and toolkits to supplement accredited programs and ensure speedy and effective information in relation to domestic abuse and child safeguarding checks between key partners

Future directions: Continue investing in rehabilitative services and support for offenders both in prison and in the community. Implement evidence-based practices and interventions to address the root causes of offending and reduce recidivism rates. Increase collaboration and partnership working between criminal justice agencies, community organisations, and local authorities to tackle serious organised crime and reduce its impact on communities

The Sandwell Youth Justice Plan focuses on early intervention and prevention for children and young people who are at risk of or who have already engaged in offending behaviour.

The plan includes various approaches such as diversionary activities, restorative justice, and targeted interventions for those who have already offended.

Reducing Youth Offending & Reoffending

Challenges: The current pandemic has increased the vulnerability of children and young people, making it important to address the issue of youth offending and reoffending. Disproportionality and cultural competence issues continue to be challenges that must be addressed to ensure equity in the youth justice system

Approaches: The Youth Justice Board leads on this area of work. Sandwell's Youth Justice Plan focuses on early intervention and prevention for children and young people who are at risk of or who have already engaged in offending behaviour. This includes working with partners to identify and support vulnerable children, providing diversionary activities and restorative justice approaches, as well as providing targeted interventions for those who have already offended. The plan also focuses on ensuring that the needs of children and young people are met, such as their educational and mental health needs, in order to reduce the likelihood of reoffending

Recent Work: The Sandwell Youth Justice Service has launched a multi-agency decision-making panel to oversee out-of-court disposals and has partnered with Safeground to create a bespoke intervention for girls in the youth justice system. The introduction of Turnaround Funding aims to support young people on the cusp of entering the youth justice system, and there are clear pathways to the Strengthening Families Service to provide ongoing support. The Sandwell Youth Justice Service has also embedded arts-based youth justice work and supported the Plain-Speaking project with Community Safety Funding. The service is working with Recre8 to create a bespoke intervention for Sandwell around peer-on-peer violence and with SafeLives to upskill workers in direct interventions with young people where domestic abuse behaviours are a concern

Future Direction: The Sandwell Youth Justice Service is focusing on developing a Transitions Team in the Probation Service to manage 18–25-year-olds, providing continuity and managed transitions. All NEET young people will have mentoring support, and there will be monthly meetings and record-keeping of career plans for all NEET Post-16. A new KPI Framework is being introduced from April 2023 to measure progress and hold the service accountable for achieving its goals

Serious organised crime is a complex and constantly evolving issue, making it difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of trends.

Serious organised crime groups are involved in a range of criminal activities, including drug trafficking, firearms offences, fraud, money laundering, and human trafficking. As of the 30/01/23 Sandwell had 9 mapped organised crime groups, this is the 3rd highest in the West Midlands, next to the major cities of Birmingham and Wolverhampton

Reducing Serious Organised Crime

Challenges: Serious organised crime is a complex and constantly evolving issue, involving activities such as drug trafficking, firearms offences, fraud, money laundering, and human trafficking. The constantly evolving nature of serious organised crime makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of trends

Approaches: The development of a Sandwell Partnership Organised Crime Group to tackle organised crime effectively.. Focus on increasing organised immigration crime and working around County Lines Intensification Weeks.

Recent Work: Regular partnership disruptions to Organised crime groups in Sandwell. In January 2023, there were 24 such disruptions. Sandwell Partnership work around County Lines Intensification Weeks held up as exemplar of good practice across the wider West Midlands Force. In October 2022, this included: 22 children and adults safeguarded, 6 cuckooing visits, 390 children engaged with through schools, 34 visits to high/medium risk young people, 10+ case reviews along with social workers, 5 drop-in sessions around contextual safeguarding. SMBC Cuckooing Video shared with staff and partners emphasising the roles of individual teams and the benefits of partnership working to protect vulnerable individuals

Future Direction: Future directions of work around serious organised crime in Sandwell will involve continued partnership working to disrupt organised crime groups, focusing on identifying and safeguarding vulnerable individuals, and implementing preventative measures to reduce the risk of criminal exploitation

Preventing and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a complex issue that requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

In Sandwell, this approach involves bringing partners together both strategically and operationally to provide a coordinated response at the local and borough-wide levels. By working together, partners are able to share data and intelligence, focus on problem-solving, and bring together resources to prevent and tackle crime and ASB in our communities.

Preventing Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour in our Neighbourhoods

Challenges: Preventing and reducing crime and ASB requires a multi-disciplined approach. The causes of crime need to be understood and addressed to provide a holistic response

Approaches: Borough and Town tasking lead on this area of work. Partners come together monthly to share intelligence and coordinate a response. Community and place-based concerns are discussed in these meetings. Community Safety Analysts provide data to inform the partnerships

Recent Work: Delivery of the Borough Hate Crime Plan, which included support for third-party reporting centres, hate crime awareness workshops, and regular training for community members and professionals. Implementation of a new Boroughwide Nuisance Bikes Plan, which included all-out days in hotspot areas, engagement with associated businesses, the introduction of a new force-wide bikes team, and the use of CCTV in strategic locations. Successful delivery of the Commonwealth Games and the annual partnership Safer 6 Community Safety campaign, which involved litter picks, ASB walkabouts, fire safety checks, illegal trading operations, and more. Successful bid and commencement for the Safer Streets Round 4 Project in Bearwood

Future Direction: Continue the multi-disciplined approach to preventing and reducing crime and ASB. Focus on understanding and addressing the root causes of crime. Develop training tools co-designed by residents and not-for-profits in each of Sandwell's six towns to prevent crime and ASB. Continue evidence-based deployment of Sandwell's deployable camera stock and focus on vehicle crime.

Ongoing work

In order to further enhance and strengthen community safety across Sandwell, the Safer Sandwell Partnership and its partners have developed the 2023-24 PoVE/RRSOC and Tasking Plans. These plans are designed to build on the work already done and continue the progress towards the partnership's goals.

The plans have been developed with input from various partners, including the police, local authorities, and community organisations. The following four areas of work will be included in the plans:

- Publication of the Serious Violence Needs Assessment - this will help identify the root causes of serious violence in Sandwell and inform the development of effective prevention strategies
- Implementation and embedding of the Serious Violence Duty - this duty requires relevant partners to work together to prevent and tackle serious violence
- Supporting the planned national review of Community Safety Partnerships - this review will provide an opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of community safety partnerships and identify areas for improvement
- Ongoing improvements to data provision and analysis - this will help the partnership make better-informed decisions and track progress towards achieving its goals

Through these plans, the Safer Sandwell Partnership and its partners will continue to work with the communities of Sandwell to ensure that residents feel safe, protected, and confident in their homes and neighborhoods.

Conclusion and Moving Forward

The Safer Sandwell Partnership is committed to improving community safety across the Borough through a collaborative approach with key partners and our communities

Through the implementation of the Community Safety Strategy and the 2023-24 PoVE/RRSOC and Tasking Plans, the partnership will continue to progress work in enhancing and strengthening community safety across the Borough

It's important for all partners to remain accountable and support the delivery of the partnership's vision of ensuring that the communities of Sandwell feel safe, protected, and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods

We encourage all stakeholders to continue to engage with the partnership and to provide feedback to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our communities

Together, we can and will continue to make Sandwell a safer place to live and work

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Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

23 March 2023

Subject:	Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group – Home Checks Review
Director:	Director of Housing Director Gillian Douglas
Contact Officer:	Housing Services Manager, Nigel Collumbell Nigel_collumbell@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations


- 1.1 To receive and comment on the outcomes and recommendations following a review of “Home Checks” undertaken by the Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group

2 Background

- 2.1 The Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group was established in 2021 as part of the Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Framework, which provides a variety of opportunities for customers to get involved in and to ensure our customers voice is heard and acted on when developing and delivering our housing services.
- 2.3 The Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group have developed their own work plan, identifying areas of service delivery that they wish to scrutinise. The latest area of work selected for scrutiny was the Home Checks undertaken by the Tenancy Management Service.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities Through strengthening tenant engagement and participation, it will enable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stronger relationships between the council and tenants ○ Enhanced information and communication ○ An opportunity for tenants to develop skills ○ Develop a greater sense of place within the community
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods By involving tenants in housing services through a more coproduced approach will enable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improvement to services for tenants ○ Better value for money ○ Improved customer experience and satisfaction ○ Better customer loyalty
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

4 Home Checks Review

4.1 The Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group wanted to test and scrutinise the Home Checks service to ensure that the whole Home Checks process is fair, transparent, beneficial, and fit for purpose to all Council tenants and the Council. The group's aims are to suggest positive changes and improvements based on an evidence-based approach to ensure tenants have the best experience possible from the process



- 4.2 The Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group deployed a number of methods with the support of council officers to complete their review. This included a survey of tenants, staff interviews, and a desktop review of evidence.
- 4.3 The findings of the Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group were discussed in detail with the relevant senior managers from Housing Services to reach a consensus on actions required to address areas of concern and opportunities for improvement identified during the review.
- 4.4 The recommendations from the group that will be taken forward to enhance future service delivery include the following:
- To provide copies of completed Home Check forms to all tenants who have received a visit;
 - review the main referral pathways to ensure these are most relevant
 - review our approach and access to interpreter services to ensure it reflects best practice
 - look at how we ensure Home Checks are accessible to all, including tenants who are at work during the day
 - ensure that the 'Dynamic Resource Scheduling' element is implemented as soon as possible to ensure appointments are managed and tenant friendly in terms of the availability of time slots
 - provide tenants with an explanation of the RAG rating, how it was arrived at and what this means going forward.

5 Next Steps:

- 5.1 Housing Management have agreed to implement the recommendations set out above and will report back to the Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group on progress.

6 Alternative Options

- 6.1 The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard mandates that social housing providers must ensure tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the scrutiny of their landlord. Our Tenant Engagement Framework provides these opportunities. The quality of work undertaken by the volunteers who form



the Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group adds significant value and benefit to the housing service.

7. Implications

Resources:	Financial, staffing, land/building implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no specific resource commitments arising from this report. The work of the Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group is met from existing resources in the Housing Revenue Account
Legal and Governance:	Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Housing Regulatory Standards can be found at (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards).
Risk:	Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no specific resource commitments arising from this report.
Equality:	Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations made by the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group on access to interpreter services will improve equality of service delivery when implemented.
Health and Wellbeing:	Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no specific health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.
Social Value	Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no specific social value implications arising from this report.
Climate Change:	There are no direct implications for climate change arising from this report.



8.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Home Checks TLSG Report.

Appendix 2 – copy of Home Check form

9. Background Papers

- Regulatory Standards - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards>



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REPORT FROM TLSG - HOUSING HOME CHECKS SERVICE

Scrutiny Document -February 2023

Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group

Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group Report on Sandwell Council's Housing Home Checks Service

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group (TLSG) wanted to test and scrutinise the Home Checks service to ensure that the whole Home Checks process is fair, transparent, beneficial, and fit for purpose to all Council tenants and the Council.

1.2 To provide a comprehensive review of the potential issues (if any) affecting the effectiveness of the Home Checks Services provided.

1.3 The group's aims are to suggest positive changes and improvements based on an evidence-based approach to ensure tenants have the best experience possible from the process.

2. **BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

a. The Home Checks service involves Neighbourhood Officers visiting the tenant in their home to carry out a comprehensive tenancy check. This involves a conversation with the tenant in their home to gather information about the state/upkeep of the property, the tenant's wellbeing and any support required that will improve their quality of life. This information is recorded via an online form which is completed during the visit. Depending on the responses to the questions, the form has a series of prompts to assist the Officer in advising the tenant. As well as collecting information the Home Check visit is seen as an opportunity for the Neighbourhood Officers to build relationships between themselves and tenants.

b. Whilst at the property, based on tenants' responses to the questions, the Officer's observations and the condition of the property, the tenancy will be assessed and given a traffic light category (Red, Amber or Green - otherwise known as RAG) to prioritise any further action that may be required,.

c. The TLSG felt that scrutiny of Home Checks at the relatively early stages of a new service which is gathering detailed information about Sandwell council tenants and council housing stock provided an opportunity to

Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group Report on Sandwell Council's Housing Home Checks Service

implement any agreed changes before the process is fully embedded.

3. METHODOLOGY

The group chose a variety of methods to test and scrutinise the service including:

3.1 Compile and assess a tenant Home Check Survey – A user friendly questionnaire was compiled with a covering introduction from the Chair of the TLSG requesting tenants complete a survey to support the improvement of the service. It was sent out to 300 tenants who had had a home check from its start in January 2022 up to the 2nd September 2022. To maintain data protection the surveys were sent to the tenants by the Council via email or text message . The survey ran for approximately 10 days and asked questions about their customer experience. The anonymous responses to the survey were received and analysed by the Vice Chair.

3.2 Staff Interviews – A subgroup of TLSG constructed a questionnaire to gain a perspective from staff around their views of the processes used, third person views on the pros and cons to the Home Checks, and to gather any suggestions and/or recommendations they thought would improve the service. Staff were approached across the borough to monitor any differences in delivery of the service.

3.3 Desk Top Evidence – the group received a detailed presentation on the service, how it is delivered, measured, and monitored. They then requested key documents and evidence to enable them to assess and evaluate the service.

This included:

- The reasoning behind establishing Home Checks
- The resources in terms of staff required
- The roll out and timescales of Home Checks to all tenants
- The measures used to test customer satisfaction
- The linkages made to other departments and agencies to ensure a holistic approach was taken
- Training undertaken by Housing Staff to enable them to deal with any major issues raised during Home Check

Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group Report on Sandwell Council's Housing Home Checks Service

3.4 Review of the Home Checks Form and relevance of Information requested - As part of the scoping exercise members of TLSG had some initial discussions about the useful information they would expect the Neighbourhood Officer to provide based on the questions being asked of the tenant.

It was agreed two members of Scrutiny would do a more in depth review of the form looking not only at the relevance and logic of the questions asked and the answer options but also the sequence, the grammar and if anything was potentially missing. This review was carried out using on a word version of the form provided to TLSG by the service.

3.5 Analysis of the Home Check experience - In addition to the surveys we were able to call on the direct experience of two members of the group who had previously had a home check. Two additional members of the group attempted to book a Home Check but only one was carried out prior to this report.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Tenant Home Check Survey

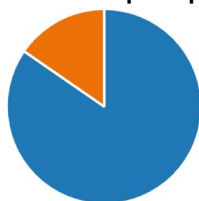
From the 300 surveys issued 13 tenants responded.

This response rate, although disappointing for us, amounts to a return of 5% which is considered an acceptable response rate. (See appendix 1 of the Tenant Survey for Results).

We believe the low response rate may be because tenants are not fully aware of the work the group is doing.

The responses from tenants indicated that the tenants were generally happy with the visit.

11 out of 13 people understood the purpose of the visit

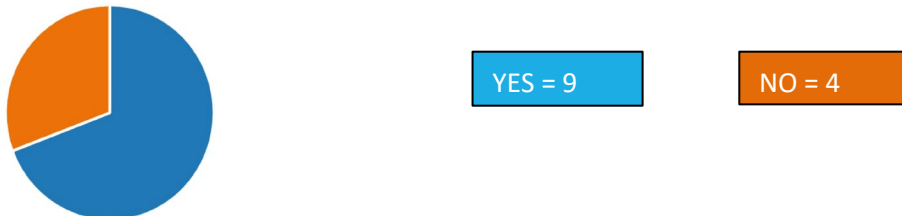


YES = 11

NO = 2

Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group Report on Sandwell Council's Housing Home Checks Service

However, to the question – Did the Neighbourhood Officer explain what action(s) if any would take place following the interview? Only 9 of the tenants responded yes.



4.2 Staff Interviews

A sub-group of the TLSG interviewed 2 Neighbourhood Officers, based in different parts of the borough. (See Appendix 2 - Staff Interview). The main findings were:

4.2.1 - Staff were professional and very experienced.

4.2.3 - Staff regarded Home Checks as very much part of their “day job”.

4.2.4 - Staff were updated on processes but there was no training around Customer Service. It was almost a ‘given’ that they would not need this as they were experienced Neighbourhood Officers.

4.2.5 – Visits are booked as either morning or afternoon timeslots.

4.2.6 - There is no clear instruction on how the visit should be conducted. For example, it is currently down to the Officer whether they will use children under 16 to act as interpreters during a home check visit.

4.2.7 - Officers are not very aware of activities or support provided via the voluntary sector. The online form prompts the Officer to promote the Route2Wellbeing website to tenants however, some of the information on this website is out of date

4.2.8 - It is not clear whether Officers should follow up on any non-housing related issues that come out of the Home Check or any related referrals

4.2.9 - There is no clear guidance on supporting tenants if there is an issue raised during the Home Check with the services they receive e.g. repairs or problems with MySandwell portal not working

4.2.10 - the Officers interviewed were very positive about undertaking Home Check visits

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4.3 Desk Top Evidence

4.3.1 - Review of the Home Checks Form

4.3.1a - From Group Discussion

- The prompts in the form do not provide much information for families or children in general
- The form lacks information that links to Safeguarding for both children and adults
 - There is no information covering Domestic Violence (DV) or Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT)
 - There is no information with links to NHS, addiction services etc
 - There is no information regarding where to go or search for support to learn English

4.3.1b Observations on the Home Checks Form and relevance of Information (See appendix 3 Home Checks form)

A couple of members of scrutiny reviewed the contents of the Home Checks form in detail and made a number of observations. Some of these include:

- No room for free text to note any issues that do not fit into the dropdown options to all the questions in the form
- No indication in the form as to what form of ID is acceptable
- If someone indicates they do not have ICT skills and/or equipment, shouldn't the advice dropdown include a link to services/community groups that have equipment and/or provide training?
- The TLSG members felt the issues of under- occupancy and the taking in of lodgers in section 2 are quite complex and probably need to be discussed as a separate issue outside of the Home Checks visit.
- Some questions raised seem irrelevant or unclear e.g. "In section 3 – Wellbeing - what is the relevance of the "Have you met your neighbours?" question?
- Also grouped into one question is "Do you know where your local shops, leisure facilities and health facilities are located?". What if the answer is yes to only one part of the question?
- Section 4, questions are poorly worded and make assumptions that tenants are in need of benefits and/or are in arrears.

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- Do Officers check records before going out to know if a question is relevant or not e.g. is the rent account checked before a visit to check if the tenant uses Direct Debit?
- There is no specific question about car ownership, this seems an omission considering parking tends to be an issue in many neighbourhoods and estates.
- A lot of the support that seems to be offered to tenants in the Home Check visit appears to be on-line. It is not clear how Officers will support or provide information to tenants who either do not have access to or do not know how to use technology.

4.3.2 Home Checks Training Information supplied

- No information was supplied on what, if any, mandatory training Officers undertake either as one off or regular basis such as personal safety, customer care or preparation for home visits.
- The PowerPoint presentation received on staff training, related only to the why Home Checks have been introduced and a run through of the questions in the online form. So, there is no indication that staff are suitably trained to potentially have difficult conversations with tenants
- From the information provided it is not clear whether there is a skills audit of staff who undertake the Home Checks, especially considering the restructure taking place which will appoint Housing Services Officers who will have Home Checks as one of their main roles.

4.3.3 Support for Tenant with English not their first language/ Learning Disability/other disabilities

- There is no clear process for supporting those tenants whose first language is not English. A translation/interpreter service is offered but the Service is not sure if all staff are aware of this. Family members are often used but there is no guidance on the minimum age of any children who may be asked to translate
- There is no clear guidance on engaging with tenants with learning difficulties. Again, there is a reliance on family and friends, but it is not clear who would be invited to support the tenant if this support is unsuitable or unavailable.

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4.3.4 Formal Feedback to tenants following the Home Check

There is no facility for tenants to request and be issued with a copy of the Home Check form including the Assessment and/or explanation of the rating the tenancy has been awarded.

4.3.5 Understanding the RAG scoring rating

There is no documented guidance on the RAG Scoring mechanism. The decision/scoring by the Officer appears to be solely based on their personal opinion.

4.3.6 Figures on 'No shows'

This is not recorded at present

4.3.7 Provision of Home Checks outside of office hours

At the moment Home Checks are only carried out during normal office hours. This may be an issue for people who are working or who have other commitments during the day.

4.3.8 Dynamic Resource Scheduling

The Group has been advised that there is a plan to introduce Dynamic Resource Scheduling to the process. This will allow tenants to receive text message alerts about their appointments and confirm the time band in which the Officer is expected to arrive.

4.3.9 Key Performance indicators (KPI's)

There are currently no Key Performance Indicators to benchmark Home Checks. For example, there is no information on the number of "no shows".

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4.4 Analysis of the Home Check experience

Comments, conclusions, and recommendations were also drawn from the 2 scrutiny members who had previously received a Home Check and one member who received a Home Check visit during scrutinising the service. Unfortunately, another member's visit was cancelled and not re-arranged in time for the report deadline. As with tenants who took part in the survey the overall experience was positive, but they felt changes could be made to improve the experience for tenants.

Tenant & Leaseholder Scrutiny Group Report on Sandwell Council's Housing Home Checks Service

RECOMMENDATIONS

NO.	Related to Findings	Area Change Suggested	Recommendation	Service area response
1	4.1 & 4.2.8	Tenant Home Check Survey	Housing to start sending out, as soon as possible, copies of completed Home Check forms to all tenants who have received a visit to date	Agreed that we need to provide either a copy of full Home Check or the agreed actions.
2	4.3.1a	Home Check Form	Source a more comprehensive list to signpost tenants e.g. organisations that support children and families, NHS, Sandwell Children's Trust, addiction services in addition to SCVO's Route2wellbeing	The form cannot physically illustrate all of the potential pathways that could result from a HC. Our internal intranet page has many more resources available for officers to use and these will be reviewed quarterly with officers to ensure the main referral pathways are most relevant, identify new resources that become available and ensure appropriate staff training to support this.
3	4.3.1b	Home Check Form	If someone indicates they do not have IT or do not know how to use technology Officers should have information to signpost tenants to organisations that can assist with equipment or provide training	There are already questions on the form to identify if tenants need help. We will check and confirm where tenants are referred to if they need support
4	4.3.1b	Home Checks Form	Add in room for free text to note any issues which do not fit into the dropdown options	The form contains a number of free text boxes at different stages, which are not always displayed on printed version of the form.
5	4.3.1b	Home Checks Form	What forms of ID would be acceptable to be made clear	The HSO would explain which type of ID would be suitable this during the Home Check meeting

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				– the types of ID differ depending on the customer's circumstances and officers will be trained to ensure they are familiar with this.
6	4.3.1b	Home Checks Form	Consideration be given to providing advice on Under-occupancy and Taking in a Lodger to be part of a follow up to the Home Checks visit so that the tenant is properly informed	Officers are trained to give basic advice on these issues, and to advise the tenant where to get further information if required.
7	4.3.1b	Home Checks Form	Consideration to be given to re-wording the questions in section 4 to add Not Applicable options	The printed version of the form does not reflect all of the options available for officers to choose from.
8	4.3.1b	Home Checks Form	Consideration to be given to adding a question about car ownership including providing information on renting council garages	Not sure what we would do with the information about car ownership, which in itself is not a tenancy issue. We will add a question regarding interest in renting a garage and ensure officers are trained that garages can be used for any storage, not just for vehicles.
9	4.3.2	Staff Training	Provide TLSG with details of all mandatory training staff receive or will receive to ensure they are suitably prepared to undertake Home Check visits	We have provided the slide set that is used to frame the conversations in the Home Check training sessions, however it is not possible for one module to cover the full depth of knowledge that officers require to conduct a Home Check - this would be gathered from the range of modules that are provided for officers. A training plan is being developed for the job group which will be shared with the TLSG.
10	4.3.2	Staff Training	To provide details to TLSG of any skills audit undertaken during the	Most officers undertaking HCs post-restructure were also doing them before. The capability of

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			restructuring process to ensure that Housing Services Officers have the necessary experience/skills and/or training	new officers was assessed via a selection process. All officers (old and new) were provided with training on Home Checks and key policies and procedures.
11	4.3.2	Staff Training	To “build-in” Customer Service into staff competency and professional training	HSOs receive a series of training modules on case management, which includes keeping customers informed and updated. Further training is being planned on Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE).
12	4.2.7	Staff Training	Build-in to staff training awareness of Community/Voluntary Groups in the neighbourhood they are working within to support tenants in getting involved to reduce loneliness, creating active communities.	We would expect officers to be aware of the active groups in their patch, as they work closely with the Community Partnerships officers. We will ask Community Partnerships team to provide further training to officers, particularly around boroughwide groups
13	4.2.6 & 4.3.3	Support for Tenants where English is not their first language or have a learning disability/other disability	Review the use of family and friends as interpreters as this may not always be appropriate. In those cases, and if professional interpreters cannot be used consideration should be given to the use of technology to communicate with tenants	Agreed that we will review our approach and access to interpreter services to ensure it reflects best practice.
14	4.2.6 & 4.3.3	Support for Tenants where English is not their first language or have a Learning	Specifically review the use of children under 16 acting as interpreters in the Home Check which includes sensitive questions	We will review our approach as per 13 above.

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		Disability/other disability		
15	4.2.5 & 4.3.7	Home Checks Process	Tenants need to have a choice of availability of evening and weekend Home Checks to ensure there is a facility for tenants who are working, have family commitments and caring responsibilities.	Agreed that we need to look at how we ensure Home Checks are accessible to all, however moving to an evening and weekend service for a non-urgent task would have a considerable impact on staffing budgets and employee Ts & Cs.
16	4.3.8	Home Checks Process	To ensure that the 'Dynamic Resource Scheduling' element is implemented as soon as possible to ensure appointments are managed and tenant friendly in terms of the availability of time slots	Agreed.
17	4.2.5 & 4.3.7	Home Checks Process	To continue with Home Check visits either in person or, as technology progresses, to offer choices of either Zoom, Teams or any other video conferencing platforms offering choice, depending on the tenant's preferred choice. IT should not be a default mechanism but a choice and should only be rolled out when the process is tried and tested	We consider the in-person method of conducting a Home Check to be essential. This is to build rapport between the tenant and the officer, to ensure a thorough inspection of the property, and to spot potential safeguarding issues. Follow up visits do not necessarily need to be in person – telephone/virtual methods can be used where appropriate.
18	4.2.7 & 4.2.8	Home Checks Process	Agree the approach for staff to support tenants after the visit e.g. re-visiting to offer support in using MySandwell	This is covered in the agreed actions box at the end of the check. The HSO will revisit as required to support on any tenancy

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			portal and any other self-referral route to support independence	management issues but would handover on-going support to other relevant agencies following referral.
19	4.3.1b	Home Checks Process	Ensure preparation and back office checks are carried out prior to a visit. For example, if a tenant pays by Direct Debit, they may not be in arrears just 'technical arrears' based on when the rent is debited from their bank account. They shouldn't then be told they are in arrears which may cause unnecessary distress or confusion	Background system checks are undertaken before the visit. We would expect officers to discuss rent debit and payment cycles with the tenant, so they are understood. However, it is now a tenancy condition that an account should not fall into debit for any period, and that the tenant should ensure that there is sufficient credit on the account to prevent this. Further training is planned to ensure officers convey this to tenants correctly without causing alarm.
20	4.1	Home Checks Process	Officers to be provided with additional information to signpost tenants who, as a result of the Home Check visit, are required to decorate their homes as they may be on a limited budget. Perhaps link with local schemes or organisations	As per recommendation 2, we will regularly review the main referral pathways to ensure these are most relevant.
21	4.3.4	Formal Feedback to tenants	The service to promote to tenants the option to request a copy of their Home Check form including the assessment and rating the tenancy has been awarded	Agreed – see recommendation 1
22	4.3.5	Understanding the RAG Scoring Rating	Produce some guidance that can be given to tenants on the scoring mechanism and potential follow ups	Agreed – tenants should be provided with an explanation of the RAG rating, how it was arrived at and what this means going forward.

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			depending on rating used when Home Checks are carried out.	We will address this as part of recommendation 1.
23	4.3.6	No Shows	To start recording 'no shows' with an Action Plan to support/deal with persistent tenants.	Agreed that we need to have an escalation process for completing Home Checks to tenancies who are not engaging.
24	4.3.9	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	For the TLSG to be informed of Home Check KPI's with results for comparison to check against.	Performance reports for Home Checks are still under development, we will share these with the TLSG once they are in place.
25	4.1 & 4.4	Review Home Checks Process	To continuously look at reviewing the Home Checks process by requesting input from tenants that have had a Home Check experience to keep up to date with changes in tenants' needs and aspirations of the service	We have recently introduced a satisfaction survey for Home Checks and will use this feedback to continuously review the service.

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Home Check Form

RAG rating:

Red

Amber

Green

Date of visit:

Officer Name:

Main Trigger:

Secondary Trigger:

Person

Address:

Occupants:

	Name	Relationship	Date of Birth	End Date
Main tenant				
Joint tenant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				
Occupant				

Can you confirm tenants ID?

Yes

No

Telephone number main:

Telephone number joint:

Emergency telephone number:

Email address:

Pets?

Yes - permission granted

No

Yes - **no** permission granted

If yes, take details of pets

Financial

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Employed?	Yes No	Yes No
Would you be interested in voluntary work?	Yes - referral made No	Yes - referral made No
Would you be interested in further career advice?	Yes - referral made No	Yes - referral made No

If yes, provide links

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Are you in receipt of HB?	Yes No No – explained how to apply	Yes No No – explained how to apply
Are you in receipt of UC?	Yes No No – explained how to apply	Yes No No – explained how to apply

Rent account balance:

Payment Method:

Direct debit is the safest and easiest way for our customers to pay. As you make a financial contribution towards your rent, you will need to complete a Direct Debit Mandate for future rent payments. We have a choice of payment dates for your convenience.

(Officer to assist with completing DD mandate via telephone or online)

<http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/payingyourrent>

If the DD mandate has not been completed, why?

Arrears?

Yes

No

Court costs:

If yes, provide number for rent teams to discuss

Welfare Rights referral made?

Yes

No

If yes, email to be sent to welfare rights general email account with core details, name, address, telephone number for referral

**Do tenant(s) require money advice?
(i.e. debt with other organisations)**

Yes

No

If yes, provide links

Wellbeing

Do you have a “My Sandwell” Account?

Yes

No – supported to set up

No – lack of technology

No – unable to use technology

No – refused

If no, provide links

How are you settling in / managing in your current property?

Provide links

Have you met your neighbours?

Yes

No

Do you know where your local shops,
leisure and health facilities are situated?

Yes

No

If no, provide inks

Is anyone or has anyone been in the armed forces? Yes

No

If yes, provide inks

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Physical medical conditions?	Yes No	Yes No

If yes, provide details

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Do you require support in your current property?	Yes - referral made No	Yes - referral made No
Do you require an adaption in your current property?	Yes - referral made No	Yes - referral made No

If yes, refer to Adult Services, discuss property suitability/priority transfer

If yes, provide details

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Mental health condition?	Yes No	Yes No

If yes, provide details

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Is your mental health condition being managed?	Yes No – referral made No – referral refused	Yes No – referral made No – referral refused

If no, refer to support worker, if they have none / FS if appropriate. Advise to contact GP, book follow up visit date agreed by tenant / officer

If yes, provide details

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Is a medical assessment required?	Yes No	Yes No

If yes, advise of process

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Drug issues	Yes	Yes
	No	No
Alcohol issues	Yes	Yes
	No	No
Gambling issues	Yes	Yes
	No	No

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Are they engaging with any Addiction support?	Yes	Yes
	No - referral made	No - referral made
	No - referral refused	No - referral refused

If no, make appropriate referrals – Cranston / GP

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Is this affecting other elements of your tenancy?	Yes	Yes
	No	No

If yes, discuss next steps to help maintain tenancy

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Do you feel isolated?	Yes	Yes
	No	No

If yes, search for local groups give details to tenant

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant

If yes, explain next steps and follow Safeguarding process

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Are you suffering from any harassment/ hate crime in your home or the area you live?	Yes – reported via MySandwell	Yes – reported via MySandwell
	Yes – doesn't want to report	Yes – doesn't want to report
	No	No

If yes, explain next steps, log on MySandwell (ASB) and follow Safeguarding process

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Are you experiencing any ASB?	Yes – reported via MySandwell	Yes – reported via MySandwell
	Yes – doesn't want to report	Yes – doesn't want to report
	No	No

If yes, explain next steps, explain/assist logging on MySandwell (ASB) provide links

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Floating support referral required?	Yes	Yes
	Existing customer	Existing customer
	Not required	Not required

If yes, provide links

	Main Tenant	Joint Tenant
Is a welfare assessment required?	Yes	Yes
	No	No

If yes, advise of process

Are there any signs of safeguarding issues at the property?	No
	Yes - Adults
	Yes - Childrens

Property

Property type

Number of Bedrooms

Is the property under-occupied?

Yes

No

If yes, advise of process

Would you consider taking on a lodger?

Yes

No

If yes, advise of process

Is the property Overcrowded?

Yes

No

If yes, advise of process

Utilities

Are all utility suppliers set up

Yes

No

Not applicable

Turn on and test completed

Yes

No

Not applicable

Tenant aware of annual gas safety process

Yes

No

Not applicable

Tenant aware of meter locations

Yes

No

Not applicable

Tenant aware of stopcock location

Yes

No

Not applicable

Property checks

Room by room check to be completed

Bedroom 1:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	
Bedroom 2:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Bedroom 3:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Bedroom 4:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Bedroom 5:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Bedroom 6:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Kitchen:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	
Bathroom:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	
Living room:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	
Dining Room:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Hall/Landing:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	
W/C:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Front Garden:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Rear Garden:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Communal Shed:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable
Balcony:	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Not applicable

When checking gardens please include boundaries

If any of the above are unacceptable please note the issue raised, how this will be managed and next steps (asb, hoarding, tenancy breach, repeat visits)

Repairs outstanding?

Yes

No

Refer tenant to My Sandwell my.sandwell.gov.uk to report / chase repairs

Adapted property?

Yes

No

If yes, what has been adapted and who is responsible?

Do you have a mobility scooter?

Yes

No

If yes, refer to scooter process

Working smoke alarm:

Yes

No

If not, log urgently

Fire Safe and Well check complete?

Yes

No

online Referral Form (Insert relevant office code)

Provide link <https://www.wmfs.net/safety/at-home/>

Does the property show evidence of hoarding?

Yes

No

If yes, email to WMFS and follow hoarding process

Any alterations made to the property?

Yes

No

If yes, describe the alteration:

Was permission requested and agreed?

Yes

No

If no, refer to alteration process

Tenant(s) Responsibilities

Repair responsibilities	Explained	Not explained
Home improvements	Explained	Not explained
Mould prevention	Explained	Not explained
Garden maintenance	Explained	Not explained
Vehicle responsibilities	Explained	Not explained
Anti-social behaviour	Explained	Not explained
Termination/end of life	Discussed	Not Discussed

i.e. do they have a will/arrangements in place following death?

Provide links

Condensation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NR53Y2x2X4&feature=youtu.be

Further Actions

RAG Rating reviewed: Red Amber Green

Summary:

Is a further visit required? Yes No

Date of next visit

Support plan required? Yes No

Officer to set targets / agreed actions

To understand more about why we collect your information, what we do with your information, how you can access your information, your personal information rights, how and to whom to raise a complaint about your information, please visit our privacy notice page at <http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/privacynotices>

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

23rd March 2023

Subject:	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing
Director:	Director of Housing Director Gillian Douglas
Contact Officer:	Housing Services Manager, Nigel Collumbell Nigel_collumbell@sandwell.gov.uk Business Manager – Community Partnerships, Manny Sehmbi Manny_sehmbi@sandwell.gov.uk Stuart Hall – Home Improvement Manager Stuart_hall@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 Consider and comment on the update revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
- 1.2 Consider and comment on the Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing









2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The focus for revising the policy is to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To continue to provide adaptations and housing improvements to disabled residents, offering the most cost effective and best value solutions, targeted at those with the greatest need.
- b) Revise policies to expand and maximise opportunities for improving the homes of disabled people. These changes are designed to promote independence and reduce/prevent demand on health and social care services and fundamentally improve quality of life.
- c) Introduce a more customer centred approach by offering residents more bespoke and easily accessible service irrespective of tenure
- d) Align the policy with objectives of the Better Care Fund (BCF) to assist with the prevention of admissions to hospital and social care, support hospital discharge and reduce social care interventions
- e) To reflect good practice as set out in the Adult Social Care Reform White Paper 2021 and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England (2022).



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting children and young people to live independently in their home • Supporting to improve quality of life • Both policies apply to adaptations for disabled children and young people as well as adults
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support more people of all ages to live in suitable housing so they can stay independent for longer and • Potentially prevent the need for care and support and help maximise independence. It can also prevent the need for additional support in the future by: • Supporting disabled residents to remain living independently in their own homes • Reduce the number of home accidents • Reduce the number of avoidable hospital admissions and readmissions
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods Sandwell needs new areas of quality housing in places where people want to live and bring up their families and can easily get to jobs across the region by public transport. Residents of all tenure including Council tenants are supported to remain independent and safe in their own home.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p>
	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell</p>



4 Background:

- 4.1 The current Housing Assistance Policy was formed in June 2012 and can be accessed here:
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/33125/smbc_policy_for_assistance_june_2012
- 4.2 The revised policy proposes a fresh approach that creates a home environment enabling disabled people to live a full life. It will reinforce a person-centred approach and a focus on prevention.
Appendix A is a draft of the proposed Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
Appendix B is a draft of the proposed Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing.
- 4.3 Since 2003 the Council has the discretion to develop and maintain its own housing financial assistance policy in compliance with the Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. Every Housing Authority in England must publish and maintain a policy to allow them to provide assistance.
- 4.4 Government funding for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) changed significantly in 2015/16 when it became part of the Better Care Fund (BCF), a single pooled budget to support health and social care services to work more closely in local areas. The aim of the fund is to provide more joined-up and customer focused services to reduce hospital and care admissions and enable people to return home more quickly. There is now an opportunity to better align the Council's policy with the objectives of the BCF.
- 4.5 The home environment plays a major role in a person's health and wellbeing and Sandwell Council can contribute to the BCF's objectives by providing assistance to adapt, repair or modify the homes of its residents. The policy seeks to support a timely and streamlined service which aims to prevent, reduce or delay the need for interventions by health and social care services, and support vulnerable individuals to remain safe and well in their own homes.



4.6 Guidance from Foundations (the National Body for Home Improvement Agencies) encourages Local Authorities to adopt policies to reduce the bureaucracy around the DFG process. Foundations report 'The Disabled Facilities Grant: Before and After the Introduction of the Better Care Fund' (June 2016) stresses the need to have a fast and nimble service to match the aims of the BCF plan to have services assembled around the individual, regardless of provider and funding source.

5 Current Structure:

5.1 The Home Improvement Agency (HIA) Team helps residents through the process of applying for grants and assistance, and manages works carried out if requested.

5.2 Examples of the types major adaptations carried out are:

- Lifts (straight and curved stairlifts, through floor lifts and step lifts)
- Ceiling Track Hoists
- BOSI (Bath Out Shower In)
- Level Access Showers
- Ramps
- Extensions

5.3 In May 2021 the HIA moved directorates from Adult Social Care to Housing, and this presented an opportunity to develop a closer working relationship with the Asset Management & Maintenance (AMM) Service, particularly when discussing council housing. But also, AMM hold vast amount of experience, skills and knowledge regarding large contract management relating to buildings and manage the repairs and maintenance of council.

5.4 The HIA and AMM Teams work together, with AMM supporting contract management and co-ordination and management of building works including major adaptations. The HIA Team continue to offer housing assistance to residents living in the private sector housing, and administrating applications for assistance under the council's policy. Also providing advice and information on the extent of assistance available



5.5 Adaptations are funded through two separate funding streams; owner occupiers, private tenants and housing associations through a DFG and local authority tenants through the housing revenue account (HRA).

- The government provide funding annually to local authorities, and currently this is £4.75m
- Currently there is a reserve of £11m which has developed through the impact of covid, however a key focus of the policy is to enable further spend.

6. Proposed Revisions:

6.1 See **Appendix C** for a summary of proposed changes within the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy. Key benefits of the new policy are:

- Supporting affordable warmth
- Supporting assisted technology
- Assisting people getting home from hospital quicker
- Supporting areas where rapid delivery of essential minor adaptations is enabled
- Faster process for low cost adaptations

6.2 The Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing aims to bring greater parity between the way housing adaptations are managed through the housing revenue account (HRA) and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) regime applied to other social housing and the private sector. The key features of this policy include:

- A focus on supporting people to consider how their housing needs can be met in the long term.
- Financial assistance to support people with the costs of relocating where needed.
- Support to meet older people's overall well-being including safety in the home, access to welfare benefits, social inclusion and referrals to sensory services and other healthcare services.
- Ensure we maximize the impact of resources and make best use of stock.



7 Consultation:

- 7.1 Engagement sessions and workshops have taken place with staff groups, which includes Adult Social Care and Housing Management, including officers who work across the adaptations pathway. The feedback received has helped shape the changes to the policy.
- 7.2 Foundations have been engaged as a critical friend throughout the process and assisted with shaping the policy and sharing good practice.
- 7.3 Initial targeted consultation has taken place with the voluntary sector and their service users, particularly those that provide a service to people with disabilities and or mobility issues. In addition, the bottom 4 of the below are also part of Adult Social Care's Community Offer programme. The organisations engaged to date are as follows:
- Agewell
 - Ideal for All
 - Murray Hall
 - Kaleidoscope Plus
 - Communities in Sync
 - St Albans
- 7.4 Discussions took place with the above partners during December 2022, and then further discussions took place with residents/service users during January 2023. Initial feedback indicates that residents agree with what is being proposed and supportive of changes to policy. It has been agreed that further promotion and raising awareness needs to be undertaken and is an action that will be undertaken upon implementation of the policies.
- 7.5 In addition, SCVO (Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations) and SCIPS (Sandwell Community Information Partnership) have been approached as infrastructure organisations and have been part of the consultation process.
- 7.6 Also consultation has taken place with relevant service areas, to ensure joined up working but also to check any legal aspects of the policy. Hence Legal have been engaged.



7.7 Current draft of the policies are due to be on SMBC website and will be inviting further feedback. In addition, we will promote and share the link wider internally and externally to encourage feedback as well as raising awareness. Once posted online, it will remain there for 6 weeks.

8 Next Steps:

8.1 The policies will be discussed at Leadership in April 2023.

8.2 A report will go to Cabinet in June 2023.

8.3 Following cabinet, if approved the policy will be adopted and implemented and further promoted.

8.4 To support the implementation and changes within the teams, staff will continue to be supported regarding learning and development

9 Alternative Options


9.1 The policy could remain unchanged and Sandwell Council would continue to deliver adaptations in the same way. The introduction of the Better Care Fund in April 2014 and the Care Act in April 2015 is leading to the creation of new integrated services centred on the home. This could potentially make grant delivery more effective, efficient and customer-focussed. There is a need to balance the preventative role of the DFG in keeping people living safely and independently with the need for the grant to be used in more flexible and responsive ways to help reduce pressures on health and social care and improve quality of life.



10 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Financial, staffing, land/building implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds to support these services and works are delivered from the HRA and DFG allocated to the Council. • The HRA is an allocation of funds to the Council to fund the management, maintenance and major improvements of council housing. The HRA funds the provision of Major Adaptation / Improved Works and Bath Out Shower In (BOSI)/ Level Access Shower (LAS) works to Council owned properties. • To date council has spent in the region of £4.5M from HRA to fund these services and works. • The DFG is an allocation to the Council to fund the provision of adaptations to disabled resident's homes that are privately-owned and non-council rented housing. • To date DFG spend has been in the region of £3.5M. • The Council plans to spend £450,000 from the DFG to fund handy person/minor adaptations contract and £1,800,000 to fund the major adaptation contract.
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is required by the Housing Grants and Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to approve a valid application for Disabled Facilities Grant and to pay the grant. The Council operates an agency service to facilitate the grant aided works and the administration of the grant. • The Council is under a duty under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and the Children Act 1989 (in respect of children) and the Care Act 2014 (in respect of adults who may be in need of care and support) to provide support where it has assessed that such support is needed, this includes practical



	assistance in the home and adaptations to the home
Risk:	<p>Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.
Equality:	<p>Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When deciding as to changes in service provision the local authority must comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and in particular section 149 (the public-sector equality duty). The protected characteristics to which the duty applies includes age as well as disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief and sex. • An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. It concluded that the policies would not adversely affect equality on the basis of any of the protected characteristics. Any unforeseen adverse impacts will be identified through monitoring processes and statistical/other data analysis. • Increased efficiency in service delivery will provide a far more effective service to all vulnerable households and improve quality of life.
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The investment of housing adaptations and improvements significantly improves the quality of life of disabled people by preventing avoidable accidents such as falls that may result in potential hospital admissions and the prevention of social care and support that may result in potential residential placement. The investment also has the added value of improving the quality of life for carers and other family members.
Social Value	<p>Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)</p> 

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are no specific social value implications arising from this report |
|--|--|

11. Appendices:

Appendix A. Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Appendix B. Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing

Appendix C. summary of proposed changes within the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

12. Background Papers

The Disabled Facilities Grant: Before and After the Introduction of the Better Care Fund - Foundations, June 2016

Adult Social Care Reform White Paper December 2021 -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper>

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England (2022) -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>

Housing Associations and Home Adaptations -

<https://www.foundations.uk.com/library/housing-associations-and-home-adaptations/>



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Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2022

**The Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance)
(England and Wales) Order 2002**

Draft – March 2022

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Introduction and Vision

1. Introduction

This policy sets out how Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) will offer financial help for improving and adapting homes in the Borough, together with the conditions and eligibility criteria associated with each type of assistance. Its aim is to support residents to improve their health and wellbeing by addressing problems with unsuitable homes that do not meet their needs.

It aims to ensure that SMBC continues to provide housing support services to its most vulnerable residents. In a period of increasing pressures on resources it will offer the most cost effective and best value solutions, targeted at those with the greatest need and whom meet the eligibility criteria defined by this policy.

The policy sets out how SMBC intends to use its powers under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) to improve the quality of housing occupied by those most in need. The RRO gives SMBC the power to adopt a Housing Assistance Policy to improve living conditions in Sandwell and to provide financial and other assistance in a way that best suits local circumstances and within the financial resources available. This activity is integral to supporting and maintaining sustainable and healthy communities and supports ambitions in SMBC's Vision 2030 and our corporate plan strategic objectives.

Ensuring that homes are decent, accessible, safe and secure is not only important for the health and wellbeing of the occupants but is vital for the sustainability of communities. Many residents have the necessary resources to maintain, adapt and repair their own homes; however, some may need some assistance to do this, especially those who have disabilities or are elderly.

Decisions regarding an individual's needs will be made in accordance with the council's Guidance for the Provision of Adaptations. All other assistance types are discretionary and subject to resources being available.

The policy is designed to be fair, consistent, and transparent and operate in accordance with all relevant legislation and statutory guidance.

This policy and its provisions apply to any residents living in owner-occupied homes, housing association and private rented tenants (referred to as tenants in this policy). Assistance for tenants of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is defined within a separate policy.

2. Statutory Context

- 2.1 Council powers to provide financial assistance for home repairs and adaptations are Governed by:
- 2.2 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 – the remaining relevant parts of this Act provide the basis for the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), which are financial grants to help with the cost of adapting a property to meet the needs of a disabled occupant.
- 2.3 It is mandatory for assistance to be provided to those that are eligible.
- 2.4 Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) – provides local authorities with the discretion to provide assistance for the purpose of improving living conditions so homes are safe to live in. This includes the use of DFG funding to support strategic priorities which integrate health, wellbeing, and housing, for the benefit of local people.
- 2.5 To use the powers provided in the RRO the Council must adopt a policy for the provision of the assistance. The Policy complies with that requirement.
- 2.6 The award of any financial assistance under the Policy through the powers provided by the RRO are subject to the availability of funding, with financial assistance provided at the discretion of the Council. Schemes may be withdrawn or amended at any time and without notice.
- 2.7 Housing Act 2004 - The Housing Act 2004 sets out that a Council shall take action where it finds serious hazards to remove or reduce the risk of harm as identified by the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System.
- 2.8 Armed Forces Act 2006, the Armed Forces Covenant Duty- Due regard will be made when supporting Armed Forces personnel or their families living in their own accommodation, and veterans.
- 2.9 It is the Council's expectation that homeowners will maintain their own property so that it remains safe, but accepts that some homeowners, particularly older people and the most vulnerable, may not have the necessary resources to do so. In certain circumstances the Council will offer advice and/or assist homeowners to do so.
- 2.10 Better Care Fund – The Better Care Fund Planning Requirements sets out the detailed requirements to local areas on developing and implementing Better Care Fund plans. It encourages the use of DFG funding in addition to the provision of the mandatory DFG, to support assistance that improves integration of housing, social care and health services, with the aims of achieving a preventative approach to care, reducing hospital admissions, improving hospital discharge and reducing inequalities. This should have the effect of improving the health and wellbeing of assisted householders and achieving savings overall.

- 2.11 These objectives have been translated into the local Sandwell Better Care Fund Narrative Plan, which recognises the role that housing plays in people's health and wellbeing, and the contribution that can be made by helping people to maintain and adapt their homes, in reducing hospital discharge times, preventing admission/re-admission (particularly from falls), and helping to reduce/delay expensive care packages.

3. Capital Resources

- 3.1 The DFG is a capital grant paid from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to local authorities in England to adapt older and disabled people's homes to help them to live independently and safely. Adaptations can include ramps, stair lifts and suitable heating systems. The DFG, which has run for more than 30 years, became part of the Better Care Fund (BCF) in April 2015.
- 3.2 Therefore, the DFG is one of the funding streams within the Better Care Fund (BCF), which is a programme spanning both the NHS and local government which seeks to join-up health and care services, so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.
- 3.3 The requirements regarding delivery of the Better Care Fund (BCF) are set out in the BCF Framework. As the DFG forms part of the funding within the BCF arrangement, it must be spent in accordance with the locally agreed BCF plan.
- 3.4 The following capital financial resources are available to apply and deliver through this policy:
- Capital grants from central government distributed through the Better Care Fund (BCF) or otherwise.
 - Where capital monies are provided through the BCF they will be allocated for spending in line with decisions regarding capital expenditure agreed with the Health and Wellbeing Board.
 - Local capital from the Council which may be provided for any specified purpose.
 - Monies from national schemes such as energy company obligations.
 - Money provided from partners or other public-sector organisations to address specified problems.
 - Money obtained from charitable or other sources on behalf of customers.
- 3.5 Local Housing Authorities are obliged first and foremost to deliver mandatory DFGs either via the 1996 Act route or an equally effective parallel pathway. Alternative discretionary assistance should not normally be promoted at the expense of delays to the statutory grant.

4. Monitoring and Review

- 4.1 The contents of the policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure the assistance provided remains relevant and keeps abreast of any national legislative changes or best practice.

4.2 A full review of the policy should be undertaken periodically.

5. Corporate Strategic Outcomes

5.1 Our Corporate Plan details how we will create a fairer Sandwell through our strategic outcomes. This policy works toward achieving the following strategic outcomes:

5.2 **People live well and age well**

Supporting individuals and families to live well and age well independently in their own homes. Assistance detailed in this policy work towards making sure that people don't stay in hospital for longer than they need to. We aim to enable people to return home quickly and help to reduce demand on residential care placements.

5.3 **Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods**

We will aim to keep people independent in their own homes as long as possible which includes incorporating lifetime homes adaptable standards in to as many new homes as possible.

6. SMBC 2030 Vision

6.1 **Ambition 2 - Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.**

The Housing Directorate supports the development of strong supportive communities that enable people to live as independently and safely as possible.

People living in Sandwell have less healthy lifestyles than the national average. They are living longer but are often in poor health as they get older – we want people to live well for longer. Better quality housing and suitable housing will help improve health and wellbeing and have a positive impact on the quality of local neighbourhoods.

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

Sandwell needs new areas of quality housing in places where people want to live and bring up their families and can easily get to jobs across the region by public transport.

The Housing Directorate is working to deliver new homes that meet a full range of housing needs to ensure everyone has a warm, safe, and secure home in an attractive environment, which is vital for improving living standards.

7. Local Context

7.1 Sandwell is a deprived area and according to the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation was the 12th most deprived local authority out of 317. On most measures Sandwell is the most deprived

borough in the Black Country. These measures include, income, employment, health deprivation and disability and living environment. Sandwell's deprivation is spread across the borough rather than being concentrated in certain hotspots.

- 7.2 There is significant research that evidences the benefits of housing interventions, including major and minor adaptations to older and disabled people to help them remain living safely and independently at home. This policy will support the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy through clear and measurable actions.
- 7.3 Current records show that Sandwell has 130,246 households. 54.2% of households (70,635) own their homes, 18.6% rent privately.
- 7.4 Local prevalent issues include:
- High rates of pre-1919 construction
 - High rates of fuel poverty – 21% of Households are in fuel poverty
 - High rates of disabilities
 - High rates of disrepair
- 7.5 The 2021 census shows that 20% of residents are disabled under the equality act definition (compared to 17.8% nationally) and 9% of residents stated that disability seriously impact their quality of life.
- 7.6 The 2022 Sandwell Housing Needs Assessment identifies that the population growth among adults with disabilities is projected to grow significantly over the next two decades. Sandwell will see increasing numbers of physically disabled adults, adults with learning difficulties, autistic people and people with long term mental ill health who require specialist accommodation to support them to live as independently as possible. This includes general, extra care and supported housing schemes.
- 7.7 Sandwell has high levels of deprivation, including a high proportion of residents living in fuel poverty, which are likely to include residents who would qualify for assistance under the policy.

8. Policy Priorities

- 8.1 In addition to mandatory DFGs, Sandwell Council has determined our local priorities to offer a range of discretionary grants to assist residents.

9. Equality, diversity and inclusion

- 9.1 Sandwell Council is committed to fulfilling its roles as an employer, service provider, purchaser of goods and services and community leader without discrimination. We will apply this policy fairly and give equality of opportunity and experience regardless of age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, transgender status/gender reassignment, race and religion/belief. All members, employees and agents of the Council must seek to eliminate discrimination and promote equality and good relations between all groups. The Council's equality information can be found on the council's website at the following location
https://intranet.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/258/equality_policy
- 9.2 We want to improve the lives and well-being of everyone in the Borough. This policy is particularly relevant for anyone who has a disability or long -term condition. Our aim is to ensure that people have a safe and suitable home and immediate surrounding areas so that they can live independently in their current home for as long as is possible.
- 9.3 Sandwell Council and contractors will actively support applicants and treat them fairly throughout the customer journey. Examples of practical help include removing barriers for those with alternative communication needs and support with understanding technical issues and using equipment in a safe manner. The Council will record and monitor data to gain insight on the impact of this policy on diverse customers and help improve operational processes.

10. Principles of Assistance

- 10.1 The Council recognises that the primary responsibility for repairing and maintaining a property rests with the owner. However, the Council has certain statutory responsibilities to fulfil and must also take steps to protect and assist vulnerable members of the community whilst providing advice to all residents to help them maintain their own homes and utilise government funding where appropriate.
- 10.2 The Council provides support to older and disabled individuals, and their carers, to help them to remain living independently, confidently, safely and with dignity in their own homes. Housing assistance can help to reduce the impact of a disabling environment and therefore maximise independence. It can also help to prevent or delay the need for care and support, both of which are central themes of the Care Act 2014.
- 10.3 In addition, housing assistance provides support to carers in their caring role and underpins a wide range of customer and carer outcomes including improved safety, greater independence, personal resilience, and well-being.

11. How Assistance is Delivered

11.1 Option 1 Managed Application Process

The Council will fully manage the application on behalf of the applicant. The Council will handle everything on behalf of the applicant through an agreement between the applicant and the service. This is the easiest and least stressful option, particularly for more extensive adaptations, as the service will organise and manage both the funding application and the work.

The Council will:

- Where applicable, assess the applicant's financial circumstances by a statutory **means test** which will identify any contribution to be paid towards the cost of the works.
- Arrange for a technical officer to visit to discuss how the adaptations can be provided in the home and what building works or alterations are required to provide them.
- Draw up a schedule of works and plans (and planning permission or building regulations approval if required).
- Assist in the completion of the formal DFG application forms.
- Supervise the contractor on site on behalf of the applicant.
- Deal with any unforeseen works and interim payments.
- Arrange final payment to the contractor and collect any certificates and guarantees from them and pass them on the applicant.

11.2 Option 2 – Customer contractor Process

This option is where an applicant may wish to use the services of the Council to prepare their application for DFG, including the preparation of drawings but wishes to use their own choice of contractor to carry out the works.

A comprehensive information pack will be provided to any applicants who wish to pursue this option including the role of the Aids and Adaptations Team and the responsibilities regarding the works which will transfer to the applicant (this option is in development).

11.3 Option 3 – Customer Managed Process

This option is where an applicant may wish to complete all elements of the application, supporting information and building management themselves. An applicant can use their own architect or draftsman and contractors to plan, develop or build a preferred scheme.

A comprehensive information pack will be provided to any applicants who wish to pursue their own application which outlines the information required to make a DFG application and the requirements to receive DFG funding (this option is in development).

12. Fees and Ancillary Charges

- 12.1 The Council will consider reasonable fees for financial assistance. The following fees will be eligible for financial assistance if they have been properly incurred in making an application or

seeking approval for the proposed works, or to ensure the satisfactory completion of works assisted under this policy;

- Confirmation, if sought by the Council, that the applicant has a relevant owner interest.
- Relevant legal fees.
- Technical and structural surveys.
- Design and preparation of plans and drawings.
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works.
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of related documents), planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent (and similar).
- Obtaining of estimates.
- Consideration of tenders.
- Supervision of the relevant works.
- Disconnection and reconnection of utilities where necessitated by relevant works.
- Payment of contractors.
- In a case where the application is for adaptations support, the reasonable services, and charges of a (private) occupational therapist in relation to the relevant works.

13. Complaints and Appeals

- 13.1 Complaints about the handling of an enquiry, application or delivery of any service will be dealt with through the Council's complaints process. The Council's complaints policy can be found on the council's website at the following location
<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/33189/customer-feedback-guidance>
- 13.2 Appeals about the refusal of any type of assistance, disputes regarding eligible works, levels of assistance provided or demands to repay a grant will be dealt with by the Director of Housing or to whom the Director of housing delegates the responsibility. The Director of Housing's decision will be final.

14. Summary of Assistance Available

Assistance	Funding Max	Financial Eligibility	Objective
Advice and Information	N/A	<p>Non-means tested.</p> <p>Available to all Sandwell residents. Advice and information will generally be available to all homeowners.</p>	Available for elderly and disabled residents about available assistance to help them live independently at home for longer.
Handyperson Service	Maximum value of £100 plus up to 3 hours labour	<p>Non-means tested</p> <p>The Handyperson Service is available to homeowners aged 60 plus and/or in receipt of a disability related benefit (Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independent Payment or Attendance Allowance) who live in Sandwell. It is also available to private tenants who meet the eligibility criteria but only for jobs which are not the responsibility of their landlord.</p> <p>All residents are eligible for a handyperson practical service to support discharge from hospital.</p>	Covers a wide range of low-cost jobs that can have a positive impact on the quality of life of vulnerable people.
Hospital to Home Assistance	Maximum value of £6,000	<p>Non-means tested.</p> <p>All Sandwell residents – subject to a referral from Adult Social Care or by a trusted assessor.</p> <p>Hospital to Home Assistance is available to Sandwell residents who are in hospital at the time of referral and waiting to be discharged or have recently been discharged to somewhere other than their own home. An assessment and referral from Adult Social Care referral is required.</p>	To assist with hospital discharge enabling people to return home quickly and to help reduce demand to residential care placements.
Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	Statutory maximum value of £30,000	<p>Means tested- the relevant person is means tested.</p> <p>Adaptation is the most satisfactory course of action subject to a 'reasonable and practicable' assessment.</p> <p>The applicant or person they are applying for must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own the property • Intend to live in the property for a period of 5 years. <p>Available to:</p>	To meet the council's statutory obligation to provide adaptations and/or technology to enable residents to live independently at home.

Assistance	Funding Max	Financial Eligibility	Objective
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled homeowners • Disabled tenants or landlords with disabled tenants (private, housing association). • Disabled people living at home with their family, and • Parents or guardians of a disabled child who are homeowners or tenants. <p>Landlords with a disabled tenant can also apply for a grant.</p> <p>The council must be satisfied the work is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs • Reasonable and practicable – depending on the age and condition of the property. <p>Further information regarding qualifying works can be found in Sandwell Council's Guidance for the Provision of Equipment and Adaptations.</p> <p>Availability is subject to a financial test of resources unless the adaptations are for a disabled child.</p>	
Disabled Facilities Grant- Top Up	<p>Maximum value of £60,000</p> <p><i>*In exceptional circumstances, the council may, at its discretion and subject to available funding, decide to approve top-up assistance in excess of £60,000</i></p>	<p>See Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) above.</p> <p>Applicants must be eligible for a DFG to be considered for a DFG Top-Up. The financial assessment for any DFG top-up will only consider the financial circumstances of the disabled person.</p> <p>See Top Up Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) above.</p> <p>Discretionary awards over mandatory amount will be considered on a case by case basis and signed off by the Director of Housing.</p>	<p>To provide top-up funding to meet the reasonable cost of non-standard equipment and adaptations to assist a disabled person to live independently in their own home.</p> <p>To provide additional assistance when the statutory maximum (including fees and charges) has been exceeded.</p>
Minor Adaptations	Maximum value of £1,500	<p>Non-means tested.</p> <p>All Sandwell residents with an assessed need. Where adaptation is the most satisfactory course of action subject to a 'reasonable and practicable' assessment.</p>	Low level adaptations to increase independence, improve quality of life and reduce falls risks and hospital admission.

Assistance	Funding Max	Financial Eligibility	Objective
Relocation Grant	<p>Maximum value of £10,000 for owner occupiers</p> <p>Maximum value of £2,000 for private tenants</p>	<p>Non-means tested– disabled person must be eligible for assistance under a DFG.</p> <p>Available to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner occupiers and private rented tenants (not housing association tenants) where it is considered neither reasonable or practicable to proceed with the adaptations due to the character, layout, or condition of their home. • The applicant must meet the qualifying criteria for the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant. • Any other person with an interest in the property either as owner or lessee that the Director of Housing considers it appropriate to offer assistance to. <p>The applicant must be satisfied that the property being purchased can be reasonably adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person.</p>	<p>To help with the cost of moving home if a property or is not suitable for adaptation.</p>
Hazard Removal Grant	<p>Maximum value of £10,000</p>	<p>Non-means tested.</p> <p>Grants will be awarded per hazard on a discretionary case by case basis.</p> <p>Available to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner occupiers in receipt of state pension and council tax reduction due to low income (not single occupier discount) or income-based employment and support allowance. 	<p>To remove urgent Category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Act 2004.</p>
External Improvement Schemes	<p>Up to 90% of the eligible expense of the scheme</p> <p><i>*rising to 100% in exceptional circumstances</i></p> <p>The maximum total eligible expense limit per property for each scheme will be determined prior to the scheme commencing.</p>	<p>Means tested.</p> <p>Offered to all owners of buildings or land (including wholly or part commercial properties if appropriate) within targeted streets and blocks in Sandwell.</p>	<p>To carry out repairs and improvements to the external fabric of a dwelling to make it weather-tight and significantly improve the visual amenity of an area – for properties in targeted streets or blocks of dwellings.</p>

Assistance	Funding Max	Financial Eligibility	Objective
Empty Property Loan	Maximum value of £20,000 for owner occupiers	Means tested. Owners of long-term empty properties where there are works required to bring the property back into occupied use again.	To help with the cost of renovating a long-term empty home. For more information please refer to the Empty Homes Strategy.
Sustainable Warmth Grants	£10,000* *A limited number of households may be entitled to a higher level of assistance if the property is not heated by gas and the house is very thermally inefficient.	Householder may be eligible if all the following apply: 1) The household's annual income (before tax) is under £31,000. 2) The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of the property is E, F or G. 3) You own and occupy your home or rent your property from a private landlord.	Householder in Sandwell who live in energy inefficient properties may be able to benefit from a grant to cover the cost of a range of energy efficiency improvements to their home

15. Details of Advice and Information

15.1 SMBC will provide advice and information to all Sandwell residents to tell them about assistance available to help them live independently at home for longer. Contact details for all services will be provided within promotional material and via the website.

15.2 Scope of Assistance

The council will seek to provide advice and information on subjects including:

- Grants and assistance for major adaptations.
- Relocation Assistance (where adaptations are not suitable).
- Grant and assistance to tackle defective housing.
- Signposting to other housing-related services.
- Loans for Empty Properties.

15.3 Processes to deliver the assistance

Advice and Information is available via the council's webpage, email, or telephone.

15.4 Preliminary fees or charges

None.

15.5 Conditions attached to the provision of assistance

None.

16. Details of Handyperson Service

The Handyperson Service covers a wide range of low-cost jobs that can have a positive impact on the quality of life of vulnerable people.

16.1 Scope of Assistance

Handyperson service includes but is not limited to:

- Refix loose floor coverings.
- Repairs to external door locks.
- Replace portable appliance fuses.
- Move small items of furniture.
- Install security light.

16.2 Processes to deliver the assistance

An Occupational Therapist or other authorised person will make a referral to the council's service providers on behalf of the person.

16.3 Preliminary fees or charges

Jobs may or may not require a contribution for the cost of labour and/or materials.

16.4 Conditions attached to the provision of assistance

None.

17. Details of Hospital to Home Assistance

17.1 Hospital to Home assistance is available to anyone living in Sandwell to assist with hospital discharge enabling them to return home quickly and to help reduce demand for residential care placements.

17.2 Scope of Assistance

Prescribed interventions to make properties clean and safe to ensure timely hospital discharge, such as:

- Deep cleaning.
- Property clearance.
- Urgent home repairs/falls prevention measures.
- Temporary heating.
- Urgent adaptations to prevent hospital readmission.

17.3 Processes to deliver the assistance

A referral will be made by Adults Social Care, or a trusted assessor, to the council's service providers on behalf of the disabled person.

17.4 Preliminary fees or charges

The following fees or charges may qualify for grant assistance:

- Confirmation, if sought by the Council, that the applicant has a relevant owner interest.
- Relevant legal fees.
- Technical and structural surveys.

- Design and preparation of plans and drawings.
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works.
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of related documents), planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent (and similar).
- Obtaining of estimates.
- Consideration of tenders.
- Supervision of the relevant works.
- Disconnection and reconnection of utilities where necessitated by relevant works.
- Payment of contractors.

17.5 **Conditions attached to the provision of assistance**

None.

18. Details of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

18.1 The health and well-being of disabled residents is often compromised due to their homes not meeting their specific needs and this can impact on their ability to live with dignity within their homes.

18.2 The council has a statutory obligation to administer mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to provide adaptations to enable disabled resident to live independently at home.

18.3 **Scope of Assistance**

The Council will award mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) according to the governing legislation principally the 1996 Act and subordinate Regulations and Orders as amended - and guidance issued by central Government. This details amongst other matters the types of work that are to be funded, the maximum grant payable (currently £30,000), and the test of financial resources where applicable.

18.4 **Occupation Requirements**

Where an owner occupier has given a signed undertaking to occupy a property as their principal residence after completion of the works, and if they cease to do so during that time, they will repay on demand to the Council the total amount of Assistance paid out.

Where a landlord (or owner) has given a signed undertaking that the property will be available for letting for a period specified after completion of the assisted works and ceases to make the relevant property available for letting during the specified period. Then the landlord will repay on demand to the Council the total amount of Assistance paid out.

Where the Council has the right to demand repayment, but extenuating circumstances exist, the Council may determine to waive the right to repayment or to demand a sum less than the full amount of Assistance paid out.

As a part of the application process, the Council will require certificates relating to property ownership and future occupation and will request permission from the owner. The Council would reasonably want to ensure the tenant has the right to carry out the works and that the landlord would not object or attempt to reinstate the property and evict the client.

18.5 Qualifying Works

Those works eligible for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant is set out in section 23(1) of the 1996 Act, as amended. These are:

- 1) Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to and from the dwelling, qualifying houseboat, or qualifying park home, (now including the garden) or
- 2) making the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or qualifying park home safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with them;
- 3) facilitating access by the disabled occupant to a room used or usable as the principal family room;
- 4) facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room used or usable for sleeping;
- 5) facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a lavatory, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- 6) facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a bath or shower (or both), or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- 7) facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a wash hand basin, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- 8) facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant;
- 9) improving any heating system in the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or qualifying park home to meet the needs of the disabled occupant or, if there is no existing heating system or any such system is unsuitable for use by the disabled occupant, providing a heating system suitable to meet their needs;
- 10) facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of a source of power, light or heat by altering the position of one or more means of access to or control of that source or by providing additional means of control;
- 11) facilitating access and movement by the disabled occupant around the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or qualifying park home in order to enable them to care for a person who is normally resident and is in need of such care;
- 12) facilitating access to and from a garden by a disabled occupant; or making access to a garden safe for a disabled occupant.

18.6 Processes to deliver the assistance

An Occupational Therapist or other authorised person will make a referral to the council's service providers on behalf of the disabled person.

A mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant application will only be made if the works are both 'necessary and appropriate' and 'reasonably practicable'. Where an applicant prefers a different scheme of works to that approved by the Council, the Council may offer to 'offset' the value of the original scheme towards those greater works with appropriate safeguards. This is at the discretion of the Council.

Works which have been started prior to the approval of an application will not be eligible for financial assistance.

Unexpected works which arise during the carrying out of eligible works will be considered for assistance if the works could not have been reasonably foreseen and if they are vital to the completion of a safe and effective adaptation.

Unforeseen works carried out without prior approval of the Council will not be eligible for assistance. Where unforeseen works are necessary these will be added to the grant up to the specified maximum for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant. Costs above the mandatory grant maximum may be supported as discretionary assistance in accordance with this policy. Care must be taken when agreeing to schemes of works on third-party property such as tenanted accommodation, that the property owner is fully engaged with the decision process. This is also particularly important where an architect or similar is acting on the customer's behalf, and where issues such as planning permission, building control and other regulation are involved.

18.7 Preliminary fees or charges

The mandatory DFG regime sets out the specific fees and charges for grant assistance. The following fees will be eligible for financial assistance if they have been properly incurred in making an application or seeking approval for the proposed works, or to ensure the satisfactory completion of works assisted under this policy;

- Confirmation, if sought by the Council, that the applicant has a relevant owner interest.
- Relevant legal fees.
- Technical and structural surveys.
- Design and preparation of plans and drawings.
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works.
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of related documents), planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent (and similar).

- Obtaining of estimates.
- Consideration of tenders.
- Supervision of the relevant works.
- Disconnection and reconnection of utilities where necessitated by relevant works.
- Payment of contractors.

18.8 Conditions attached to the provision of assistance

A land charge will be registered when the local authority approves an application for a disabled facilities grant from an owner, and the grant is for a sum exceeding £5,000. The charge will be for the amount of the grant that exceeds £5,000 but cannot be for more than £10,000 in total (so, for example, if the grant were for £8,000 the charge would be for £3,000; if the grant were for £15,000 the charge would be for £10,000; if the grant were for £25,000 the charge would still be for £10,000).

The charge will only be recovered if the property is disposed of within 10 years of the “certified date”, that is, the date certified by us as the date on which the works were completed to our satisfaction.

Any specialist equipment provided will be re-claimed.

The council may require grant applicants to use the services of a qualified agent (e.g. the Home Improvement Team) or a member of the RICS, RIBA or equivalent.

The council may, at its discretion, decide not to reclaim the amount of grant or to reclaim a lesser amount.

The council will not place local land charges in the following circumstances:

- Where the application is being made for a child in a long-term foster placement.
- Where the grant is solely to provide equipment including stairlifts, vertical lifts, step lifts, ceiling track hoists or a combination of the above equipment.

18.9 Test of Resources and Sandwell Discount

All applications for Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant will be subject to a means test in accordance with the regulations made under the 1996 Act, (including any local amendments within this policy). The maximum mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant award at the time of policy publication is £30,000 minus any contribution required by a ‘means test’ (test of financial resources. If the maximum grant limit is changed by statute, then the maximum available Disabled Facilities Grant award by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council will reflect this. When the financial means test determines that a client has a financial contribution to make and that contribution is £15,000 or less, the requirement to make that contribution may be waived. This

ensures that vulnerable clients are not deterred from having essential adaptations due to the requirement to make a financial contribution.

The Director of Housing can alter or withdraw this means test discount at any time.

Where successive applications are awarded, the applicants' assessed contribution to the first grant award will be considered if within the period of the contribution originally calculated (10 years if owner, 5 years if tenant).

NOTE: where an applicant is in receipt of a recognised, qualifying, means tested benefit they will not be further means tested and they will have no calculated contribution to make. Where works are for the benefit of a child or young person up until their 19th birthday or younger at the date of application – they too will be exempt from a means test.

18.10 Insert section - How do you prioritise a process application?

18.11 Insert section - What are the conditions relating to Contractors, Standard of Works and Invoices?

18.12 **Future occupation of the dwelling**

It is a condition of the grant that throughout the grant condition period (that is 5 years from the date of certification) the dwelling is occupied in accordance with the intention stated in the certificate of owner occupation or availability for letting or intended tenancy.

18.13 **Applicant dies**

Where the applicant or disabled person for whom the adaptation is required dies prior to grant application then no funding will be available via the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant for any costs incurred.

Where the applicant or disabled person dies after the grant has been awarded, then reasonable fees will be paid from the grant where those have been incurred and can be evidenced. If works have been started then they will be completed to a reasonable point which makes the property safe and meets minimum standards, excluding the provision of any specialist equipment. Each case would be decided individually based on circumstances and the stage of works completed, but it would be expected that all electrical and plumbing installation works would be completed and able to be used, although decoration and finishes etc. may not be completed.

18.14 **Customer Own Schemes (COS)**

Customers who meet the Disabled Facilities Grant eligibility and are therefore entitled to a grant

may wish to 'top-up' the Disabled Facilities Grant funding. The Disabled Facilities Grant recommendation by the Occupational Therapist will be for the most cost-effective solution which meets all identified needs and will look to adapt an existing property. Where a customer wishes to pursue a different scheme, they will be responsible for the difference in costs between the Disabled Facilities Grant 'Mandatory Scheme' and the final cost of the works, including unforeseen costs.

19 Details of Disabled Facilities – Top Up Grant

A grant may be offered to provide top up funding to meet the reasonable cost of non-standard equipment/technology and adaptations or as additional assistance when the maximum statutory grant limit (including fees and charges) has been exceeded.

19.1 Scope of Assistance

To carry out works recommended by an Occupational Therapist as part of a Disabled Facilities Grant in excess of the maximum amount payable.

Top-up funding is available to homeowners only and is subject to the availability of council funding.

19.2 Processes to deliver the assistance

An Occupational Therapist or other authorised person will make a referral to the council's service providers on behalf of the disabled person.

19.3 Amount of Assistance- Exceptional Circumstances

A grant of up to £60,000 is available to cover the cost of works identified by an Occupational Therapist. In exceptional circumstances, the council may, at its discretion and subject to available funding, decide to approve top-up assistance in excess of £60,000.

Discretionary awards over £60,000 will be considered on a case by case basis and signed off by the Director of Housing.

19.4 Preliminary fees or charges

The following fees or charges may qualify for a top-up grant:

- As per the Disabled Facilities Grant.

19.5 Conditions attached to the provision of assistance

Does the applicant have to be a permanent resident of SMBC?

If the applicant disposes of the property do, they need to inform the council?

A land charge will be registered when the local authority approves an application for a disabled facilities top up grant from an owner, and the grant is for a sum exceeding £5,000. The charge will be for the amount of the grant that exceeds £5,000 but cannot be for more than £10,000 in total (so, for example, if the grant were for £8,000 the charge would be for £3,000; if the grant were for £15,000 the charge would be for £10,000; if the grant were for £25,000 the charge would still be for £10,000).

The charge will only be recovered if the property is disposed of within 10 years of the “certified date”, that is, the date certified by us as the date on which the works were completed to our satisfaction.

The council may require grant applicants to use the services of a suitably qualified agent (Sandwell’s Home Improvement Agency or a member of RICS, RIBA or equivalent).

The council may, at its discretion, decide not to reclaim the amount of grant or to reclaim a lesser amount.

20 Details of Minor Adaptations

Low level adaptations to increase independence, improve quality of life and reduce falls risks and hospital admission.

20.1 Scope of Assistance

Types of work include:

- Grab rails
- Handrails
- Ramps
- Door widening (replace with stair rail)
- Over bath showers (replace with half step)
- Assistive technology.

20.2 Processes to deliver the assistance

An Occupational Therapist or other authorised person will make a referral to the council’s service providers on behalf of the disabled person.

20.3 Preliminary fees or charges

None.

20.4 **Conditions attached to the provision of assistance**

None.

21 **Details of Relocation Grant**

A relocation grant can be made available to help with the cost of moving home if a property is not suitable for adaptation.

21.1 **Scope of Assistance**

Property is unsuitable for adaptation, or it is more cost effective to move rather than adapt.

The type of costs covered include:

Homeowners:

- buy & sell solicitors fees (homeowners only)
- packaging and removal costs
- cost of valuation survey
- mortgage redemption fees
- Estate Agent's fees
- Stamp Duty fees.

Private Tenants:

- packaging and removal costs.

Grant application must be made prior to moving.

21.2 **Processes to deliver the assistance**

An Occupational Therapist or other authorised person will make a referral to the council on behalf of the disabled person / applicant. Assistance can only be paid retrospectively following the purchase of a property or in the case of a tenant after removal costs have been incurred.

21.3 **Preliminary fees or charges**

Any preliminary fees or charges will be defined for all individual schemes developed.

21.4 **Conditions Attached to the Provision of Assistance**

These conditions apply to homeowners only and not to private tenants.

- the property must be occupied by the applicant as their main residence, for a period of five years
- the purchased property must have no category 1 hazards
- no further grant assistance will be given for 15 years from the completion date unless there is a change in needs making relocation necessary (except DFG)
- the assistance is repayable in full if the property is disposed of within 10 years
- the assistance amount is secured as a local land charge against the property.
- Applications must be supported by an OT/suitable appropriate assessor who can confirm that the new property will meet the needs of the disabled person or be suitable for adaptation at a reasonable cost. In some cases, depending on the distance of the potential property an independent OT may be commissioned to do this assessment.

22 Details of Hazard Removal Grant

A Hazard Removal Grant can be provided to remove Category 1 hazards identified in the property by the council.

22.1 Scope of Assistance

To carry out works to remove hazards identified in a property under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System in accordance with the council's response to the Housing Act 2004. Grants will be awarded per hazard on a discretionary case by case basis.

22.2 Processes to deliver the assistance

An authorised person will make a referral to the council's service providers on behalf of the applicant. The council will determine if there is serious disrepair to the property under the Housing Act 2004. Individual schemes will be defined to tackle specific issues.

22.3 Preliminary fees or charges

The following fees or charges may qualify for grant assistance:

- Confirmation, if sought by the Council, that the applicant has a relevant owner interest
- Relevant legal fees
- Technical and structural surveys
- Design and preparation of plans and drawings
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of

related documents), planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent (and similar)

- Obtaining of estimates
- Consideration of tenders
- Supervision of the relevant works
- Disconnection and reconnection of utilities where necessitated by relevant works
- Payment of contractors

22.4 **Conditions attached to the provision of assistance**

The council may require grant applicants to use the services of a suitably qualified agent (Sandwell's Home Improvement Agency or a member of RICS, RIBA or equivalent).

Work must be carried out within 12 months of the date of approval unless otherwise agreed by the Council.

The grant will be paid subject to the works being completed to the satisfaction of the Council and the receipt of an acceptable invoice, demand, or receipt.

The grant will be repayable if applicant does not permanently occupy the property within 6 weeks of the work being certified complete.

The grant will be repayable on disposal of the property or a breach of the relevant future occupation certificate for the relevant grant condition period – three years after the grant certification date.

If grant conditions are breached, the owner must repay on demand the relevant amount plus compound interest.

Grant conditions will be registered as a local land charge against the property.

23 Details of External Improvement Schemes

External Improvement Schemes may be made available to owners of properties in targeted streets or blocks of dwellings to carry out repairs and improvements to the external fabric of a dwelling to make it weather-tight and significantly improve the visual amenity of an area.

Further works may also be carried out both within and outside the immediate curtilage of the dwelling to improve the visual amenity of the area.

A Grant will only be provided where, in the authority's opinion, to do so represents the most satisfactory course of action.

The owner's contribution to the cost of the works will be fixed.

23.1 **Scope of Assistance**

External Improvement Assistance may be used for any of the purposes described below:

- To carry out any works to the external fabric of properties within a targeted block of dwellings to ensure the dwellings are weather-tight and the visual amenity of the area is improved
- To carry out works to the curtilage of dwellings including boundary walls, yards, pavements etc to improve the visual appearance of an area
- To carry out works immediately outside the curtilage of the dwellings to improve the visual amenity of an area
- To pay for preliminary fees or charges including the production of drawings, Structural Engineers fees, Building Regulation Fees, Planning Fees or Supervising Agents fees properly incurred in carrying out the above
- To pay for storage, removal and rehousing costs properly incurred in carrying out the above
- For any other purpose agreed by the Director of Housing (or equivalent).

23.2 **Processes to deliver the assistance**

The Council will decide which streets or blocks of dwellings it wishes to consider for External Improvement Schemes.

When the Council is in a position to offer grants, it will contact all owners in the block and invite them to make applications.

A sufficient proportion of owners must agree to participate in the scheme to make the scheme financially viable and to achieve value for money before it will be considered further.

The Council will inspect all the buildings, decide on eligible works and prepare costed schedules of work.

The Council will advise all owners of their likely contribution including a fixed figure for contingencies and obtain their consent to proceed.

The Council, in consultation with the owners will agree a single agent and contractor to carry out the works on behalf of the owners.

The agent will be responsible for submitting applications on behalf of the owner.

Applications for grant must be made on a standard form to be provided by the Council and include all information including certification of proposed future occupation required by the Council.

The Council will determine what works it is prepared to pay grant towards.

The Council will determine the amount of grant it feels it is reasonable to pay by reference to its own schedule of rates and an assessment of the costs submitted in relation to fees and disbursements.

No grant will be payable for works which have been started or completed before a grant application is determined.

Grant monies will be paid directly to contractors or agents in all but exceptional cases.

Grant will only be paid once works are completed to the satisfaction of the Council and satisfactory invoices are submitted.

Any variations in the cost of the scheme due to unforeseen works over and above the contingency will be paid for by an increase in the grant and not result in an increase in the owner's contribution.

Any contingencies remaining may be repaid to the owner or put towards the cost of additional works in accordance with the wishes of the owner.

23.3 **Amount of Assistance Available- Exceptional Circumstances**

The Council will pay a proportion of the costs determined on a scheme by scheme basis rising to 100% in exceptional circumstances.

The Director of Housing will agree the terms and conditions for each scheme including the criteria for 100% contributions.

The maximum total eligible expense limit per property for each scheme will be determined prior to the scheme commencing.

A fixed figure for fees and disbursements reasonably incurred in submitting a grant application and supervising works may be included in the grant and will be agreed prior to the scheme commencing.

The Director of Housing (or equivalent) may impose a maximum grant payable or vary the exceptions at any time.

23.4 **Preliminary Fees or Charges**

The following fees or charges may qualify for grant assistance:

- Confirmation, if sought by the Council, that the applicant has a relevant owner interest

- Relevant legal fees
- Technical and structural surveys
- Design and preparation of plans and drawings
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of related documents), planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent (and similar)
- Obtaining of estimates
- Consideration of tenders
- Supervision of the relevant works
- Disconnection and reconnection of utilities where necessitated by relevant works
- Payment of contractors

23.5 Conditions Attached to the Provision of Assistance

All grant applicants must use the services of one agent agreed by the Council.

All applicants must provide access at all reasonable times to allow for the completion of the works.

All works must be carried within 12 months of the date of approval or such further period as the Council agree.

Grant will be paid subject to the works being completed to the satisfaction of the Council and the receipt of an acceptable invoice, demand, or receipt.

Applicants must agree not to dispose of the property during the relevant grant condition period and occupy the property in accordance with the relevant Certificate of Future Occupation.

The Certificate of Future Occupation will require:

- Persons applying as owner occupiers to occupy the premise as their only or main residence for the grant condition period
- Persons applying as Landlords to make the property available for letting not to a member of their family during the grant condition period.

The grant will be repayable upon disposal of the property or a breach of the relevant future occupation certificate for the relevant grant condition period after the certified date.

Where a grant is provided to a private landlord, the person providing the Certificate of Availability for Letting must agree to take all reasonable steps to become an accredited landlord and carry out all additional works, at their own expense, to enable the property to be accredited under the

Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme both within 6 months (or other period agreed by the Council) of the Certified Date of the grant.

The relevant grant condition period will be 3 years after the certified date.

If a breach of grant conditions occurs the owner for the time being of the premise will be required to repay on demand the relevant amount plus compound interest decreasing by a third for each complete year that the conditions have been complied with.

The Council may, at its discretion, decide not to reclaim the amount of assistance or to reclaim a lesser amount.

Grant Conditions will be registered as a Legal Charge. This Legal Charge will be registered at HM Land Registry and secured against the property, the Legal Charge will rank in priority after any existing mortgages and after any secured loan provided from one of the Council's partner organisations.

The provisions of Section 45 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 will be adopted in determining whether a disposal is a relevant or exempt disposal.

The provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (Grant Repayment) General Consent 2000 will be adopted in determining the circumstances in which the Council may determine not to demand repayment.

The Director of Housing (or equivalent) may, at any time, specify additional conditions for the provision of assistance.

24 Details of Empty Property Loan

Empty property loans are to help with the cost of renovating a long-term empty home.

Empty property loans are for certain circumstances where financial difficulties are preventing property owners from being able to make their empty property safe to live in again.

Loans are limited and subject to council discretion on a case-by-case basis against the merits of each individual situation. Loans will be subject to a legally binding agreement to bring the property back into use.

Loans will be specifically aimed at properties that are in a reasonable condition but need works to bring them back into a lettable or sellable condition to ensure that they are occupied in the near future.

24.1 **Scope of Assistance**

Where the empty property contains category 1 or 2 hazards as per the Housing Health and Safety Rating System under the Housing Act 2004.

24.2 **Processes to deliver the assistance**

1. Application made for loan
2. Property inspected to assess viability
3. Financial checks carried out
4. Owner provides contractor quotes
5. Offer in principle mad
6. Paperwork signed
7. Money transferred to owner
8. Works carried out
9. Property placed on market or occupied as per terms agreed
10. Money repaid as per terms agreed.

24.3 **Preliminary Fees and Charges**

There will be a registered charge on the empty property that will be lifted when the money is repaid. The Council may seek to enforce the sale of a property to recover the charge where the terms are not met, and the money is not repaid.

24.4 **Conditions Attached to the Provision of Assistance**

- The loan will be interest free
- Owner must be a person, not a company
- Owner must be a permanent UK citizen
- Person receiving loan must owner of property
- Joint owners must all agree loan agreement and agree where money is paid
- Borrowers will be means tested to ensure they are suitable for a loan
- The loan will be paid directly to the bank account of the applicant only
- Robust proof of identity and permanent UK citizen status will be required
- Loan conditions will be registered as a legal charge. This legal charge will be registered at HM Land Registry and secured against the property, the legal charge will rank in priority after any existing mortgages and after any secured loan provided from one of the Council's partner organisations
- Works must be carried out by a professional qualified contractor with full liability insurance
- Works and timescales will be agreed before a loan is issued
- Works must progress timely and reasonably as agreed else the loan will be immediately repayable in full
- The loan will be repayable within a month of works being completed

- The loan is repaid immediately and in full at the point of a sale of the property
- The loan will be repaid in instalments if the property is let to a tenant or occupied by the owner or other persons without a sale occurring
- Should the loan not be repaid, the property may be at risk from recovery action of the debt.

25 Sustainable Warmth

25.1 Scope of Assistance

Where the property has an EPC rating of E, F or G and the household has a combined income of less than £31k.

Measures available to Sandwell residents could include:

- External wall insulation (EWI)
- Cavity insulation
- Loft insulation
- Door improvements
- Smart heating controls
- Solar panels
- Central Heating

25.2 Processes to deliver the assistance

The council will work with a suitably qualified and accredited registered provider in line with current industry standards to deliver energy efficiency works.

1. Enquiry made
2. Property survey undertaken to assess viability and proposed package of measures
3. Financial checks carried out
4. Offer in principle made
5. Paperwork signed
6. Works carried out.

Please note not all households who receive an energy survey will necessarily receive a grant

25.3 Preliminary Fees and Charges

The following fees or charges may qualify for grant assistance:

- Confirmation, if sought by the Council, that the applicant has a relevant owner interest
- Relevant legal fees
- Technical and structural surveys

- Design and preparation of plans and drawings
- Preparation of schedules of relevant works
- Assistance in completing forms.
- Applications for building regulations approval (including application fee and preparation of related documents), planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent (and similar)
- Obtaining of estimates
- Consideration of tenders
- Supervision of the relevant works
- Disconnection and reconnection of utilities where necessitated by relevant works
- Payment of contractors

25.4 **Conditions attached to the provision of assistance**

- Owner must be a person, not a company
- Owner must be a permanent UK citizen
- Must be their principal abode
- If the property is sold within 5 years of the work being carried out the cost of works could be repayable.

Appendix 1: Summary of Grant Repayment Conditions

Grant Type	Conditions
Disabled Facilities Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full amount of the grant over £5,000 up to a maximum of £10,000 may need to be repaid on sale or transfer of the adapted property within ten years of the work being completed • The grant will be registered as a local land charge against the property for any grants over the value of £5,000 • Any specialist equipment provided may be reclaimed • The pursuance of any insurance claims by the applicant to cover the cost of adaptations and reimbursement to the council where appropriate • The council may require grant applicants to use the services of a suitably qualified agent (Sandwell's Home Improvement Agency or a member of RICS, RIBA or equivalent) • The council may, at its discretion, decide not to reclaim the amount of grant or to reclaim a lesser amount. • Repayment conditions only apply to grants awarded to owner occupiers.
Disabled Facilities – Top Up Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full amount of the grant to be paid upon relevant disposal of the property for a period of 10 years following the certified date- same as above • The grant will be registered as a local land charge against the property • The council may require grant applicants to use the services of a suitably qualified agent (Sandwell's Home Improvement Agency or a member of RICS, RIBA or equivalent) • The council may, at its discretion, decide not to reclaim the amount of grant or to reclaim a lesser amount. • Repayment conditions only apply to grants awarded to owner occupiers.
Relocation Grant	<p>These conditions apply to homeowners only and not to private tenants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the property must be occupied by the applicant as their main residence, for a period of five years • the purchased property must have no category 1 hazards • no further grant assistance will be given for 15 years from the completion date unless there is a change in needs making relocation necessary (except DFG) • the assistance is repayable in full if the property is disposed of within 10 years • the assistance amount is secured as a local land charge against the property. • Maximum of one grant in a five-year period
Hazard Removal Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grant will be registered as a local land charge against the property • Full amount of the grant to be paid upon relevant disposal of the property for a period of 3 years following the certified date

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council may require grant applicants to use the services of a suitably qualified agent (Sandwell's Home Improvement Agency or a member of RICS, RIBA or equivalent)
New Homes Grant (Clearance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Homes Grants will only be paid for new homes purchased within Sandwell The Director of Housing (or equivalent) may, in exceptional circumstances, allow New Homes grant to be paid for dwellings outside of the Borough All costs for which grant aid has been agreed must be incurred within 12 months of the date of approval or such further period as the Council agree Grant will be paid subject to the works being completed to the satisfaction of the Council and the receipt of an acceptable invoice, demand or receipt The grant will be repayable if applicants fail to take up permanent occupation of the new home within 6 weeks of the certified date The grant will be repayable upon disposal of the property or a breach of the relevant future occupation certificate for the relevant grant condition period after the certified date The relevant grant condition period will be 5 years after the Certified Date If a breach of grant conditions occurs the owner for the time being of the premise will be required to repay on demand the relevant amount plus compound interest decreasing by a fifth for each complete year that the conditions have been complied with The Council may, at its discretion, decide not to reclaim the amount of assistance or to reclaim a lesser amount Grant Conditions will be registered against the new house as a Legal Charge. This Legal Charge will be registered at HM Land Registry and secured against the new home, the Legal Charge will rank in priority after any mortgage secured to assist in the purchase of the new home and after any secured loan provided from one of the Council's partner organisations The Director of Housing (or equivalent) may, at any time specify additional conditions for the provision of assistance.
External Improvement Schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All grant applicants must use the services of one agent agreed by the Council All applicants must provide access at all reasonable times to allow for the completion of the works All works must be carried within 12 months of the date of approval or such further period as the Council agree Grant will be paid subject to the works being completed to the satisfaction of the Council and the receipt of an acceptable invoice, demand or receipt Applicants must agree not to dispose of the property during the relevant grant condition period and occupy the property in accordance with the relevant Certificate of Future Occupation. <p>The Certificate of Future Occupation will require:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons applying as owner occupiers to occupy the premise as their only or main residence for the grant condition period • Persons applying as Landlords to make the property available for letting not to a member of their family during the grant condition period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grant will be repayable upon disposal of the property or a breach of the relevant future occupation certificate for the relevant grant condition period after the certified date • Where a grant is provided to a private landlord, the person providing the Certificate of Availability for Letting must agree to take all reasonable steps to become an accredited landlord and carry out all additional works, at their own expense, to enable the property to be accredited under the Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme both within 6 months (or other period agreed by the Council) of the Certified Date of the grant • The relevant grant condition period will be 3 years after the certified date • If a breach of grant conditions occurs the owner for the time being of the premise will be required to repay on demand the relevant amount plus compound interest decreasing by a third for each complete year that the conditions have been complied with • The Council may, at its discretion, decide not to reclaim the amount of assistance or to reclaim a lesser amount • Grant Conditions will be registered as a Legal Charge. This Legal Charge will be registered at HM Land Registry and secured against the property, the Legal Charge will rank in priority after any existing mortgages and after any secured loan provided from one of the Council's partner organisations • The provisions of Section 45 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 will be adopted in determining whether a disposal is a relevant or exempt disposal • The provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (Grant Repayment) General Consent 2000 will be adopted in determining the circumstances in which the Council may determine not to demand repayment. <p>The Director of Housing (or equivalent) may, at any time, specify additional conditions for the provision of assistance.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Empty Property Loan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loan will be interest free • Owner must be a person, not a company • Owner must be a permanent UK citizen • Person receiving loan must owner of property • Joint owners must all agree loan agreement and agree where money is paid • Borrowers will be means tested to ensure they are suitable for a loan • The loan will be paid directly to the bank account of the applicant only

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust proof of identity and permanent UK citizen status will be required • Loan conditions will be registered as a legal charge. This legal charge will be registered at HM Land Registry and secured against the property, the legal charge will rank in priority after any existing mortgages and after any secured loan provided from one of the Council's partner organisations • Works must be carried out by a professional qualified contractor with full liability insurance • Works and timescales will be agreed before a loan is issued • Works must progress timely and reasonably as agreed else the loan will be immediately repayable in full • The loan will be repayable within a month of works being completed • The loan is repaid immediately and in full at the point of a sale of the property • The loan will be repaid in instalments if the property is let to a tenant or occupied by the owner or other persons without a sale occurring • Should the loan not be repaid, the property may be at risk from recovery action of the debt.
<p style="text-align: center;">Sustainable Warmth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council may require grant applicants to use the services of a suitably qualified agent / surveyor • The council may require that all measures are installed by an accredited installer • Work must be carried within 12 months of the date of approval unless otherwise agreed by the Council • The grant will be paid subject to the works being completed to the satisfaction of the Council and the receipt of an acceptable invoice, demand or receipt • The grant will be repayable if applicant does not permanently occupy the property within 6 weeks of the work being certified complete • The grant will be repayable on disposal of the property or a breach of the relevant future occupation certificate for the relevant grant condition period, five years after the grant certification date • If grant conditions are breached, the owner must repay on demand the relevant amount plus compound interest. • Maximum of one grant in any five-year period <p>Grant conditions will be registered as a local land charge against the property.</p>

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SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
POLICY ON ADAPTATIONS FOR DISABLED TENANTS IN COUNCIL
HOUSING
(Effective from to be confirmed)

1. Executive Summary

A comprehensive review of the Disabled Adaptations Service has been completed and this policy will replace the previous version dated 2012. The City Council aims to bring greater parity between the way housing adaptations are managed through the housing revenue account (HRA) and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) regime applied to other social housing and the private sector. The key features of this policy include:

- A focus on supporting people to consider how their housing needs can be met in the long term
- Financial assistance to support people with the costs of relocating where needed
- Support to meet older people's overall well-being including safety in the home, access to welfare benefits, social inclusion and referrals to sensory services and other healthcare services
- Ensure we maximise the impact of resources and make best use of stock.

2. Background

- 2.1 The aim of the Adaptations Service is to enable tenants with disabilities to be provided with housing which best meets their assessed needs. The council will consider alternatives to adaptations, such as the provision of equipment or if appropriate assistance with relocation, when deciding on the most suitable option(s) to meet a person's needs. Decisions regarding an individual's needs will be made in accordance with the views of the tenant and the council's Guidance for the Provision of Equipment & Adaptations. All other assistance types are discretionary and subject to funding being available.
- 2.2 The policy will also guide Occupational Therapists (OT) and other professionals to understand what the council may or may not, be able to assist with in terms of adaptations to their home.

3. Legal context

- 3.1 In determining this policy, regard has been given to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy 2021 alongside the relevant statutory provisions and

requirements mentioned in the Housing Act 1996, Localism Act 2011, Care Act 2014, the Equality Act 2010, the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, as amended by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.

- 3.2 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on a public authority, where it must in the exercise of its functions, have due regard for the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality.

4. Necessary and appropriate, reasonable and practicable works

- 4.1 Adult Social Care and Housing Management will work in partnership to take the appropriate measures to satisfy themselves that the works are reasonable and practicable having regard to the age and condition of the property:

- Assessments are completed by Occupational Therapists (OT's) in line with their good practice guide. An Occupational Therapist or other authorised person will make a referral to the council's service providers on behalf of the person detailing the nature of the works required. Each case will be individually assessed on its own merits and the Council decides what is reasonable in the light of its need to make housing available to a wide range of people in need, over the long term.
- Reasonableness also relates to cost, and where the construction type of a property makes it excessively costly to adapt, the Council may refuse the adaptation in favor of offering alternative housing that meets the applicants needs or which can be readily adapted at a lower cost.

5. Application process

- 5.1 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to working in collaboration with Adult Social Care and the Children's Trust to enable people to remain independent in suitable housing for as long as possible.

6. Applying for an adaptation

- 6.1 An applicant may request an OT assessment by contacting Sandwell Assist. The Contact Centre will take their details, including their requirements, and categorise their needs as either urgent or non-urgent. A request will normally be classified as urgent if the person does not have access to a kitchen or toilet or they are terminally ill.
- 6.2 The Occupational Therapist will arrange a visit to assess the person's needs as

required. Following this visit, if the adaptation request is potentially reasonable and practicable, a recommendation will be passed to the Housing Team who will be required to carry out a Homecheck on the property. The property condition will be checked, and a more detailed discussion will take place to assess your individual needs and manage the person's expectations through their chosen pathway.

- 6.3 The OT may order some minor works without the need to visit and these will be sent to the council as appropriate. Once an order is received the council will contact the tenant.

Adaptations will be categorised into two groups

- i. **Minor adaptations** as referred to in **section 8** of this policy and
- ii. **Major adaptations** as referred to in **section 10** of this policy.

7. Eligibility

- 7.1 An individual will be considered for adaptations to their home if they are:

- a Sandwell Council tenant and/or
- a partner or a member of the tenant's immediate family who has been a permanent resident of the household (proof of residency will be requested) and they have an impairment which has a significant and serious long-term effect on their ability to:
 - a) Carry out normal day to day activities in or around their home
 - b) Access essential facilities within the home

- 7.2 Under the terms of this Policy, a person is regarded as being disabled if they have a physical, sensory or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities within their home. A long-term effect refers to disabilities that have lasted for at least 12 months, the effects of which last for at least 12 months, or which are likely to last for the remainder of a person's life.

8. Minor Adaptations (under £1,500)

- 8.1 The Council will provide low level adaptations to increase independence, improve quality of life and reduce the risk of falls and hospital admission up to the value of £1,500.

- 8.2 These will include but are not limited to:

- Grab rails

- Assistive Technology
- Handrails
- Ramps
- Door widening (replace with stair rail)
- Over bath showers (replace with half step)

8.3 In the event that a customer has accessed an Occupational Therapist (OT) directly (4.1 above) and an assessment has been completed, the council will determine whether additional consideration of a tenant's long-term housing options is required.

8.4 It is the Council's intention to ensure that the needs of the client are balanced with the suitability of adapting the property depending on the tenant's circumstances and the alterations required to the property.

9. Long Term Housing Needs

9.1 Where an adaptation is likely to exceed £1,500 a Homecheck may be carried out to discuss the tenant's broader needs including the best long-term housing solution which may include a move to alternative accommodation.

9.2 For some, moving home can be a stressful process. Every effort will be made to support the person to find housing in a location that is most suitable for their needs.

9.3 If it is decided that a tenant's needs may be better met by relocating, then financial help may be offered only if the estimated cost of the initial adaptation request would have exceeded £2,500. This financial assistance will be equivalent to (but not in addition to) that made to tenants in accordance with the Council's under-occupation incentive scheme. However, if a tenant is moving home and not downsizing, the amount paid in lieu of completing the adaptation will be at the council's discretion. In this scenario, it is expected that a discretionary payment will only be made in lieu of extensive major adaptations such as extensions or work over the value of £20,000.

9.4 Where a tenant decides to move, help to complete the application will be offered. An assessment of their needs will take place and where appropriate priority will be applied. The tenant/s will be able to bid through choice-based lettings for a suitable property.

9.5 Where an applicant requires a specific size, type or adapted property, they will be placed in the appropriate housing needs band, but may be offered a direct offer, if the Council has a shortage of suitable properties.

9.6 Those waiting for a move will be provided with temporary adaptations where possible, for example a removable ramp or other equipment as recommended by an Occupational Therapist in order to meet their needs in the short term.

9.7 Non urgent cases will be banded in accordance with the Housing Allocations Policy.

10. Major Adaptations

10.1 The council will liaise with the tenant and their family to ensure that the applicant's needs have been fully considered in accordance with section 6.0 above and will only complete major adaptations where the works are identified as necessary and appropriate, reasonable and practical as recommended by an OT.

10.2 The following will be taken into account:

- The total value of the proposed adaptation (including design costs) which should not exceed the max value of an equivalent Disabled Facilities Grant (as stated in Sandwell Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2023).
- The availability of housing that would be more suitable to adapt.
- Any exceptional circumstances which require the person to remain in their current property.
- Whether the property is suitable for building alterations as determined by the council.
- The size of the household and their housing need.
- Any unacceptable health and safety risks associated with the desired adaptations.
- The occupant's status, the type of tenancy held and any pending possession action.
- The person's wider physical and mental health needs and the length of time that they will remain in the property.

10.3 Some cases are complex and require a multi-disciplinary approach with other professionals. However, all cases will be determined on their own merit and where an applicant's needs can only be met in their existing accommodation; this work will be arranged to be completed at the earliest opportunity.

10.4 The budget for adaptations will be set as a part of our Housing Revenue Account Business Planning Cycle which is reviewed periodically and/ or where demand exceeds the allocated budget.

11. Circumstances where we will not undertake an adaptation

11.1 This section of the policy only relates to adaptations exceeding £1,500. We will deal with each adaptation request on a case to case basis, however where one or more of the following criteria applies the council may exercise their right to refuse your request and offer additional advice or assistance:

- Where a person is under-occupying **more than** one bedroom or where they are overcrowding (except in exceptional circumstances) or are waiting for a transfer to another property.
- Where the adaptation is unreasonable for instance installing a level access shower to a house or a flat above ground floor which cannot be accessed by an *existing* lift or; where the tenants needs can be met with alterations to the original proposal i.e. using a ground floor second reception room as a bedroom.
- Where there is other suitable alternative adapted, part adapted accommodation or where temporary aids and adaptations can be provided it is considered likely that a suitable property will become available within 3 years of the request being made.
- Where an adaptation would adversely affect the council's ability to make the best use of the stock and re-let the property in the future without incurring significant additional costs.
- Where the cost of the adaptation is prohibitive and exceeds the equivalent maximum value applied to a DFG.
- Where the applicant's condition is such that further adaptations will be required over time, temporary mitigation to meet current needs and/ or review their priority to move will be considered until alternative suitable accommodation becomes available.
- Where an adaptation would place others at risk i.e. a communal stair lift with no alternative access for other first floor residents.
- Other than in exceptional circumstances, where a person has left another property with suitable adaptations already present, within 5 years of those adaptations being completed.
- Where the building is unsuitable for adaptation due to its construction.

12. Tenants alterations

- 12.1 If a tenant wishes to install their own alterations to make their home more suitable for their needs, they should apply under the Tenants Alteration Procedure. The Council will not unreasonably withhold consent, but will refuse permission for adaptations that make the house less suitable for occupation in future.

13. Where adaptations are no longer required

- 13.1 Although the council will have made every effort to ensure adapted accommodation is let to those in need, there are occasions when, due to low demand, a property may be let to someone who does not have an assessed need for the adaptations previously installed. If an adaptation cannot be used by the incoming tenant and can easily be removed, it will be removed by the council free of charge. The council will recycle equipment as far as possible.
- 13.2 In the event that a tenant without a disability accepts a property with an adaptation, they do so on the understanding that the adaptation may not be removed. Items which can be recycled, like stairlifts, will be removed prior to occupation.
- 13.3 Adaptations such as level access showers or fixed ramps will only be replaced at the end of the items economic life as determined by the council. At this point, staff will consider the needs of the household at that time. Prospective tenants will be advised of this in advance of accepting the tenancy.
- 13.4 Where the person for whom an adaptation has been completed no longer resides in the property and the tenancy continues i.e.: for succession, any equipment that cannot be removed easily will remain in the property and the weekly servicing and maintenance charge in respect of that piece of equipment will continue, we will assist the occupant to move to suitable accommodation. If the remaining tenant is on housing benefit, they will be supported to apply for a discretionary housing benefit payment to cover this cost.
- 13.5 Major adaptations made to a property could deem the property to be considered as a “specialist dwelling”. The property would then be recorded by the council on their housing register as a “specialist dwelling” and as such this could potentially affect any right to buy applications against this dwelling in the future.

14. Timescales

- 14.1 As a guide, tenants may expect their adaptations to be completed within 90 days from the date when the work is approved.
- 14.2 Approved adaptations for those pending hospital discharge, those with limited

access to essential facilities or the potential for harm to a carer will be prioritised.

- 14.3 The council will work closely with health and social care professionals to ensure that the requirements of tenants with deteriorating or life limiting conditions are addressed in a timely manner, with dignity and in consideration of their current and future needs.

15. Future rehousing

- 15.1 Properties will be allocated in accordance with the criteria set out in the council's Lettings Policy and adverts will clearly detail within the adaptations within each property. Tenants moving from adapted housing may not be allocated any further priority if their current housing remains suitable for their existing needs.
- 15.2 In order for the council to make best use of its resources, it is expected that the occupant for whom the adaptation has been completed will remain in the property for at least five years after the adaptation has been completed if their circumstances, in accordance with the lettings policy are otherwise the same.

16. Mutual exchange

- 16.1 If a tenant applies for a mutual exchange, the council will engage an Occupational Therapist to assess the suitability of the proposed exchange where either a property is adapted or one or more of the parties to the exchange has needs for adaptations. The council may refuse a mutual exchange if the property is adapted for a person with a disability and nobody in the new household requesting to move requires the adaptation.

17. New housing developments

- 17.1 As part of its new housing development program, the Council aims to increase availability of high quality, newly built accessible housing for people to move to.
- 17.2 The Council may adopt a Local Lettings Policy or make direct offers for any new build developments which gives priority for existing tenants who require a specific adaptation however; this will be considered on a site-specific basis and will take account of housing needs at the time.

18. Appeals, suggestions, complaints and compliments

- 18.1 The Council is committed to providing good quality housing for its tenants. The council welcomes feedback that enables it to improve services and will respond to complaints in line with its policy.
- 18.2 In the event that a tenant disputes the decision made they have a right to appeal.

The appeal will be referred to independent senior officer/s. Where available this will also include an Occupational Therapist.

19. Equal Opportunities

- 19.1 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council has an equal opportunities policy and works positively to continually improve and make services accessible to all.
- 19.2 An equality impact assessment has been completed and is available separately.
- 19.3 This document can be made available in other languages and in large print or audio transcript if required.

20. Implementation and review

- 20.1 This policy came into effect on (to be confirmed). The policy will be available on Sandwell Council's website and specifically shared with relevant professionals involved with the service. The policy will be periodically reviewed, and any significant changes will be referred back to the appropriate scrutiny committee.

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Appendix C

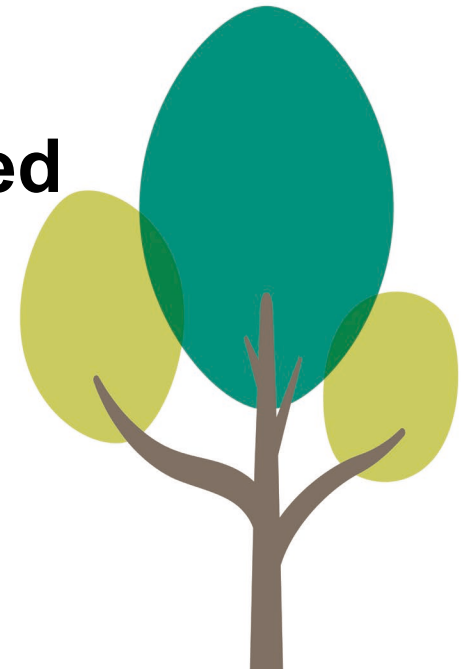
Current Policy	Proposed Policy	Rationale
Minor Adaptations Fund adaptations up to £1,000 provided universally to assessed resident with an identified need	Increase limit to £1,500	To take into account inflationary pressures and to allow rapid delivery of essential low-cost adaptations such as grab rails / hand rails / ramps / steps / key safes / over bath showers
Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Available to fund adaptations that cost between £1,000 and £30,000 - Subject to eligibility	Mandatory Requirement to administer DFGs. Proposal to increase the availability by disregarding the first £15,000 of any means tested contribution	Increase the number of residents who will receive assistance with adaptations. Low cost adaptations such as stair lifts and bathroom adaptations available to all residents without a financial contribution.
Hospital to Home Grant – In development	Hospital to Home Grant. New grant of up to £6,000 to facilitate hospital discharge. No conditions attached to the grant award	To adapt or alter a home to allow someone to be discharged from hospital. Equipment such as a stair lift could be installed prior to someone leaving hospital.
Assisted Technology Grant In development	Assistance to give disabled residents access to technology that will allow them to remain living independently	Assistance to be develop but could include voice activated systems / Wi-Fi enabled technology and an enhanced telecare offer
New Homes Grant	Replaced with a Relocation Grant to assist disabled residents move to suitable or adaptable housing £10,000 grant	the council recognises the need to provide financial assistance to disabled resident who live in homes that are unadaptable. £10,000 available to cover the costs associated with buying / selling and moving. Smaller amount available for private tenants who are disabled.
Home Improvement Assistance Grant	Replaced with a Hazard Removal Grant. To assist vulnerable owner occupiers, tackle serious disrepair	£10,000 targeted at the most vulnerable owner occupiers living in properties that pose a risk to health – Category 1 Hazards
Sustainable Warmth Grant In development	Sustainable Warmth Grant. Max £10,000 available to fund interventions to energy inefficient Householder may be eligible if all the following apply: The household's annual income (before tax) is under £31,000.	Specific grant used to tackle the problem if cold energy inefficient homes. Delivery Modal and specific schemes / interventions to be developed.

Current Policy	Proposed Policy	Rationale
	<p>The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of the property is E,F or G. You own and occupy your home or rent your property from a private landlord.</p>	
<p>Empty Property Loan In development</p>	<p>Loan based assistance to bring empty properties back into use. A loan will be available to pay for essential repairs to allow empty properties to be occupied. Assistance is fully repayable.</p>	<p>To be developed as part of the Empty Property Policy</p>

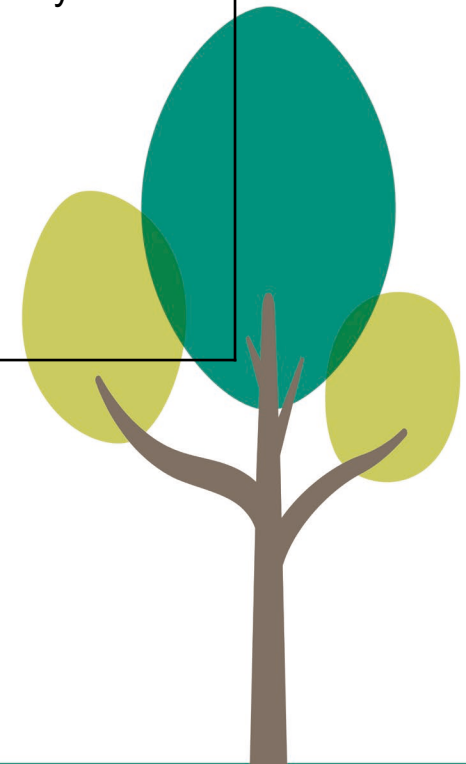
Safer and Active Communities Committee 23rd March 2023

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2023

Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing 2023



Subject:	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2023 Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing 2023
Director:	Director of Housing Director Gillian Douglas
Contact Officer:	Housing Services Manager, Nigel Collumbell Nigel_collumbell@sandwell.gov.uk Business Manager – Community Partnerships, Manny Sehmbi Manny_sehmbi@sandwell.gov.uk Stuart Hall – Home Improvement Manager Stuart_hall@sandwell.gov.uk



Background:

Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2023

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- The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 is legislation that allows a local housing authority to provide assistance to any person to: -
 - Acquire living accommodation
 - To adapt or improve living accommodation
 - To repair living accommodation
 - To demolish living accommodation and construct replacement living accommodation
- Assistance may be provided in any form
- Assistance may be unconditional or conditional

Page 5266
A local housing authority may not exercise the above powers unless they have:-

- Adopted a policy for the provision of assistance
- They have given public notice of the adoption of the policy
- A document which sets out the policy is available for inspection free of charge



Current Situation

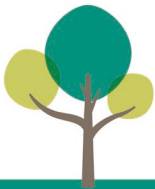
SMBC Policy for the Provision of Assistance – Approved by Council June 2012:

https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200223/housing/4935/home_improvement_agency

The policy has not been updated or revised since that time.

New policy required in order to comply with new priorities, legislation and national guidance.

Separate policy for adaptations to council housing required so council tenants will no longer be required to apply for a grant.



Rationale for Policy Revisions:

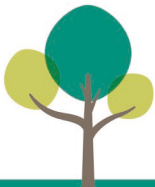
To continue to provide housing support services to its most vulnerable residents, offering the most cost effective and best value solutions, targeted at those with the greatest need.

Introduce additional and amend existing grants and assistance to improve independence and wellbeing for vulnerable and disabled residents and reduce/prevent demand on health and social care services and fundamentally improve quality of life.

Introduce a more customer centred approach by offering residents more bespoke and easily accessible service irrespective of tenure

Align the policy with objectives of the Better Care Fund (BCF) to assist with the prevention of admissions to hospital and social care, support hospital discharge and reduce social care interventions

To reflect good practice as discussed within the Adult Social Care Reform White Paper 2021 and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England (2022)



Financial Context

Adaptations are funded through:
Disability Facilities Grant – owner occupiers, private tenants & Housing Associations
Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Council tenants

Government allocate £4.75m to SMBC

Currently hold reserves of some £11m, due to impact of covid, however a key focus of the policy is to enable further spend with a key focus on increasing benefits to people with disabilities

HRA spend to date £4.5m
DFG spend to date £3.5m



Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Headline Proposals

New and improved offer for disabled residents to assist residents to live as independently as possible for as long as possible.

New forms of assistance for vulnerable homeowners living in poor or dangerous homes

A new form of assistance to tackle empty properties

Improved offer to tackle energy inefficient private sector housing and fuel poverty



key proposals		
Current Policy	Proposal	Change / Benefit
<p>Minor Adaptations up to ££1,000 provided universally to assessed residents.</p>	<p>Minor Adaptations up to £1,500 provided universally to assessed residents</p>	<p>Increase in financial threshold to allow rapid delivery of essential adaptations such as grab rails / hand rails / ramps / steps / key safes / over bath showers.</p>
<p>Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant up to £30,000 for eligible applicants – subject to a test of resources.</p>	<p>Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant up to £30,000 for eligible applicants – subject to a test of resources. The first £15,000 of any means tested contribution will be disregarded.</p>	<p>Increase the number of residents who will receive assistance with adaptations. Low cost adaptations such as stair lifts and bathroom adaptations available to all residents without a financial contribution.</p>

Current Policy	Proposal	Rationale for Change
<p>Discretionary Home Improvement Assistance Grants for adaptations over £30,000 subject to a request to the Director of Housing. 100% repayable for a 10 year period.</p>	<p>DFG Top Up Grant available to anyone who is eligible for a DFG for adaptations. Max available £60,000 plus £30,000 DFG. To be approved by operational managers not the Director -maximum to be repaid for 10 years is capped at £10,000.</p> <p>Assistance beyond £90,000 will be subject to Director approval.</p>	<p>Reduce the bureaucracy associated with higher cost adaptations. Speed up delivery of higher cost adaptations. Reduce repayment conditions burden. Increase transparency.</p> <p>Decision matrix / protocol to be developed.</p>

Current Policy	Proposal	Rationale For Change
<p>Hospital to Home Grant – In development</p>	<p>Hospital To Home Grant New grant of up to £6,000 to facilitate hospital discharge.</p> <p>No repayment conditions.</p>	<p>To adapt or alter a home to allow someone to be discharged from hospital. Equipment such as a stair lift could be installed prior to someone leaving hospital.</p>
<p>Assisted Technology Grant –In development</p>	<p>Assisted Technology</p>	<p>To be developed</p>
<p>New Homes Grant</p>	<p>Relocation Grant. £10,000 to assist owner occupiers.</p> <p>£2,000 to assist private tenants.</p> <p>Fully repayable of property sold within 10 years</p>	<p>New homes grant for clearance is obsolete. However, the council recognises the need to provide financial assistance to disabled resident who live in homes that are unadaptable. £10,000 available to cover the costs associated with buying / selling and moving. Smaller amount available for private tenants who are disabled.</p>

Current Policy	Proposal	Rationale for change
<p>Home Improvement Assistance Grant – general grant for disrepair, central heating, emergency repairs and major adaptations for Council tenants. Lifetime repayment condition apply in certain circumstances.</p>	<p>No direct replacement for this grant. Assistance for serious disrepair tackled through Hazard Removal Grant.</p> <p>Council tenants no longer required to apply for grants to fund adaptations. Adaptations will be delivered by the landlord directly.</p>	<p>Hazard Removal Grant - Increase grant value from £5,000 - £10,000 and replace lifetime repayment conditions with 3 year repayment conditions. Assistance targeted at the most vulnerable owner occupiers living in properties that pose a risk to health – Category 1 Hazards</p> <p>New policy for the Provision of Adaptations For Council Tenants to be adopted.</p>

Current Policy	Proposal	Rationale for change
<p>Sustainable Warmth Grant</p> <p>- In development</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 275</p>	<p>Sustainable Warmth Grant.</p> <p>Max £10,000 available to fund interventions to energy inefficient</p> <p>Householder may be eligible if all the following apply:</p> <p>The household’s annual income (before tax) is under £31,000.</p> <p>The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of the property is E,F or G.</p> <p>You own and occupy your home or rent your property from a private landlord.</p>	<p>Specific grant used to tackle the problem if cold energy inefficient homes.</p> <p>Delivery Modal and specific schemes / interventions to be developed.</p>
<p>Empty Property Loan –</p> <p>In development</p>	<p>Empty Property Loan</p>	<p>Loan based assistance to bring empty properties back into use. A loan will be available to pay for essential repairs to allow empty properties to be</p>

Current Situation	Proposal	Rationale for change
External Improvement Schemes	No change	Financial assistance for repairs and improvements to whole streets of houses.
Advice & Information	No change	Refresh the Information available via the website that support this policy Publication of new information leaflets and guidance documents

Appeals

The current policy has a two stage mechanism for dealing with appeals –

Stage 1 By the Director or Panel of Managers

Stage 2 By the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

The new Policy has a single stage appeal - All appeals will be considered by the Director of Housing.

Aim – to speed up decisions regarding appeals



Policy for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing

To bring greater parity between the way housing adaptations are managed through the housing revenue account and the Disabled Facilities) regime

A focus on supporting people to consider how their housing needs can be met in the long term.

Financial assistance to support people with the costs of relocating where needed.

Support to meet older people's overall well-being including safety in the home, access to welfare benefits, social inclusion and referrals to sensory services and other healthcare services.

Ensure we maximise the impact of resources and make best use of stock.



Consultation

Engagement sessions and workshops with staff
Foundations have been engaged as a critical friend
Initial targeted consultation with voluntary sector
partners to those providing service to people with
disabilities or mobility issues

Online consultation and will also be promoted to
voluntary sector for further comment

Continued engagement with Foundations



Next Steps

Leadership Meeting 11.04.23

Cabinet – June

Adopt Policy & Implement

HIA Team – support with transition and L&D



Background Papers

The Disabled Facilities Grant: Before and After the Introduction of the Better Care Fund - Foundations, June 2016

Adult Social Care Reform White Paper December 2021 –
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper>

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) delivery: guidance for local authorities in England (2022) -
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>

Housing Associations and Home Adaptations -
<https://www-foundations.uk.com/library/housing-associations-and-home-adaptations/>



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Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities

23 March 2023

Subject:	Update from the Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group
Contact Officer:	Democratic Services Officer, Alexander Goddard Alexander.Goddard@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To receive an update from the Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

For the Board to receive regular updates of the work of the Tenants' and Leaseholder's Scrutiny Group.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group (TLS) was formed in December 2021 with a specific remit of scrutinising the Council's housing services function.



- 4.2 The Group conducts regular engagement with housing management, contractors and tenants to ensure that the Council's housing stock meets consistent and appropriate standards. There is also an opportunity for the Group to conduct reviews into specific governance areas relating to housing, strategy and policy development and service delivery.
- 4.3 The Scrutiny Group's Membership consists of Council tenants and leaseholders. In addition, the Group holds a co-opted position for the Chair of the SNAC Board which is reciprocated by the Board Membership in respect of the Chair of the TLS Group.
- 4.4 The Board has the opportunity to invite the Chair of TLS Group to present an update of the works of the TLS Group.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no specific resource implications
Legal and Governance:	The Board has a responsibility to scrutinise all matters as appropriate in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Housing Policy • Social Housing • Private Rented Sector Accommodation.
Risk:	There are no risk implications.
Equality:	There are no equality implications
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no health and wellbeing implications.
Social Value	Engagement with the TLS Group allows engagement with the Board and an opportunity to participate in service improvement and development.
Climate Change	There are no climate change implications

6 Appendices

There are no appendices.

7. Background Papers

There are no background papers.



Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

23 March 2023

Subject:	Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations
Director:	Law and Governance Surjit Tour Surjit_tour@sandwell.gov.uk
Contact Officer:	Alexander Goddard – Scrutiny Lead Officer Alexander_Goddard@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations







That the Board considers the items within the recommendations tracker and notes the progress on their implementation.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 To facilitate the effective monitoring of progress on responses to and press with implementation of recommendations made by the Board and identify where further action is required.
- 2.2 Effective monitoring of recommendations facilitates the evaluation of the impact of the scrutiny function overall.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people	<p>The scrutiny function supports all of the objectives of the Corporate Plan by seeking to improve services for the people of Sandwell. It does this by influencing the policies and decisions made by the Council and other organisations involved in delivering public services.</p> <p>Effective monitoring of recommendations made supports this and allows scrutiny to evaluate its impact.</p>
	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 attached Appendix details the responses to and progress on the implementation of recommendations made by the scrutiny function.

5 Implications

Resources:	The resource implications will be detailed in the responses to recommendations as detailed in the appendix.
Legal and Governance:	<p>The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Part 1A Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2000.</p> <p>The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on the Executive to respond to Scrutiny recommendations within two months of receiving them.</p>



Risk:	<p>Any risk implications have been considered with the relevant Officer/Director/Cabinet Member/Risk Owner at the time the recommendations were referred to them by the Board.</p> <p>Any specific risks for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p>
Equality:	<p>Any equality implications have been considered with the relevant Officer/Director/Cabinet Member/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team at the time the recommendations were referred to them by the Board.</p> <p>Any specific equality implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>Any health and wellbeing implications have been considered with the relevant Officer/Director/Cabinet Member/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team at the time the recommendations were referred to them by the Board.</p> <p>Any specific health and wellbeing implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p>

6 Appendices

Appendix – Monitoring Table



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Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities 22/23				
Date	Item	Recommendation/ Action	Responsible Person	Notes
23 FEB 23	Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023- 2028	Checkpoint reports throughout the first 18 months of the Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023- 2028 are provided to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board	Matt Huggins	
		Feedback from the survey of trees, to include impact on light to habitable rooms is provided to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board	Matt Huggins	
26 JAN 23	Launch- Plan of the Sandwell Aquatic Centre	Working group to be established to meet via MS Teams, to support and guide both Operational and Business Planning areas.	Ben Percival/ Democratic Services	Established MAR 23
		What action is being taken to re- open Langley Swimming facilities to the public? (Currently only open for swimming lessons).	Ben Percival	
	Playing Pitch Strategy	Short- life Working group to be established to meet via MS Teams, to support the completion, adoption and implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy.	Ben Percival/ Democratic Services	Established MAR 23
	Update of Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector to Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis	The Director of Public Health provide a dedicated contact officer to answer queries, share information and support councillors in relation to foodbank coordination as part of the Cost of Living Crisis.	Lisa McNally/ Liann Brookes-Smith	
		That the Director of Public Health explores providing financial support to foodbanks. List to be sent to Directorate of Public Health.	Lisa McNally/ Liann Brookes Smith	List sent 27 JAN 23
		That the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board refer poverty proofing and financial support provision for schools to the Children's Services and education Scrutiny Board.	Democratic Services (Connor Robinson)	
		That the Director of Borough Economy arrange for letter's to be sent to library staff operating warm banks in recognition for their hard work.	Alice Davey	Confirmed as sent 01 FEB 23
		Data on schools accessing financial support for school trips and poverty proofing exercises is cascaded to the board.	Liann Brookes-Smith	
That the distribution of the Sandwell Herald to 'all households in Sandwell' is looked into as part of the corporate contract.	Communications (Matt More)			

		That a list of warm space usage by town is cascaded to the board, providing a statistical breakdown.	Liann Brookes Smith	
10 JAN 23	Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan	That the Directors of Housing and Regeneration and Growth investigate the feasibility of turning Council owned non- residential properties into residential units.	Gillian Douglas/ Tony McGovern	
		What proactive action, prior to mould being discovered, does the Directorate of Housing take to mould- proof Council owned housing stock?	Gillian Douglas	
24 NOV 22	Draft Housing Strategy 2023- 2028	that the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board supports the implementation of Service Level agreements (SLAs) between the Council and temporary accommodation providers.	Gillian Douglas	Send to Cllr Padda
		that the Director of Housing explores the feasibility of a standardised response time for complaints.	Gillian Douglas	Send to Cllr Padda
		that the Directors of Housing, Borough Economy, and Regeneration and Growth work in collaboration to shape policy around neighbourhood development.	Gillian Douglas/ Alice Davey/ Tony McGovern	Send to Cllr Padda
		the Director of Housing considers Minute No. 47/22 (24 November 2022) as part of any formation of housing strategy and policy.	Gillian Douglas	Send to Cllr Padda
Asset Management and Investment Programme for Housing 2023- 2024	that the Director of Law and Governance arranges training related to procurement exercises and local authority contracts to be offered to all councillors.	Surjit Tour	Update Cllr Allcock	
	the Director of Housing reviews the robustness of the repairs triage process by the service with consideration for household and resident characteristics.	Gillian Douglas		
Report of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group – Housing Hub Review	that the Director of Housing investigates means to reduce the cost of telephone calls to the Housing Hub, including the viability of a call-back service.	Gillian Douglas/ Nigel Collumbell		
	that the customer satisfaction levels of tenants receiving a service from the Housing Hub be monitored by the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.	Gillian Douglas/ Nigel Collumbell		
	What is the difference in costs between telephone service via Housing Hub and face- to- face service via Neighbourhood Office? Breakdown of costs to be provided.	Nigel Collumbell	Estimated average cost of transactions last year: Locals: £109 per transaction	

				Telephone: £15 per transaction My Sandwell: £0.63 per transaction
01 NOV 22	Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector to Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis.	that Directors ensure that the marketing of support services is strengthened; including making use of multi-media, billboards, communications to parents via schools and a roadshow event.	Lisa McNally/ Leadership team	
		that Directors produce a map of support services via location and geographical coverage and share this through a range of media including print and online.	Lisa McNally/ Leadership team	
		that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education be asked to conduct a review of demand and funding pressures on Youth Services across the borough.	Cllr Hackett/ Michael Jarratt	
		that the Directors of Borough Economy and Regeneration and Growth investigate the options for working with the Six Towns Credit Union to relocate into an empty property in West Bromwich, more central to the town centre and transport links.	Alice Davey/ Tony McGovern	
		that Directors investigate ways to better coordinate the existing foodbank network in Sandwell to ensure best use of available food resources.	Lisa McNally/ Leadership team	
		that the Chair of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board hold discussions with representatives from the Directorate of Public Health to discuss period poverty and access to sanitary products.	Lisa McNally/ Liann Brookes Smith	
30 SEPT 22	Update on Review of Voluntary and Community Sector Grants	the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board supports the development and introduction of an open and transparent Council funding process.	Gillian Douglas	
		the Director of Housing considers Minute No. 29/22 (30 September 2022) as part of any redesign of grant making processes.	Gillian Douglas	
		Working Group comprised of the members of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board be established to support and review the Council's approach to the cost of living crisis.		

The following items set out key decisions to be taken by the Executive in public session:-

	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
1	Community Hubs Contact Officer: Director of Business Strategy	Cabinet - Communities (Cllr Millard)	June 2023		
7	Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028 Contact Officer: Louis Bebb Director: Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing	Cabinet – Housing (Cllr Padda)	June 2023	SNAC 24 November 2022	Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
8	<p>Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy and Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing</p> <p>Contact Officer: Manny Sehmbi</p> <p>Director: Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing</p>	<p>Cabinet – Housing (Cllr Padda)</p>	<p>June 2023</p>		<p>Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy</p> <p>Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants (HRA Property)</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
9	<p>Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2.1 Funding</p> <p>Contact Officer: Gillian Douglas</p> <p>Director: Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing</p>	<p>Cabinet – Housing (Cllr Padda)</p>	<p>June 2023</p>		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
10	<p>Asset Transfer of Hurst Road and Charlemont Community Centres</p> <p>Contact Officer: Nick Garratt / Manny Sehmbi</p> <p>Director: Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing</p>	<p>Cabinet - Housing (Cllr Padda)</p>	<p>June 2023</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>-Community Centre Asset Transfer Report</p> <p>-Equality Impact Assessment</p> <p>-Quality Assurance Document</p>

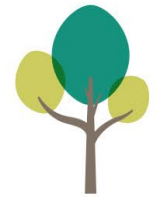


	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
11	<p>Feasibility of establishing a Council owned Housing company</p> <p>Contact Officer: Alan Martin</p> <p>Director: Tony McGovern, Director of Regeneration and Growth</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & Growth (Cllr Hughes)</p>	<p>June 2023</p>		



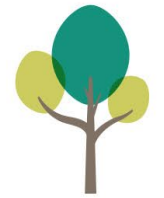
The following items set out key decisions to be taken by the Executive in private session:-

Title/Subject	Cabinet Portfolio Area	Decision Date	Reason for Exemption	List of documents to be considered



Annual Programme Reminder (these items are not added automatically)

Title/Subject	Cabinet Portfolio Area	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
Review of Fees and Charges		January		
Determination of Admission Priorities for Sandwell's Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools		January/February		
Schools Funding		December/January		
Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring		February		
Council Finances		February		
Financial Regulations		February		
Business Plans		February		
Highways Asset Management Plan		March		
Local Transport Settlement		March		



Title/Subject	Cabinet Portfolio Area	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
Revenues and Benefits Policy framework 2022/23		March		
Schools Capital Programme		April to June		
Financial Outturn		May		
Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules		July		
Review of Fees and Charges Sandwell Residential Education Services Centre Charges		May – July		
Childcare Sufficiency Report		July - September		
Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring		August		



Title/Subject	Cabinet Portfolio Area	Decision Date	Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
Model Schools Pay Policy		October/November		
Winter Service Operational Plan		October/November		
Road Safety Plan		November		
Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring		November		
Council Tax Base Calculation		December		
Business Rates Retention Estimates		December		
Council Tax Reduction Scheme		December		



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Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2022/23



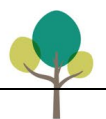
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Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities

Standing Items:-

- Tracking and Monitoring of Recommendations to the Executive
- Work Programme (including Cabinet Forward Plan)

Meeting Date	Item	Presented by
02 August 2022	Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group Work Programme 2022/23	Manny Sehmbi (Business Manager Community Partnerships and Support Services)
	Housing Tenants' Annual Report 2021/22	Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager Housing Management)
30 August 2022 Additional Meeting	Council House New Builds Programme	Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth)
	The Appropriation of Various Disused Former Garages in the Borough	Tony McGovern (Possible input from Gillian Douglas)
30 September 2022	Housing Needs Assessment	Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager Housing Management)
	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review	Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing)
	Rents and Service Charges	Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing)

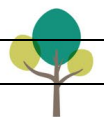


01 November 2022	Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector to Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis	Lisa McNally (Director of Public Health). SCIPS. SCVO.
Additional Meeting	Review of Voids Process	Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager Housing Management)
	Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Plan	Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing)
	Empty Homes Strategy	Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager Housing Management)
24 November 2022	Housing Strategy	Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager Housing Management) Louis Bebb.
	Report of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group - Housing Hub Review	Manny Sehmbi (Business Manager Community Partnerships and Support Services)
	Fees & Charges (inc concessions) for LATC / Sandwell Aquatic Centre	Alice Davey/ Ben Percival
	2023-24 Asset Management Investment Programme for Housing	Jonathan Rawlins/ Gillian Douglas
10 January 2023	Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Plan Update	Gillian Douglas
Additional Meeting		
26 January 2023	Playing Pitch Strategy – ITEM 3	Ben Percival
	Council House New Builds Programme Update – ITEM 4	Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth)
	Update of Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector to Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis. - ITEM 2	Liann Brookes Smith SCIPS. SCVO.
	Launch plan of Sandwell Aquatic Centre – ITEM 1	Ben Percival/ Mark Braithwaite



23 February 2023. Additional meeting at Sandwell Valley.	Nature Reserves Funding and Green Spaces Strategy	Matt Huggins Asst. Director Parks, Grounds Maint. & Events
	Heritage Strategy	Dawn Winter Asst. Director Libraries, Archives & Heritage
	Enforcement activity in relation to housing, particularly ASB	Nigel Collumbell/ Gillian Douglas
	Tree Strategy and Policy	Matthew Huggins
23 March 2023	Homelessness Strategy (Implementation). Incorporating a Deep dive - Manifoldia Grange site – ITEM 1	Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager Housing Management)
	Homes Improvement – Disabled Facilities Grant – ITEM 4	Manny Sehmbi
	Reports of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group - Home Checks Review – ITEM 3	Nigel Collumbell
	Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022-26 One Year On ITEM 2	Chief Supt Maria Fox (Chair of Safer Sandwell Partnership)

To be Scheduled



Reports of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group on:-

- Building Safety Review
- Responsive Repairs & Customer Satisfaction Review

Fees & Charges (inc concessions) for LATC / Sandwell Aquatic Centre Update PROVISIONAL

Community Hubs – Helen Green (15 FEB 23 Cabinet)

Neighbourhood Management Model (Manny Sehmbi)

Future Provision of Leisure Services Update (Ben Percival)

Heritage Strategy Update (Dawn Winter) POSSIBLE

Commonwealth Games Legacy Plan – Alex Oxley/ Tony McGovern and Ben Percival/ Alice Davey.

Anti- social behaviour by private tenants and owner- occupiers – Nigel Collumbell

Tenant Satisfaction Survey Outcomes – Nigel Collumbell

Heritage Strategy Journey Update PROVISIONAL – Dawn Winter

Hot Spot Solutions (Green Spaces Strategy)– Matt Huggins

Update on Grounds Maintenance Technology – Matt Huggins

Checkpoint reports throughout the first 18 months of the Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan – Matt Huggins

Feedback from the survey of trees, to include impact on light to habitable rooms where possible.- Matt Huggins

Sandwell Valley Masterplan – Matt Huggins

For Municipal year 2023/24:

Quarter 1:

Safer Parks and Green Spaces – Alice Davey

Housing Hub Review (Report of the T and L Scrutiny Group) - implementation of recommendations update. – Nigel Collumbell

Quarter 2:

Quarter 3:

Built Facilities Strategy Alice Davey/ Ben Percival

Quarter 4:

