

Agenda Council

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, to be held on Tuesday, 13 June 2023 at 6.00 pm for the purpose of transacting the following business:-

The Mayor of Sandwell, Councillor Bill Gavan, in the Chair

- | | | |
|----------|---|----------------|
| 1 | Apologies for Absence | 7 - 8 |
| | To receive apologies for absence (if any). | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest | 9 - 10 |
| | Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting. | |
| 3 | Minutes | 11 - 46 |
| | To confirm as a correct record, the minutes of the Annual Meeting of Council held on 23 May 2023. | |
| 4 | Urgent Business | 47 - 48 |
| | To consider any urgent business (with prior approval by the Mayor). | |
| 5 | Announcements | |
| | To receive announcements from the Chief Executive and The Mayor. | |



6 **Petitions** 49 - 50

To receive petitions under Standing Order No. 8.

7 **Written Questions** 51 - 52

To consider written questions under Standing Order No. 9 from

- (a) Elected Members
- (b) Members of the Public

to:-

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

8	Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board 2021-2023	53 - 74
	To receive the annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board 2021-2023.	
9	Sandwell Council Improvement Plan	75 - 150
	To consider and approve the Sandwell Council Improvement Plan update report.	
10	Proposed Departure from the Development Plan at Forge Mill Farm, Forge Lane, West Bromwich	151 - 168
	To consider a proposed departure from the development plan in respect of Forge Mill Farm, Forge Lane, West Bromwich.	
11	Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 Update - West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority	169 - 180
	To receive an update from the Council's lead on West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority.	
12	Revisions to Appointments to Committees, Boards and Other Bodies	181 - 184
	To consider revisions to the appointments of Committees, Boards and other bodies.	
13	To receive the minutes of Cabinet	185 - 212
	To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 March 2023.	
14	To receive the minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board	213 - 220
	To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held on 29 March 2023.	

15 **To receive the minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee** 221 - 228

To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 16 March 2023.

16 **Notices of Motion** 229 - 234

To receive an update on previous motions and consider the following motions received under Standing Order No. 12:-

16.1 **Anti Social Behaviour Plan** 235 - 236
Proposer: Councillor William Gill
Secunder: Councillor Dunn

This Council recognises the impacts that anti-social behaviour has on our residents, businesses and communities.

This council welcomes the action taken by Government to announce the anti-social action plan and to make the West Midlands an area for hotspot policing.

And this Council resolves to invite the leader to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner to highlight the importance of this funding for our town centres and high streets and to work co-operatively with the Council's partners to deliver this action plan in the coming weeks and months for local residents.



Shokat Lal
Chief Executive
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury

Distribution
All Members of the Council

democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

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Apologies

To receive any apologies from members

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Declarations of Interest

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

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Minutes of Annual Council

Tuesday 23 May 2023 at 6.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: His Worshipful The Mayor, Mr Richard Jones;

Councillors Abrahams, Akpoteni, K Allcock, Anandou, Ashraf, Bhullar, Carmichael, Chambers, Chapman, Chidley, Choudhry, Crompton, Davies, Dhariwal, Dhatt, Dunn, Fenton, Fisher, Fitzgerald, Gavan, E Giles, J Giles, L Giles, S Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hemingway, Hinchliff, Hughes, Hussain, Jalil, Johnston, Kalari, Kalebe-Nyamongo, Kaur, Khan, Khatun, Kordala, Lewis, Loan, Mayo, Melia, Millard, Moore, Muflihi, Owen, Padda, Pall, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Randhawa, Rollins, Shaeen, J Singh, N Singh, Smith, Taylor, Tipper, Tromans, Trumpeter, Uddin, Uppal, Webb, Weston, Wilkes, Williams and Younis

Also present: Shokat Lal – Chief Executive; Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer; Elaine Newsome – Services Manager – Democracy; Trisha Newton – Deputy Democratic Services Manager; Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer; John Swann – Democratic Services Officer; Ruth Darby – Senior Civic & Member Services Officer; Kennedy Brown – Sergeant at Arms.

(Outgoing Mayor Mr R Jones in the Chair)

56/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Allcock, Maycock and W Gill.



57/23 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

58/23 **Election of the Mayor**

Mr Richard Jones invited nominations for the office of Mayor of the Borough of Sandwell for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Councillor Bill Gavan was nominated by Councillor Owen and Councillor Hackett seconded the nomination.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried and it was:

Resolved that Councillor Bill Gavan be elected to the Office of the Mayor of the Borough of Sandwell for the ensuing Municipal Year 2023/24.

Councillor Bill Gavan made the Declaration of Acceptance of Office required by law and was invested with the Mayoral chain and badge of office.

Councillor Gavan took the Chair and made his speech of acceptance. The Mayor announced that, during his term of office, his chosen charities would be Better Understanding of Dementia in Sandwell (BUDS) and Age UK.

The Mayor announced that his husband, Mr Adam Kennedy, would act as the Mayor Consort for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Mr Adam Kennedy was invested with the chain and badge of office of Mayor's Consort.



(His Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Bill Gavan, in the Chair)

59/23 **Vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor**

Councillor Millard moved a vote of thanks to the retiring Mayor, Mr Richard Jones, on behalf of the Council, and Councillor Randhawa seconded the motion.

In response Mr Richard Jones thanked members of the Council for giving him the opportunity to represent the Borough as Mayor. Mr Jones also thanked his partner, Mr Richard McVittie as well as officers in members services.

60/23 **Election of the Deputy Mayor**

The Mayor invited nominations for the position of Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Sandwell for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Councillor Elaine Giles was nominated by Councillor Hughes and Councillor Allcock seconded the nomination.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried and it was

Resolved that Councillor Elaine Giles be elected to the position of Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Sandwell for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

Councillor Elaine Giles made and subscribed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office required by law and was invested with the chain and badge of office and made her speech of acceptance.

The Deputy Mayor announced that her daughter, Miss Elizabeth Giles, would act as the Deputy mayoress Consort for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Miss Elizabeth Giles was invested with the chain and badge of office.



61/23 **Vote of thanks to the retiring Deputy Mayor**

Councillor J Giles moved a vote of thanks to the retiring Deputy Mayor, Councillor Jackie Taylor, on behalf of the Council, and Councillor Hartwell seconded the motion.

In response Councillor Jackie Taylor thanked members of the Council for giving her the opportunity to represent the Borough as Deputy Mayor.

Councillor Taylor thanked her husband Mr Taylor for his support over the past year and extended her best wishes to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the year ahead.

62/23 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary meetings of Council held on 28 March 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

63/23 **Executive Appointments**

- (1) that the names of persons appointed by the Leader of the Council to the position of Deputy Leader (Statutory) and as a Cabinet Member be noted;
- (2) that the Executive Portfolios, as determined by the Leader of the Council and their assignment to the Deputy Leader and each Cabinet Member, as follows, be noted:-
 - i. Councillor Bob Piper as Statutory Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources;
 - ii. Councillor Suzanne Hartwell as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care;



- iii. Councillor Simon Hackett as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education;
- iv. Councillor Syeda Khatun as Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities;
- v. Councillor Danny Millard as Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways;
- vi. Councillor Laura Rollins as Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment;
- vii. Councillor Charn Singh Padda as Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism;
- viii. Councillor Peter Hughes as Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA.

(3) that the executive appointments as set out in Appendix A be approved.

64/23

Political Balance, Appointment to Committees, Boards and Other Fora 2023/24 and updates to the Council's Constitution

In accordance with the requirements of its Constitution, the Council considered proposals relating to the identification of the bodies it wished to carry out its function as a local authority and terms of reference for those bodies.

Consideration was given to the nominations to committees, boards and other fora which had been received from all political groups.

Resolved:-

- (1) that, taking into account proportionality, the constitution of committees, board and other fora for 2023/24 be approved;



- (2) that the appointments of members and co-opted members to the positions, committees, boards and other fora established by the Council, as set out in Appendix B, be approved;
- (3) that, in accordance with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, one nomination from each of the Church of England Diocese and Roman Catholic Archdiocese and two nominations for Parent Governor representatives to serve as non-elected members on the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board be invited, with voting rights conferred only on any matter with regard to education, whether in respect of schools or wider educational issues;
- (4) that the programme of meetings for the 2022-23 municipal year be approved;
- (5) that the term of office for Mr Michael Ager, Independent Member for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, be extended for a four-year period expiring at the Annual Meeting of Council in 2027;
- (6) that the changes to the Council's Constitution be approved in respect of:-
 - Part 4 - Scrutiny Procedure Rules/Article 2a - Councillor Call for Action;
 - Revised Terms of Reference for Corporate Parenting Board and Health and Wellbeing Board;
 - Revised job role for the Performance Champion – Cleaner and Greener Communities.

65/23

Appointment of Representatives to Other Bodies

Consideration was given to the appointment or nomination of representatives to serve on outside bodies for the Municipal Year 2023/24.



Resolved that the appointments to outside/other bodies, as detailed in Appendix C, be approved.

66/23

Independent Remuneration Panel Review on Members' Allowances Scheme

Consideration was given to the report and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel in respect of the Members Allowance Scheme 2023-27.

It was moved and seconded by the Leader and Deputy Leader that the administration had concluded that it could not accept any increase in the levels of the allowances proposed and it was therefore proposed to freeze the majority of the existing scheme of member allowances at the current value. However, the following recommendations of the Panel were proposed for approval:-

- maintaining the one special responsibility allowance rule, so that a Member cannot receive more than one SRA;
- the recommended reduction in the Deputy Leader Special Responsibility Allowance to 75% of the Leader's Allowance;
- the proposed removal of both the broadband and paperless working allowances;
- the proposed qualification of the appointment of a Cabinet Member to chair the Joint Consultative Panel Chair, which was also extended to the Chair of the Land and Asset Management Committee.

In addition, it was recommended that the Council did not accept the indexed increase in the basic allowance in line with the staff pay award.

In relation to the wider recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel, the Governance and Constitution Review Committee would undertake a review as part of its work programme in the current municipal year.



Resolved that:-

- (1) the one special responsibility allowance rule, so that a Member cannot receive more than one SRA, be maintained;
- (2) the Deputy Leader special responsibility allowance be reduced to 75% of the Leader's Allowance;
- (3) the reduction from two West Bromwich Vice Chairs to one;
- (4) the reduction in Performance Champions from six to five;
- (5) the broadband and paperless working allowances be removed from the Members' Allowance Scheme;
- (6) the Chair of the Joint Consultation Panel will be a qualified appointment of a Cabinet Member;
- (7) the Chair of the Land & Asset Management Committee will be a qualified appointment of a Cabinet Member;
- (8) there will be no indexed increase in the basic allowance in line with the staff pay award from April 2022;
- (9) the Governance and Constitution Review Committee will undertake a further review of the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel and submit a report to a future meeting.

Meeting ended at 6.55pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk



Appointments made by the Executive

Health and Wellbeing Board (2023/24)

(4 members)
(Lab 4)

Deputy Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (Chair)
Cabinet Member for Housing & Built Environment

Non voting members:

Chair – Health & Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board
Chair – Children’s Services & Education Scrutiny Board

Other Board members as agreed by Council:-

Director – Adult Social Care (without voting rights)
Director of Children’s Services (without voting rights)
Director of Public Health (without voting rights)
NHS Commissioning Board:
One representative of the NHS England - Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country Area Team (without voting rights)
Black Country Integrated Care Board:
Four representatives (three votes)
Healthwatch Sandwell:
One representative (with voting rights)
One representative of Sandwell’s faith sector (with voting rights)
Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (without voting rights)
One representative of West Midlands Police (without voting rights)
One representative of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service (without voting rights)
One representative of Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (without voting rights)
Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust (without voting rights)
Sandwell Children’s Trust (without voting rights)

Strategic Waste Partnership Board (2023/2024)

(3 members)
(Lab 3)

Leader of the Council
Statutory Deputy Leader
Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways

(and representatives of Serco)

Cabinet Petitions Committee 2023/2024)

(9 members)
(Lab 9)

Chair Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways

Members of the Cabinet x 8

Committees & Panels

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (2023/2024)

(7 members) + 3 independent members
(Lab 6) (Cons 1)

Chair Preece

Vice Chair Mr Ager (Independent Member)

Bhullar
Dhariwal
L Giles
Smith
Tipper

Anandou (Trumpeter – Sub) (C)

(+2 independent members)

Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Committee (2023/2024)

(7 members)
(Lab 6) (Cons 1)

Chair Leader

Vice-Chair Statutory Deputy Leader

Fisher (Kalari – Sub) (C)

Plus four members drawn from the following plus one opposition rep:-

Cabinet Members or chairs or vice-chairs of relevant boards/
committees/panels.

Chief Officers Terms and Conditions Appointments Sub-Committee

Leader (Chair), opposition member, plus one member selected by the Chair from Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs to deal with appointments to and the determination of matters relating to posts designated as service manager tier 2.

Emergency Committee (2023/2024)

(7 members)
(Lab 6) (Cons 1)

Chair Leader

Vice-Chair Deputy Leader
Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Education
Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities
Chair – Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board

Fisher (W Gill – Sub) (C)

Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee (2023/24)

(8 **non-executive** members)
(Lab 7) (Cons 1)

Chair K Allcock

Vice-Chair Kaur

Crompton
J Giles
Hemingway
Muflihi
Rahman

Trumpeter (W Gill – Sub) (C)

(+ 3 independent persons as observers)

General Purposes and Arbitration Committee (2023/2024)

(7 non-Executive members)
(Lab 6) (Cons 1)

Chair Melia

Vice-Chair Dhariwal

M Allcock
Fitzgerald
Johnston
Maycock

Kalari (Trumpeter – Sub) (C)

Governance and Constitution Review Committee (2023/2024)

(8 members)
(Lab 7) (Cons 1)

Chair Leader

Chambers
Kalebe-Nyamongo
Melia
Piper
Rollins
Padda

W Gill (Chapman – Sub) (C)

Land and Asset Management Committee (2023/24)

(7 members)
(Lab 6) (Cons 1)

Chair	Hughes
	Chidley
	Hinchliff
	Randhawa
	Singh
	Taylor
	Williams (Wilkes – Sub) (C)

Licensing Committee (2023/2024)

(15 **non-Executive** members)
(Lab 12) (Cons 3)

Chair	J Giles
Vice-Chairs	Fenton
	Lewis
	Davies
	E M Giles
	Hussain
	Jalil
	Khan
	Loan
	Daya Singh
	Tromans
	Uppal
	Abrahams (C)
	Weston (C)
	Wilkes (C)

Planning Committee (2023/2024)

(16 **non-executive** members to be geographically representative)
(Lab 13) (Cons 3)

Chair Millar

Vice-Chair Chidley

Fenton
S Gill
Kaur
Loan
Pall
Preece
Daya Singh
Tromans
Uppal
Webb
Younis

Chapman (C)
Fisher (C)
Kordala (C)

Scrutiny Boards (2023/2024)

<p>Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board (Up to 11 members) Chair + Chairs/Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Boards (+ 2 opposition if not included above)</p> <p>Chair Moore Vice Chair Fenton</p> <p>Chair & Vice Chair of Children’s Services & Education</p> <p>Chair & Vice Chair of Economy, Skills, Transport & Environment</p> <p>Chair & Vice Chair of Health & Adult Social Care</p> <p>Chair & Vice Chair of Safer Neighbourhoods & Active Communities</p> <p>Anandou (C) Fisher (C)</p>	<p>Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board (11 members + 4 co-opted members) (Lab 9) (Cons 2)</p> <p>Chair Hinchliff Vice-Chair Chambers</p> <p>K Allcock Ashraf Choudhry Fitzgerald Mayo Pall Uddin</p> <p>W Gill (C) Weston (C)</p> <p>1 Church of England Diocese representative – Barrie Scott</p> <p>1 Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative - Carmel Hinton</p> <p>2 Parent Governor representatives</p>
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Scrutiny Boards (continued) (2023/2024)

<p>Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board (11 members) (Lab 9) (Cons 2)</p> <p>Chair Taylor</p> <p>Vice-Chair Owen</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Akpoteni Ashraf Dhatt Hemingway Hussain Rahman J Singh</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Chapman (C) Kordala (C)</p>	<p>Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board (11 members) (Lab 9) (Cons 2)</p> <p>Chair E M Giles</p> <p>Vice-Chair Tipper</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">M Allcock S Gill Johnston Kalebe-Nyamongo Millar Muflihi Uppal</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Dunn (C) Williams (C)</p>
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Scrutiny Boards (continued) (2023/2024)

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

(11 members + 1 co-opted member)
(Lab 9) (Cons 2)

Chair Fenton

Vice-Chair Lewis

Davies

Dhatt

Khan

Maycock

Shaeen

Webb

Younis

Fisher (C)

Trumpeter (C)

Co-opted Member - Chair of Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group
(Phillippe Brown)

Joint Consultative Panel (2023/2024)

(6 members)
(Lab 6)

Chair Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Choudhry
Millard
Randhawa
Shaeen
Smith

Member Roles

Town Chair and Vice Chair Positions (2023/2024)

(Lab 6)

Oldbury

Owen (Vice Chair: Daya Singh)

Rowley Regis

Webb (Vice Chair: Mayo)

Smethwick

Shaeen (Vice Chair: S Gill)

Tipton

A Hussain (Vice Chair: Rahman)

Wednesbury

L Giles (Vice Chair: Chidley)

West Bromwich

Akpoteni (Vice Chair: J Giles)
(Vice Chair: Randhawa)

Performance Champion (2023/24)

(Lab 5)

Cleaner and Greener Community – Bhullar
Safer Community – Uddin
Our Economy – Randhawa
External Partnerships – Smith
Neighbourhoods – Crompton (lead champion)

Other Roles (2023/24)

(Lab)

Heritage Champion – Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth
Armed Forces Champion - S Melia

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Appointments to Other Bodies – Nominations

Appointments to Other Bodies

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Bus Lane Adjudication Service Joint Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Environment Deputy: Service Manager – Highways	Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways Deputy: Service Manager – Highways
Local Government Association – General Assembly	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council (voting) Non-voting members:- Deputy Leader of the Council Director - Regeneration and Growth	Leader of the Council (voting) Non-voting members:- Statutory Deputy Leader of the Council Director - Regeneration and Growth
Local Government Information Unit – General Assembly	1 year expiring annual meeting	Deputy Leader of the Council or their nominee	Statutory Deputy Leader of the Council or their nominee

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
PATROL Adjudication Joint Committee (Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London)	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Environment Substitute member – Councillor Hughes	Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways Substitute member – Councillor Hughes
SIGOMA (Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities within the LGA)	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council or their nominee	Leader of the Council or their nominee
Active Black Country Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health Substitute: Councillor Padda	Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care Substitute: Councillor E M Giles
Association of Black Country Authorities	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council (substitute: Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth)	Leader of the Council (substitute: Statutory Deputy Leader)
HS2 Regional Enterprise Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth Director – Regeneration and Growth	Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways Director – Regeneration and Growth

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Midlands Joint Advisory Council for Clean Air and Noise Control	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health Chair – Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Director – Public Health	Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care Chair – Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Director – Public Health
Midlands Joint Advisory Council for Environmental Protection	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health Chair – Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Director – Public Health	Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care Chair – Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Director – Public Health
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Jalil vacant	Councillor Jalil* Councillor Kaur
Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Webb Councillor Gavan	Councillor Choudhry* Councillor Melia

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
West Midlands Rail Ltd	Expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council Substitute: Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth	Leader of the Council Substitute: Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways
West Midlands Police and Crime Panel	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Communities Substitute: vacant Named ABCA alternate: vacant	Cabinet Member for Public Health & Communities Substitute: Councillor Uddin Named ABCA alternate: Smith
West Midlands Regional Health Scrutiny Chairs Group	1 year expiring annual meeting	Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny	Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny
West Midlands Scrutiny Network	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Moore	Councillor Moore
West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Deputy Leader of the Council	Statutory Deputy Leader of the Council

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Pensions Committee and Investment Advisory Sub-Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Vacant	Councillor Davies
West Midlands Shareholders Airport Committee	1 year expiring	Leader of the Council Observer: Deputy Leader of the Council	Leader of the Council Observer: Statutory Deputy Leader of the Council
Birmingham Airport - Airport Consultative Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council	Statutory Deputy Leader of the Council
Black Country Executive Joint Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council Substitute: Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth	Leader of the Council Substitute: Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA
Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust – Assembly of Governors	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor K Allcock	Councillor Tipper
Clinical Governance Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board	Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Contest Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Communities	Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Public Health & Communities
Corporate Parenting Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Children and Education Hinchliff E A Giles Mayo Choudhry	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education Chair/Vice Chair – Children and Education Scrutiny Board Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council Leader or Deputy Leader of the Opposition Councillor Chidley Councillor J Giles Councillor S Gill Councillor Mayo Councillor Rahman Councillor Daya Singh
Fostering Panel	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Randhawa	Councillor Randhawa

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Inclusive Economy and Community Wealth Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth Lead Member for Community Wealth Director – Regeneration and Growth	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA Lead Member for Community Wealth Director – Regeneration and Growth
Local Improvement Finance Trust (LIFT) – Strategic Partnership Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Director – Regeneration and Growth	Director – Regeneration and Growth
River Trent Regional Flood and Coastal Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Jalil	Councillor Jalil
Sandwell Local Access Forum	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Gavan Councillor M Gill Councillor Taylor	Councillor K Allcock Councillor Chidley Councillor Millar
Sandwell Children’s Social Care Trust – Council appointed non-executive Director		Vacant Director	Councillor Randhawa Director – Gillian Douglas

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
SIPS Education Board	3 years expiring 2027	Vacant Director – Business Strategy and Change	Councillor Hinchliff Director
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Children and Education Councillor Chidley Nominated representatives: Vacant	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education Councillor Chidley Nominated representatives: Councillor Lewis and Melia respectively
Town Deal Local Board West Bromwich	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member Cabinet Member Cabinet Member Town Lead Member	Cabinet Member (Councillor Rollins) Cabinet Member (Councillor Hartwell) Cabinet Member (Councillor Hughes) Town Lead Member

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Town Lead Local Board Rowley Regis	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member Cabinet Member Town Lead Member	Cabinet Member (Councillor Carmichael) Cabinet Member (Councillor Millard) Town Lead Member
Town Lead Local Board Smethwick	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member Cabinet Member Town Lead Member	Cabinet Member (Councillor Piper) Cabinet Member (Councillor Padda) Town Lead Member
W2R Contract Management Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Piper Director	Councillor Piper Director – Borough Economy
West Midlands Combined Authority Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council Deputy Leader of the Council Substitutes: Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism	Leader of the Council Statutory Deputy Leader of the Council Substitutes: Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Simms Substitute: Councillor Taylor ABCA nomination: Councillor Fenton	Councillor Moore Substitute: Councillor Owen ABCA nomination: Councillor Fenton
West Midlands Combined Authority Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Substitute: Councillor Padda	Councillor Preece Substitute: Councillor L Giles
West Midlands Combined Authority Environment & Energy Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA
West Midlands Combined Authority Investment Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA
West Midlands Combined Authority Economic Growth Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth	Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
West Midlands Combined Authority Growth Company	1 year expiring annual meeting	Leader of the Council	Leader of the Council

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
West Midlands Combined Authority Housing and Land Delivery Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing & Built Environment
West Midlands Combined Authority Energy Capital Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA
West Midlands Combined Authority Wellbeing Board	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health	Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care
West Midlands Employers	1 year expiring annual meeting	Deputy Leader	Statutory Deputy Leader
Safer Sandwell Partnership	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Communities Chair of Licensing Committee Councillor Fenton	Cabinet Member for Public Health & Communities Chair of Licensing Committee Councillor Lewis
Akrill Trust	4 years expiring February 2027	Councillor Randhawa	Councillor Preece Councillor Melia Councillor Dhatt

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Barlow Homes Committee of Management	1 year expiring annual meeting	Councillor Owen Councillor Fenton Councillor Kausar Councillor Bhullar Councillor Dhariwal	Councillor Owen Councillor Fenton Councillor Gavan Councillor Dhariwal Councillor Johnston
Climate Change Working Group	1 year expiring annual meeting	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth Councillor Piper Councillor R Jones Councillor McVittie Councillor Randhawa Councillor Millar Councillor Allcock Councillor Taylor Councillor Rollins Councillor Smith Councillor Anandou	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA Councillor Piper Councillor Chidley Councillor Mayo Councillor S Gill Councillor Daya Singh Councillor Rahman Councillor Bhullar Councillor Rollins Councillor Smith Councillor Anandou
George and Thomas Henry Salter Trust	1 year expiring annual meeting	The Mayor	The Mayor
Harborne Parish Lands Charity	4 years expiring July 2025 4 years expiring annual council 2027	Councillor Hinchliff Vacant	Councillor Hinchliff Councillor Hemingway

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
Leonard Andrews Poole Trust	1 year expiring annual meeting	Members of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee	Members of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee
Margaret Westwood Memorial Charity	4 years expiring annual meeting 2027		Councillor Gavan
Rowley Quarry Residents Liaison Group	1 year expiring annual meeting	Ward Blackheath Councillor Millard Rowley Councillor Akhtar Tividale Councillor Crompton	Ward Blackheath Councillor Millard Rowley Councillor Mayo Tividale Councillor Crompton
Sandwell Twinning Association	1 year expiring annual meeting	The Mayor Vacant Vacant	The Mayor Councillor Hackett Councillor Khatun

Organisation	Term of Office	Current Representative(s)	Nomination(s)
West Midlands Arts Trust	1 year expiring annual meeting	Vacant	Councillor Tipper

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Urgent Business

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

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Petitions

To receive any petitions under Standing Order No. 8 (strategic policy issues or which are of a Borough-wide significance if they are relevant to some matter to which the Council has functions and responsibilities, or which affects the Borough, or part of it, or its citizens or a number of them).

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Report to Council

13 June 2023

Subject:	Written Questions
Director:	Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

The following written questions have been received:-

7(a) From Councillor William Gill to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA

The Council are currently investigating the feasibility of the land on Railway Street, Tipton for a housing development. The development of the new Midland Metro line is to have a stop near this land. With the ongoing metro development likely to require more parking in our local area, will the Council reconsider the potential development at Railway Street and work with residents and West Midlands Metro to use this land as a parking facility rather than a housing development?

7(b) From Councillor Hinchliff to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

As this week is Corporate Parenting week what can we do as councillors to be the best Corporate Parents possible?

7(c) From Councillor Crompton to the Leader of the Council

Can I ask the Leader of the Council, the portfolio lead for Animal Welfare - what, if anything, can this council do proactively about the recent government U-turn on allowing Puppy Farming to continue?



7(d) From Councillor Dunn to the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Built Environment

At the Council meeting on March 28th 2023, Councillors unanimously agreed an amended motion on the feasibility of an additional licensing scheme to be rolled out across Sandwell for Houses of Multiple Occupancy. Could you give me an update on the progress being made to bring this to full council?

Question to be heard under urgent business:

7(e) From Councillor Fisher to the Leader of the Council

Can I ask of the Leader of this Council to provide an update for members on the ongoing bin strikes and what measures the Council are considering to reduce the impact of the strikes on residents?



Report to Council

13 June 2023

Subject:	Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021-2023
Director:	Director of Children and Education Michael Jarrett
Contact Officer:	Corporate Parenting Project Officer, Rosa da Silva Rosa_DaSilva@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 For Council to consider the 2021-2023 Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report and makes any recommendations as necessary.




2 Reasons for Recommendations

The report will highlight Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board's progress and achievements for our children in care and care leavers throughout September 2021 to March 2023 where our services have supported our young people in adjusting to society's 'new normal' post Covid-19.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people: The work of Corporate Parenting Board provides an assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services for the children in Sandwell's care and care leavers. It aims to ensure that our children in care and care ceavers receive the right support to enable them to thrive and become happy members of society.</p>
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	It ensures that the Council and its key partners are good Corporate Parents and that our children in care and care leavers are a part of our 'family'. The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report provides an overview of what Corporate Parenting Board has delivered between September 2021 to March 2023.
	Strong resilient communities: Corporate Parenting Board aims to listen to the voices of our children in care and care leavers to ensure that our towns become welcoming places for young people and that they have work opportunities, activities and facilities to give them a part in the local community.
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods: Corporate Parenting Board aims to support the Council's ambitions to support our children in care and care leavers with a good housing offer for them in Sandwell when they become adults. This includes an offer of priority 1 banding for care leavers and a 100% Council Tax exemption for care leavers up to age 25.
	A strong and inclusive economy: Corporate Parenting Board aims to listen to the voices of our children in care and care leavers to ensure they have access to the skills and knowledge required for education, employment and training opportunities in Sandwell. Corporate Parenting Board maintains high aspirations for our children in care and care leavers and aims to support the provision of work experience opportunities and apprenticeships for those children and young people wherever possible.

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Background and Main Considerations

- 4.2 The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021 to 2023 is a breakdown of the effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Board multiagency members and extended members in delivering improved outcomes for Sandwell Children in Care and Care Leavers.



- 4.3 Section 1: Contents page - Outline the structure of the report.
- 4.4 Section 2: Chairs foreword – Introduces the annual report, the purpose of the report, the Corporate Parenting Board’s review and the development the deep dive programmes. It highlights the importance in listening to the voice of the child and outlines Corporate Parenting Board next forward steps.
- 4.5 Section 3: Governance – Provides information with regard to Corporate Parenting Board and its role. Discusses the commitment of the Board to use plain English and not corporate language. It breaks down the continual work of embedding the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-23, the Corporate Parenting Pledge and action plan. It highlights the progress the board has made with the new programme.
- 4.6 Section 4: May and December 2022 Ofsted Inspection – Provide a breakdown of the Ofsted children’s services inspection in May 2022 and the Trust Adoptions services inspection in December 2022.
- 4.7 Section 5: Children in Care and Care Leavers Data highlights - Provides a breakdown of the demographics and data of children in care and care leavers.
- 4.8 Section 6: The Voice of the Child – Provides the feedback received by Corporate Parenting Board from children in care and care leavers through reports from Voices of Sandwell Board and Care Leavers Forum. Provides examples of the work completed by our young people throughout the September 2021 to March 2023.
- 4.9 Section 6: Health and Emotional Wellbeing - Provides the context breakdown the accomplished, activities and Performance information by Black Country ICB Partners.
- 4.10 Section 7: Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health – Provides activity and performance information to ensure the emotional wellbeing of Sandwell children in care and care Leavers is .



- 4.11 Section 8: Life and Memory Work – Provides activity and performance information with regards to the work Sandwell Children’s Trust have achieved to ensure the improvement of Life story work for children in care and care leavers.
- 4.12 Section 9: Education – Provides activity and performance information with regard to the education provided by the virtual school within the reporting period.
- 4.13 Section 10: Skills, Training and Employability – Provides Activity and performance to support care leavers into higher education, employment, apprenticeships, and any other employment opportunities.
- 4.14 Section 11: Access to Services - Provides oversight of the activity and achievements to Support Care leavers 18 – 25 years old to access public services.
- 4.15 Section 12: Safeguarding and Stability – Provides clear detail of the fostering service and placement activity of Sandwell children in care and Care leaver throughout the period of the report.
- 4.16 Section 13: Preparation for Adulthood Review – Provides details of support children in care receive as they prepare for adulthood throughout the period the report.
- 4.17 Section 14: Conclusion – Highlights what the report has achieved and further highlights how the Corporate Parenting Board will move forward into 2023/2024.
- 4.18 Section 15: Note – Corporate Parenting members 2021-2022 and Corporate Parenting member 2022 - 2023

4.19 The Current Position

- 4.20 The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report was approved by Director of Children and Education services and Chief Executive of Sandwell Childrens Trust in May 2023.
- 4.21 Following a full self-assessment in June 2022 the Corporate Parenting Board meetings have been held every 2 months and has been following a deep dive programme. The first deep dive took place in October 2023



4.12 Consultation

4.13 Sandwell Children’s Trust has contributed to the content of the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

4.14 The Designated Nurse for Children in Care has contributed to the content of the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

4.15 The Executive Head of the Virtual School has contributed to the content of the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

4.16 Children in Care and Care Leavers have agreed to the content of the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

4.22 Alternative Options

4.19 The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report is considered to be the most effective way of communicating the work of Corporate Parenting Board to the Council.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. The formulation of the Annual Report was met from existing resources.
Legal and Governance:	This report has been produced in accordance with the Council’s Constitution. The law and government guidance set out the leading role of Councillors to make sure their Council is an effective Corporate Parent for every child in care. This means supporting standards of care and wanting the same as any good parent would want for their child.
Risk:	There is no requirement to engage crime and disorder policies or risk assessment methods because of this report.
Equality:	An equality impact assessment is not required.
Health and Wellbeing:	The work of Corporate Parenting Board supports the health and wellbeing of children in care and care leavers.
Social Value:	The work of Corporate Parenting Board supports and promotes social value for children in care and care leavers. Corporate Parenting Board aims to identify



	opportunities for social value for our young people and supports the relevant partners in pursuing the implementation of these opportunities.
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6 Appendices

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021-2023.

8. Background Papers

Corporate Parenting Landing Page:

https://intranet.sandwell.gov.uk/info/20171/childrens_services/3239/corporate_parenting_matters



Corporate Parenting Annual Report

2021 – 2023





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Chair's Foreword



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Welcome to Sandwell Council's Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023, where we will highlight the improvements members and services have achieved for our Children in Care and Care Leavers throughout September 2021 to March 2023.

In June 2022, I became lead member for Sandwell Children and Education and chair of Corporate Parenting Board for the second time. I am proud of what has been achieved by our young people and partners this year. As members and officers we actively listen to, advocate and engage with our young people. Their involvement in the board continues to be invaluable, with the Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA) chair co-chairing the board meetings. In 2022, there were two key Ofsted inspections. The full inspection (ILACS) saw Sandwell Children's Services progress from being 'Inadequate' to being graded 'Requires

Improvement to be Good'. Sandwell Children's Trust Adoption Services also progressed from 'Requiring Improvement' to being rated 'Good'. These positive results highlight continuing improvement of services and our commitment as a system to achieve the best outcomes for our children and young people.

The Corporate Parenting Board too has undergone a process of review and development. During 2022 a new programme of thematic deep dives was implemented to help us to identify gaps in services and identify tangible goals to support our young people to become healthy and successful members of society.

Between October and December 2022, Sandwell's partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) resulted in training sessions for Sandwell Council's cabinet members, elected members and the Corporate Parenting Board. The training provided further understanding about what makes a corporate parent and how we can become better corporate parents.

In 2023, Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board will continue to champion our Children in Care and Care Leavers and strive to deliver improved services.

We aim to ensure:

- All councillors know and sign our newly redrafted Pledge.
- An enhanced profile and renewed focus on Corporate Parenting through the launch of our first annual corporate parenting week in 2023.
- Sandwell Council continues working in partnership with the LGA to become a beacon for good Corporate Parenting practice.
- Sandwell Council, Sandwell Children's Trust and wider partners, plus the private sector become the 'family business' by offering jobs and apprenticeships to our Care Leavers.
- All reports demonstrate their impact on our Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board supports our NHS partners to put free optical and dental prescriptions in place for Care Leavers 18-25 years old.

Sandwell Council, Sandwell Children's Trust and wider partners will continue to listen, champion and engage with our Children in Care and Care Leavers

across all services. We are proud that our Care Leavers are now eligible for free medical prescriptions and value their continued participation at the Corporate Parenting Board.

Thank you to Sandwell Council Corporate Parenting members for supporting our children and young people and enabling them to thrive.

Most importantly, thank you to all our children and young people for being brilliant and brave and continuing to share your stories, engaging and participating with the Corporate Parenting Board.

We have good practice from across the Corporate Parenting Board, yet we know there is more to do to ensure our children become healthy and successful members of society. Therefore, in everything we do, as corporate parents, I would ask you to stop and question, "Would this be good enough for my child?"

**Councillor Simon Hackett,
Chair of Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board
Sandwell Council's Cabinet Member for Children
and Education**



1 Governance

- 1.1 The report will highlight Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board's progress and achievements for our Children in Care and Care Leavers throughout September 2021 to March 2023 where our services have supported our young people in adjusting to society's 'new normal' post Covid-19.
- 1.2 Corporate Parenting Board members actively engage with young people through two forums, Voices of Sandwell (VOS) for 10 to 18-year olds and the Forum for Independent Young Adults Forum (FIYA) for 18 to 25-year olds. There is a genuine interest in listening to young people's views, wishes and feelings to ensure their concerns remain the service's central focus and drive future development.

Corporate Parenting Pledge

The 10 messages that will steer our work:

- 1 We need more love in the care system, including displays of positive physical affection.
- 2 We want to be seen as individuals worthy of respect much more than we are.
- 3 Relationships are critically important to us.
- 4 Instability and loss of continuity in our lives is made worse through no fault of ours by pressure in the care system.
- 5 Mental health and well being are our biggest worries and the most important and urgent things that have to improve.
- 6 The impacts of the care experience do not end at 18, or 21, or even 25.
- 7 Our sense of who we are is important, our family heritage and history are uniquely ours and must be protected.
- 8 Having our say is essential.
- 9 We have legal rights and entitlements and we are not always being told what they are.
- 10 Nobody knows more about what it means to be in care than we do.

- 1.3 In November 2021, the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG) was formed. It continues to meet monthly with service partners to tackle key actions and concerns raised at the previous Corporate Parenting Board meeting and plans for the next board meeting. The group updates and tracks activities on the Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2022 - 2023 to drive forward the Corporate Parenting Strategy (2020-2023).
- 1.4 The board completed a full self-assessment in June 2022. As a result, both board members and young people agreed to strengthen the terms of reference and decided on an annual programme of meetings based on thematic deep dives led by the child's voice.
- 1.5 In October 2022, the first deep dive concentrated on Life Story work, emotional well-being, mental health, and physical health. Young people discussed how they felt services could help them and shared that this may be at different times for different people. It highlighted the need for consistent support when young people first enter care, free medical prescriptions, and a greater understanding of who should be involved in Life Story Work. As a result, our Care Leavers are now exempt from prescription costs if they are 18 to 25 years old; also, our young people re-named Life Story work to Life and Memories and a full review was undertaken that informed positive changes.
- 1.6 In January 2023, the board's second deep dive focused on education and attainment, skills, training and employability. As a result of the deep dive, we have implemented a Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) Strategy plan which targets 16-24-year-old and those at risk of becoming NEET with specific targeted actions around 19-21-year-old care leaver NEET group.

- 1.7 The board's third deep dive in March 2023 focused on the safeguarding and stability of the child's journey while in the care system. This session provided the board with a clearer understanding of the pathway a child takes once entering care.
- 1.8 The Corporate Parenting Board partnered with the LGA between October and December 2022. Lead members, elected members, Corporate Parenting Board officers and young people all received training which concentrated on:
 - What is a Corporate Parent?
 - What makes a good Corporate Parent?
 - What can Corporate Parents do to raise awareness for Children in Care and Care Leavers?
 - The role of the cabinet in being effective Corporate Parents

- 1.9 The aim was to ensure there is clear and consistent understanding of the role, with each person promoting outcomes for the children and young people within their organisation, service area, directorate and within the cabinet. The Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board continues to work with the LGA to strengthen its Corporate Parenting practice.

Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board Thematic Deep Dive Programme 2022 - 2023

The Voice of the child to lead each Deep Dive

- OCTOBER 2022: Physical & Mental health, Emotional & Wellbeing
- JANUARY 2023: Education, Skills & Training
- MARCH 2023: Safeguarding & Stability
- JUNE 2023: Access to Services: Local Offer Review
- SEPTEMBER 2023: Preparation for Adulthood

2 May and December 2022 Ofsted Inspection

2.1 In May 2022, Sandwell received a full Inspection Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) Ofsted inspection and improved the Ofsted rating from 'Inadequate' in September 2017 to being rated 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. Ofsted was positive about children and young people's engagement.

"The Voices of Sandwell group is regularly consulted on how to improve support to Children in Care, through regular attendance at corporate parenting boards. An active group, it enables children's involvement in a wide range of social activities. This group is involved in and proactively influences service developments, learning events and the induction of new staff"

"The responsibilities of the corporate parenting model, to ensure that those in care and Care Leavers receive the opportunities they are entitled to and make the progress they are capable of: impact is starting to be seen in the incremental increase in the number of Care Leavers in education, training, and employment."



2.2 Sandwell is part of a Regional Adoption Agency called Adoption@Heart. This operates across the Black Country and includes Wolverhampton Council, Dudley Council and Walsall Council.

In December 2022, The Trust's Adoption Services were inspected where improvements were noted in all areas and an overall grade of 'Good' was achieved. Some direct quotes are highlighted below:

"Children are provided with life-story work and books as well as later-life letters, which are mostly child focused. Inspectors saw some good examples of life-story books and later-life letters, which were personalised, and creatively and sensitively."

"Children who have communication challenges are placed with adopters who understand their needs and vulnerabilities. Adopters are sensitive to children's needs and provide individualised care. As a result, children can express their views and feelings to skilled adopters."

"Children are introduced to adopters in a planned and sensitive way. When introductions take place between children and adopters, these are managed well. Adopters are supported to develop strategies to help manage children's feelings and build positive relationships."

3 Children in Care and Care Leavers Data Highlights

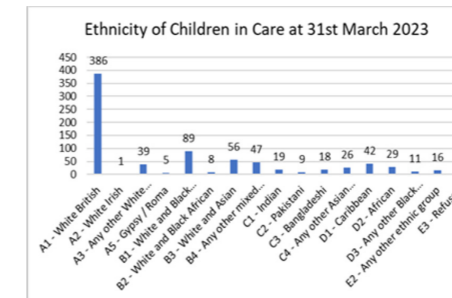
Children in Care

There were 802 children in care at 31st March 2023:

53% are male, this is above the Sandwell 2022 mid-year population estimate (52%) but below the England average of 56%.

47% are female which is slightly below the Sandwell 2022 mid-year population estimate (48%) but above the England average of 44%.

Age Group	Count at 31st Mar 23	Percentage
0-4	159	20
5-9	201	25
10-15	307	38
16+	135	17
Total	802	100



As 31st March there were 14 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC - This was 5 for Dec 2021).

Young people with the same social worker for the last 12 months has improved since September 2021 from 17.9% to 27.2% at the end of March 2023.

Care Leavers

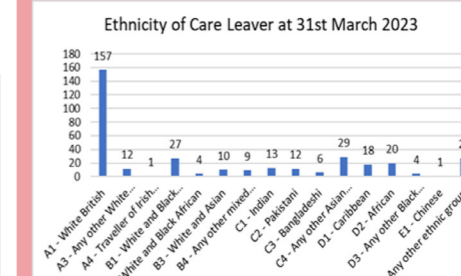
At 31st March 2023:

The total number of care leavers was 350 between the ages of 16-24.

Age Group	Count at 31st Mar 23	Percentage
16	1	0.2
17-18	80	22.8
19-21	203	58
22-24	66	19
Total	350	100

Care Leavers are predominantly male at 61%

with 38% being female and 1% indeterminate.



Accommodation

CIC long term placement stability: 63.1% - This was 69.7% for Dec 2021.

In the last 12 months 8% of CiC had 3 or more placement moves. This was 6.9% in Dec 21.

87.2% of Care Leavers are in Suitable Accommodation. This was 88% in Dec 21.

Health

For Children 5+:

Review Assessments, 65.2% of eligible young people have had their assessment within timescale by March 2023. This was 74.5% for Dec 21.

Dental checks, 57.9% of eligible young people have had their check within timescale by March 2023. This was 17% for Dec 21.

Education, Training and Employment

In the academic year ending July 2022, 92% of Personal Education plans were completed.

85% children in care attend an education setting that is 'good/outstanding (+5% from 2020 and +5% above the national average) 17% of CiC attending Outstanding schools.

Average attendance for children in care at July 2022 was 94%

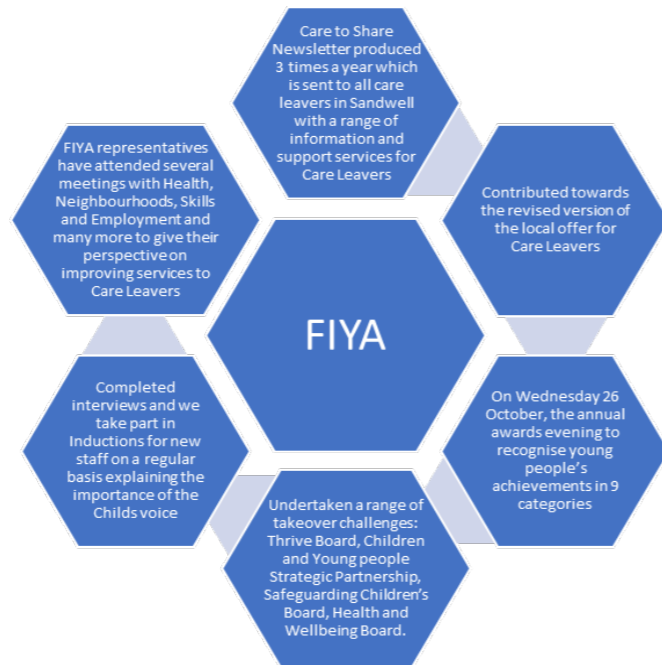
86.7% of Care Leavers have had an updated

Pathway Plan in the last 6 months – this was 68% for Dec 21

45.7% of Care Leavers are engaged with education, employment or training – this was 52% for Dec 21

4 The Voice of the Child

- 4.1 Voices of Sandwell are a group of young people aged 10 to 18 who have experienced the care system first-hand. Meeting every fortnight, they discuss issues that concern young people in care, then act as the voice in Sandwell. They participate in consultation events, attending Corporate Parenting Board meetings and other relevant meetings and activities which concern Children in Care. As a group, they are extremely proud of the progress and achievements made over the past two years and enjoy representing young people's views, improving the service they receive and making a difference.
- 4.2 FIYA (Forum for Independent Young Adults), formerly known as the Care Leavers Forum, is a group of care-experienced young people aged 18 years old and older who have experienced the care system. They also meet fortnightly and focus on matters that concern young people who have left care and act as the voice for Care Leavers in Sandwell forums.
- 4.3 VOS and FIYA continue to co-chair and engage with the Corporate Parenting Board, leading on take-over challenges, interviewing staff, taking part in staff inductions and interaction in public events.

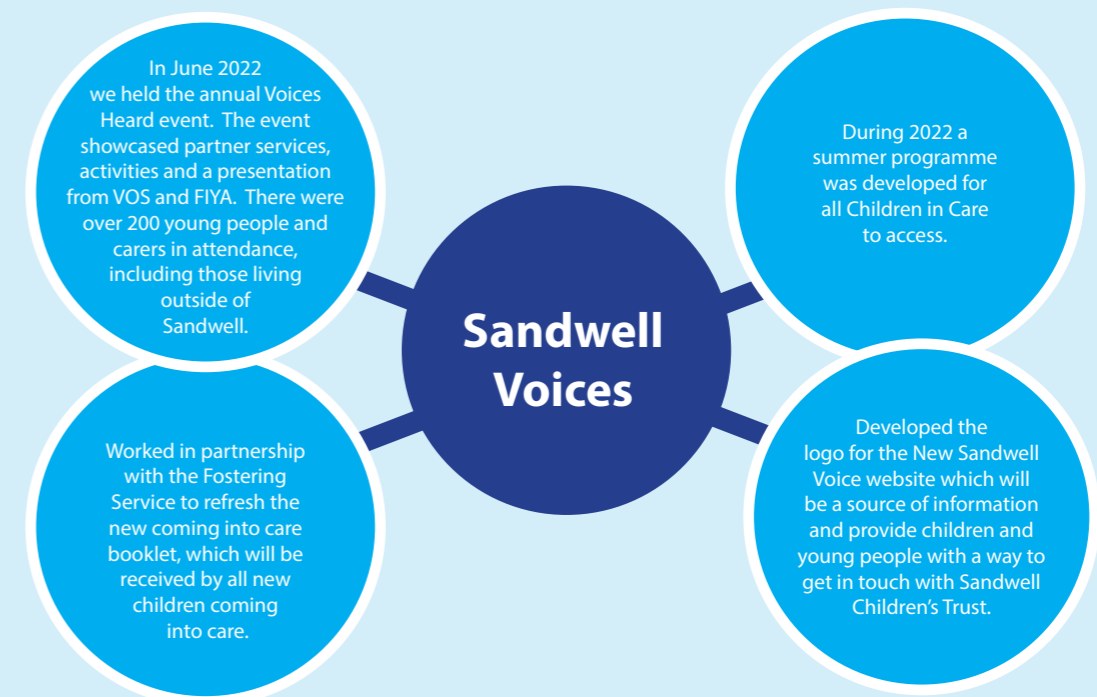


- 4.4 Young people from both groups were involved in speaking to Ofsted inspectors during 9 - 20 May 2022 ILACS inspection. They shared their views and suggestions on how things have improved for children and young people across Sandwell. Ofsted praised their interaction with the inspectors and mentioned the positive impact being made on behalf of Children in Care and Care Leavers in Sandwell.
- 4.5 The Trust's Participation Team and Care Leavers Forum members visit children new to the care system. They inform young people about their rights, how to access support, how to make a complaint and how they can get involved in making a difference through the forums.
- 4.6 Here are some of the achievements made by VOS and FIYA over the past 2 years:
- 4.7 A key project this year was the commissioning of the video 'Care Leavers Project' by Sandwell Neighbourhoods Team. KRUNCH Sandwell raised awareness of issues and stigma faced by our Care Leavers. By working together with the Participation Team and FIYA to develop the video, which focused primarily on accessing accommodation. The video is available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6HUDBD56ho>



4.8 The Care Leavers Project video was launched at the Care Leavers Award Ceremony on 26 October 2022, during National Care Leavers Week. It has been showcased to professionals in Sandwell and presented to children, young people, and professionals at national events. Later in 2023, the video will be presented to staff in the Neighbourhoods Team in workshop settings across Sandwell, to ensure the services which are provided to Care Leavers, meet the needs of young people.

- 4.9 In 2021, the West Midlands Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) and Participation Lead Network undertook an exercise to develop the 'West Midland Regional Care Leaver Offer Blueprint'. As a result, Sandwell is reviewing its Local Offer by identifying key priorities for improvement.
- 4.10 Between June - December 2022, a task and finish group conducted a gap analysis of the existing Local Offer for Sandwell Care Leavers. The analysis identified gaps in the service that need financial support. It suggested lead agencies and determined and estimated the maximum costs involved in achieving the goals outlined in the blueprint. The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group will take the analysis into account and work closely with FIYA and VOS to set objectives and develop a series of actions to improve the Local Offer.



5 Health and Emotional Wellbeing

5.1 Between April 2021 - March 2022, a health needs analysis of Children who entered care was undertaken. This included an examination of Initial Health Assessments (IHA), immunisations, as well as developmental delay and physical health.

The findings were as follows:

- 24% of children needed a referral to optometry - meaning their difficulties seeing have not been explored and correct treatment not commenced before entering care.
- Over a third of children entering care have routine childhood immunisations outstanding, making the child more vulnerable to preventable diseases which can cause illness, disability and death.
- Over a quarter of children appeared to have developmental delays during the Initial Health Assessment, the most prevalent being a speech delay at 13%. Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust children's therapies department have acknowledged the extra vulnerabilities that Children in Care have and responded by ring-fencing appointment slots each month for the sole use of Children in Care.



5.2 The Designated Nurse for Children in Care monitors the completion of health assessments through a range of mechanisms. Six monthly auditing is undertaken with regards to initial and review health assessments to examine timescales of completion, communication and quality compliance. Continuous improvement is achieved through considered feedback and education.

5.3 During the financial year 2021/2022, 93% of Review Health Assessments (RHA) were completed. The overall completion rates for the year still demonstrate a positive picture, despite staff shortages in the provider team. 85% of children entering care during 2021/2022 were seen within 20 working days from receipt of notification from SCT.

5.4 Sandwell piloted the Care Leavers passport app in January 2020. The app enables the user to keep important information about health, appointments, health history, immunisations, medications and allergies in one secure place, making it easily accessible at the click of a button. Since the launch, data shows that there have been 500 downloads from app stores and 200 young people have been provided with a paper copy. Following a positive audit and feedback of the app, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) is supporting an update, making it available to all Care Leavers across the Black Country.

5.5 The nursing team holds a 'drop-in' health session for Care Leavers at the Metsec Building. In June 2022, it was reinstated following the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.6 By March 2023, there were 14 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in care. When entering care, they receive a welcome pack and their health needs are assessed.



5.7 Data has shown a downward trend in the percentage of children over 5 who received a dental assessment within the last 12 months. The Designated Nurses have worked collaboratively with a paediatric dentist from NHSE to create a Child in Care dental pathway.

5.8 Black Country ICB agreed to free medical prescriptions to our Care Leavers (18-25) in January 2023. There continue to be discussions to obtain ongoing funding for prescription pre-payment certificates for individuals who would not otherwise be eligible for free prescriptions.

5.9 In 2022, 142 young people entered care with 62 having their initial health assessment completed within the timescale (44%). For review assessments, 82.9% of eligible young people have had their assessment, and 42.2% have had their dental check within the timescale, by December 2022.



6 Emotional Well-being and Mental Health

- 6.1 Children in Care and Care Leavers have said that their mental health and emotional well-being is a key concern for them, and this has therefore been made a priority within the Children and Family Strategic Partnership and the multi-agency Thrive Board (Led by the ICB and Sandwell Council).
- 6.2 The Children in Care Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CIC CAMHS) has streamlined the referral pathway to access the service, reducing delays for young people receiving support, as part of the task and finish group. This group collaborates on the care leaver blueprint and the corporate parenting plan.
- 6.3 The CiC CAMHS service provides an integrated and consistent approach to children and young people by placing the child at the centre of care provided. The clinicians have received specialist training in approaches that are evidence-based for the highly complex needs of Children in Care. They are also able to access specialist medical expertise. In the past, this team has consisted of 2.4 full-time equivalent multidisciplinary team members, with the

consultant psychologist providing clinical guidance and the CAMHS Sandwell service manager overseeing operations. This year's investment in transformation has allowed the staff to grow to 4.4 full-time equivalents. With the new transformation investment, the team is now effectively working within a 10-week target, whereas before the investment, the team was successfully meeting the national target of 18 weeks for referral to the first appointment.

- 6.4 Due to a move to a new information system in March 2022, Children in Care data was not reliable and therefore not reportable. Steps are being taken to resolve this. Currently, all referrals are seen within the 10-week target and there are only two children waiting to be allocated post assessment.
- 6.5 The team provided attachment training and Nurturing Attachments and Complex Trauma Training programme to foster carers who care for children/young people who meet the criteria for specialist CAMHS. With the help of this training programme carers can provide parenting that is attachment focused.

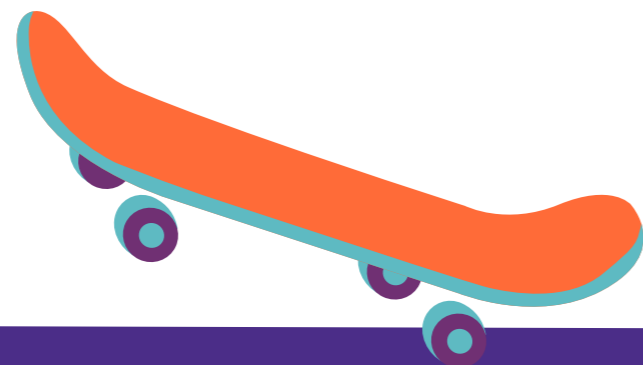


- 6.6 In August 2022, a CAMHS clinical specialist for external placements was employed. The role will be to attend the panel and work closely with all children and young people funded and to need funding from health commissioning. This specialist will closely monitor all placements to confirm the quality assurance and therapeutic interventions provided.
- 6.7 CAMHS Children in Care professionals provide social workers with fortnightly 3-hour drop-in sessions. Depending on the level of complexity three to five cases are reviewed per session, allowing for more systemic and psychological thinking. The cases are overseen by a social care manager.
- 6.8 Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust (BCHFT) is developing a new flexible model for transition pathways and has recently employed transition worker roles to:
 - Work closely between CAMHS and AMHS to ensure a smooth transition. This includes Children in Care CAMHS
 - Enhance the offer for 18-25-year olds ensuring the most vulnerable groups needs are addressed. This includes Care Leavers
 - Provide counselling support for young people 18+ in schools, colleges and universities
 - Development of paid peer support worker roles
 - Collaborative working across the system and across The Children's Trust
 - Co-production of service model



7 Life and Memory Work

- Page 69
- 7.1 This has been an area for improvement for some time. Although there are some excellent examples of life story work, this has not been undertaken consistently.
- 7.2 A review of life and memory work took place Autumn 2022, it identified barriers in practice, with social workers and other practitioners needing to gain confidence. To support this, high-quality training, guidance, and a structure that allowed the work to be supported by evidence were implemented. The Children's Trust put together an improvement programme, including consultation with children and young people, foster carers, social workers, managers and independent reviewing officers.
- 7.3 Children and young people have directly influenced the name change to Life and Memory Work. This was a powerful message for everyone, providing a clear statement about how our children and young people view their lives and the importance of keeping their memories whether good or bad. The independent reviewing officer's service reports an increase of Life and Memory Work being completed with children and young people.
- 7.4 Social workers, foster carers and other practitioners have been involved in developing all parts of the improvement programme: 'approach', 'purpose', 'roles' and 'responsibilities'; and 'practice standards'. It also means that they understand why they are undertaking the direct work and intervention, what they need to do, and how well they need to do it, so there is a consistent approach.
- 7.5 The Children's Trust's services have aligned their approaches with life and memory work. All internal services now receive regular updates via communications, Principal Social Worker reflective sessions and dissemination through management and team meetings. The effectiveness of the groups will be demonstrated through the use of appropriate resources, practice guidance and training, and system adjustments implemented.
- 7.6 The Children's Trust will continue to ensure everyone is clear about the expectations of the contribution of each key partner agency, which positively add to this work with Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 7.7 The task and finish group are working on changes to the system and intend to test this out during 2023, with training and practice guidance being rolled out from April to July. From May 2023, the Children's Trust will be producing performance data in relation to the amount of life and memory work being completed.
- 7.8 By October, all social workers, practitioners, foster carers and managers are expected to be trained. Partnership work with our key agency partners will run from Summer 2023 to Autumn 2023. There is a plan to undertake internal quality assurance activity and review during November to understand the quality of the life and memory work undertaken with our Children in Care and Care Leavers and the impact of the improvements made.



8 Education and Attainment

- 8.1 The Sandwell Virtual School continue to have high aspirations for Children in Care and provide every opportunity to access the very best education possible and achieve their potential. This is embodied in their motto - Learn: Achieve: Together.
- 8.2 The May 2022, ILACS Ofsted inspection report stated:
- “Leaders and the head of the virtual school have high expectations for Children in Care. They have worked diligently since the previous inspection to bring about improvements in the virtual school service and have had notable successes in improving the quality of how Children in Care are monitored and supported through education. Most Children in Care attend schools which are good or better and for those who do not, the reasons are clearly defined and in the best interests of the child. Children in Care have a high attendance rate at school.”***
- The Trust's inspection of Adoption Services (December 2022) noted:
- “Children have access to a range of social and educational opportunities. The agency, through its links with the virtual school, keeps track of children's attainment, achievements and progress. When needed, additional support is provided to children without delay. This ensures that children's educational progress does not drift, and the support promotes children's learning.”***
- 8.3 These are some of the achievements for our Children in Care:
- As at October 2021, 49.3% of children and young people were placed in education outside of Sandwell. This is a reduction of 4.8% from the high in 2016 which was 55%.
 - 85% of Children in Care attend 'good or outstanding' education settings with 17% of those attending an outstanding school. This is an increase of 5% since 2020 and 5% above the national standard.
 - There has been an increase of 2.47% in school attendance during the 2022 academic year, with attendance now at 92.82%
 - Schools are being supported to embed trauma informed practices to understand the needs of Children in Care, this has supported the substantial improvement in reducing suspensions. In 2020/2021 there were 145 occasions of suspensions (31.8); to 97 occasions of suspension (16.9%) in 2021/22.
 - Aspire to University currently has 41 Children in Care engaged in the seven-year programme. In 2022, three pupils 'graduated' from the programme moving on to university to study law, software engineering and criminology.
 - 15 Children in Care took part in producing a video for athletes participating in Birmingham Commonwealth Games - Creative Commonwealth – <https://youtu.be/kjrS00dvYVs>

- 8.4 Sandwell's Music Provision is funded to strengthen children's (aged 9-11-year olds) perseverance and self-esteem. Music lessons have been provided to 96 children across 57 schools, with 17 music teachers delivering 30 minute 1:1 lesson. As a result, the band 'IGNITE' have been formed, they have performed two concerts and also at the SIPS Summer Music and Art Festival. There was a presentation evening on the 30th September 2022: 185 children were recognised and 75 attended to be presented with certificates and prizes.
- 8.5 The Sandwell Virtual School has continued to deliver training, engaging 597 service partners and carers, an increase of 88 from 2021.



- 8.6 There were 528 engagements for the Designated Teacher Training, which is an increase of 29.58% of attendees were school staff, 27%, educational professionals and 15% social care staff.
- 8.7 For foster carer training, 20 participants joined Tots Talking for 2-3 years old. 14 Foster carers joined Raising Educational Attainment in Literacy (REAL) for 8 weeks. 6 foster carers attended Bringing different literacy strands to life for 3-8 years old.
- 8.8 **Early Years Foundation Stage (0-5years):** Children in Care attainment rose by 14% (showing a good level of development) since 2021, outcomes nationally rose by +9%. Since the pandemic year 2020, Sandwell have closed the attainment gap by +32%.
- 8.9 **Key Stage 1 (6-7 year olds):** There has been a rise in all areas of attainment for this year group, with increases in Reading (+4%), Writing (+11%) and Maths (+4%), it is clear that attainment has not recovered to the 2019 outcomes achieved. Children with in-school support made significant gains in 2021 with increases in Reading (+27%), Writing (+39%) and Maths (+27%).
- 8.10 **Key Stage 4 (14- 16-year olds):** Attainment 8 is an average score of eight subjects at GCSE, including English and Mathematics. There is a rising 5-year trend in attainment, the average points score has risen by +8.42 from 2019, and +15.62 from 2017. While the attainment of all Sandwell peers' average points scores rose by only 3.5 in points 2019, 87% of children achieved at least one qualification at the end of their Year 11.

9 Skills, Training and Employability

- 9.1 Connexions Sandwell continues to provide independent and impartial career information, advice and guidance to young people moving from school to post 16 Education, Employment and Training opportunities (EET).
- 9.2 Connexions conducted 1103 interventions with Children in Care for year groups 8 to 14 over the course of the academic year 2022. Interventions included advocacy, face-to-face interviews, virtual/online interviews, phone conversations, texts, and emails. Action planning workshops were held for individuals in year 8, 9 and 11 who aspire to progress to higher education or universities.
- 9.3 Apprenticeships are a great route into employment for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Sandwell Council is committed to offering apprenticeship opportunities, with a minimum of 3 ringfenced per year. To make apprenticeships more accessible, adjustments are made to the standard recruitment practice including guaranteed interviews, working interviews and coaching sessions with advisors.
- 9.4 The Think Sandwell employment team works with Children in Care and Care Leavers to help them decide on the appropriate apprenticeship including offers of work experience in a variety of departments and disciplines. The team helps support opportunities within Sandwell Council as well as local employers utilising reverse marketing to sell the skills of the young person. Generating employment opportunities with local employers is vital to ensuring a wealth of opportunity is offered to our Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 9.5 Whether apprenticeships are internal or external, all Children in Care and Care Leavers apprentices are provided with mentoring in the workplace and support with their onward journey into sustainable employment.



- 9.6 Sandwell Council has a Child in Care and care leaver NEET strategy which sets out how collectively Sandwell Council, the Trust and their partners aim to tackle NEET in the borough, including the key priorities and reaching targets to be achieved.
- 9.7 In Sandwell we have a multi-agency NEET panel which encompasses the Children's Trust, the Education team, Connexions, Employment and Skills and Department for Work and Pension (DWP) where required. This is an example of joint working which puts the Children in Care or care leaver at the centre, allowing key professionals to add to the career journey of the young person and warm referrals to take place.
- 9.8 A dedicated Connexions adviser is allocated for 16-18-year olds who are NEET, with the Think Sandwell employment team continuing the journey from 19 plus. The Impact Project can also offer support for those aged 16-29 delivering bespoke training opportunities which can assist Children in Care and Care Leavers.



9.9 Sandwell Council is utilising social value to leverage opportunities for our Children in Care and Care Leavers. Sandwell Council is placing commitments on large developers awarded large contracts in Sandwell, giving them key performance indicators (KPIs) to work to. These KPIs are put into an employment and skills action plan, which determines what the provider needs to deliver. For example, how many work experience opportunities, school experiences, apprenticeships, and job opportunities they need to meet.

- 9.10 As part of social value, Sandwell Council can use this to leverage additional opportunities for Children in Care with the contractor and their supply chain. Often, the supply chain has more options than the main contractor and can be a local employer established in the community.
- 9.11 A good example of a social value opportunity is the opportunity generated with the organisation rolling out the 'Mail it' system in Sandwell Council. DSI Billing Services Limited Group are offering an employer experience day to a group of 18-24 Children in Care and Care Leavers offering an insight into their business with the potential of following sponsorship opportunities. Meetings were held with DSI in January 2023 with the experience day due to take place in May 2023.



10 Access to Services

- 10.1 The Children's Trust's HOME Programme continues to be a success using training flats to provide a steppingstone to independent living and is usually accessed by 17-18-year olds. It aims to assist Care Leavers to live independently in their own home by providing intensive, housing-related support tailored to their specific needs, assisting them to transition to independent living.
- 10.2 Young people receive support to become tenancy ready. At this stage, they have the choice to either stay in their training flat and take on the tenancy or bid for alternative council housing with Band 1 priority. The programme manages 25 flats and Housing replenish the stock as and when required.
- 10.3 In 2022, 11 young people moved on, 8 young people have moved on to their own tenancy (4 converting their flat into a tenancy and 4 bidding for an alternative tenancy) 1 has moved on to university, 1 has got married and moved in with family, and 1 has struggled to maintain a training flat and has moved in with family. 16 young people have moved into flats in the last 12 months.
- 10.4 Young people usually need 12 months in a training flat before they become tenancy ready. In addition to this resource, we have access to a crash pad, which is a 2-bedroom flat which can be utilised in an emergency to help prevent homelessness for our Care Leavers.
- 10.5 Staying put arrangements for former foster children who wish to continue living with their foster carer after they turn 18 until they are 21 years old. The child's social worker will discuss with the young person and carers about staying put before their 18th birthday.
- 10.6 The accommodation officer will oversee the arrangement for the duration, with regular supervision offered, including extra support from their personal advisor (PA). There are currently 59 Staying Put arrangements, including Care Leavers who are job seeking, working or studying in further education.
- 10.7 Some arrangements are outside of Sandwell, allowing the young person to remain in the area they have lived in, while continuing their education or progress with work until they are ready for independent living. It allows for those Care Leavers attending university to come home during the vacation periods. It helps promote lifelong links for our young people as they leave care. Staying Put is also useful for those Care Leavers who feel they are not quite ready to move on and need time to develop their independence skills.

11 Safeguarding and Stability

- 11.1 SCT Fostering Service offer placements to Sandwell Children in Care although it is no longer part of Sandwell Council. The agency is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and its fostering arm is called Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering.
- 11.2 The Fostering service continues to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster families for children who are unable to live at home. Wherever possible and where safe to do so, children will be placed with someone from their extended family or a close family friend, "friends and family" foster placements.
- 11.3 The agency has an annual recruitment and publicity strategy which focuses on recruitment of foster carers who can meet the needs of Children in Care in the borough. During the period April 22 to March 2023, 14 new carers were approved which is increase of two families compared to the previous year. Between April 2022-March 2023, 10 Connected families were approved.
- 11.4 The sufficiency strategy includes:
 - Recruitment and marketing strategy
 - Establish specialist carer provision
 - Establish Training programme and support for internal foster carers
 - Improved matching and alignment of work with Commissioning team
 - Larger bedroom properties for internal carers – discussions with Sandwell Council
 - Development of investment to save proposals to improve the offer to Foster Carers
 - Use of dedicated space for foster carers to come together
 - Extension of Employee Benefits Scheme to Foster Carers

- 11.5 A bank of Independent Assessing Social workers has been appointed to assist in the growing demand for fostering assessments. This will increase our local caring capacity and reduce the need for young people to be placed out of borough.
- 11.6 The Fostering service has a fostering panel constituted in accordance with regulation 23 of the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair are independent people, well established members, with professional experience of fostering.
- 11.7 They are supported by the Panel Adviser, who ensures the service maintains "a central list" of panel members. To support and develop our foster carers there is an annual training plan to ensure foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care.
- 11.8 Children will be visited in placement by both their own social worker and the foster carer's supervising social worker. Children will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about the foster placement and experience of living with the fostering family.
- 11.9 The fostering team is committed to providing and promoting safe, stable and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances for looked after children are positive. Ensuring we are providing high quality placements to meet the assessed and diverse needs of looked after children and young people.
- 11.10 The cultural background, religion and language of looked after children and young people and the needs of disabled children are fully recognised and promoted when placement decisions are made.

- 11.11 The Fostering Service has 97 mainstream fostering families caring for 136 children, and 73 family and friend's carers looking after 158 children. Our largest number of children are with family and friend's carers.
- 11.12 The child's placement needs are paramount in the matching process. As far as possible we aim to place children within Sandwell so that contact with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services can be kept.
- 11.13 To ensure we can keep children closer to their communities and links there is work progressing towards the development of block contract arrangements (referred to as Residential Provider Partnership Contracts) with local providers to ensure placements are available. This is in accordance with the need's analysis. A pre procurement engagement event with the market took place on 24 March 2023.

- 11.14 In addition, there is planned work with Council Housing and larger local Housing Associations to provide existing internal foster carers with properties that have more bedrooms – thereby increasing the capacity of internal foster carer placements. This will reduce the demand for more expensive external Independent Fostering Agencies and again keep our children close to their links in local placements.



12 Preparation for Adulthood Review

- 12.1 To help prepare our young people for adulthood, early planning is key. At 15 years and 9 months old, a pathway assessment is completed, which should be led by the young person. By 16 a pathway plan is developed. The plan should be aspirational and achievable and identify key steps to assist the journey to independence and adulthood. Recent improvements have been made to the pathway plan format enabling a more streamlined approach that promotes the young person's voice.
- 12.2 Relationships are critical throughout a child's time in care and it is essential that they are well supported as a young person starts to navigate adulthood. Children in Care continue to have an allocated social worker until they are 18.
- 12.3 Young people are allocated a PA at 17, with the goal of allocating them earlier. The PA's role is to build a positive relationship with each young person, as well as share details of the Local Offer, explore independence pathways and ensure necessary documents are in place to help with a smooth transition.

- 12.4 They are aware of the challenges our Care Leavers face once they turn 18 and they are available to advise on matters concerning accommodation, finances, education, training, emotional well-being and other support networks. Crucially the PA role recognises that the impact of being in care does not end at 18, and support will continue to be available until a young person is 25.
- 12.5 Referrals to the Young Adults Transitions Team for those who may need Adult Social Care can be made from 14 and if criteria are met, a Young Adults Social Worker will be allocated and will attend Children in Care Reviews to ensure a smooth transition.
- 12.6 Key work continues with health in relation to a transition to adult health services with specific work about the transitions from CAMHS to AMHS. NEET Panel and Accommodation Panel continue to identify key agencies and strategies to support through the transition process.

13 Conclusion

- 13.1 As noted at the report has highlighted the work across Sandwell Corporate Parenting multi-agency partnership. As addressed at the beginning of the report, while we can evidence examples of good practice across the partnership, there is much more we can do for our Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 13.2 Moving forward into 2023/2024 the board members and services aim to:
 - Continue working in partnership with the LGA to become a beacon for good Corporate Parenting practice and ensure that we become more (parent and less corporate) for our children and young people.
 - Ensure Sandwell Council, partners and the private sector become active as the 'family business' by offering jobs and apprenticeships to Care Leavers.
 - Ensure all Sandwell Council reports demonstrate their impact on Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 - Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board to support our NHS partners to bid for Care Leavers 18-25 years old free optical and dental prescriptions.
 - Launch Sandwell Annual Corporate Parenting week in the summer 2023
 - Review the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023 and launch the new young people's pledges and promises.

- Continue with the Local Offer review, identifying and addressing financial implications where appropriate.
- Ensure all social workers, practitioners, foster carers and managers are trained in Life and Memory work.
- Develop an emotional well-being service for Sandwell Children in Care and Care Leavers to support the needs identified by young people.
- Develop an action plan to reduce the number of Care Leavers 19+ who are NEET.
- Develop a mentoring programme with young people: for young people, they are the experts, and nobody knows more about what it means to be in care than they do.



Corporate Parenting Board Members 2021-2022
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Ann Shackleton (Chair)

Councillor Karen Simms
 Councillor Vicki Smith
 Councillor Pam Randhawa
 Councillor Nicki Hinchcliffe
 Councillor Parbinder Kaur
 David Stevens, Chief Executive (Until July 2021);
 Kim Bromley-Derry, Managing Director Commissioner (From August 2021)
 Lesley Hagger, Director of Children and Education services (Until August 2021);
 Melanie Barnett, Acting Operational Director of Children and Education Services (August – November 2021)
 Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education Services (From November 2021)
 Rashpal Bishop, Director of Adult Services
 Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing
 Sally Giles, Strategic Commissioning and Partnerships Manager
 Mandip Chahal, Senior Joint Commissioning Manager
 Balwant Bains, Head of Looked After Children in Education Virtual School
 Erroll Blackwood, Commissioning Manager Connexions
 Charlotte Moriarty, Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator

Young people

Ieasha Hamrahi, Chair of the Voices of Sandwell Board and Chair of the Care Leavers' Forum
 Helen Kimber, Care Leavers Forum
 Voices of Sandwell – Representative

Sandwell Children's Trust

Jacqui Smith, Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust Board
 Emma Taylor, Chief Executive
 Steven Gauntley, Director of Operations
 Carol Singleton, Interim Quality and Assurance Director
 Shanti Eaves, Head of Services Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering and Hollies Family centre
 Tom Davies, Partnership and Engagement Manager
 Rebecca Greenhouse, Care Leavers Team Manager
 Michelle O'Farrell Baines, Children in Care and Care Leavers, Service Manager
 Claire Tate, Care Leavers Team Manager
 Abdul Kahar, Participation Team Manager

NHS

Jane O'Reilly, Designated Nurse for Children in Care, Black Country CCG
 Dr Indu Mahabeer, Designated Doctor for Looked After Children

Other Agencies

West Midlands Police
 West Midlands Fire Service
 Department for Work and Pensions.



Corporate Parenting Members 2022 - 2023
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Simon Hackett (Chair)
 Councillor Piper, Deputy Leader of the Council
 Councillor Nicki Hinchcliff
 Councillor Ann Shackleton - Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board (Deceased November 2022)
 Councillor Elizabeth Giles
 Councillor Claire Mayo
 Councillor Aqueela Choudhry
 Kim Bromley-Derry, Managing Director Commissioner (Until January 2023); Shokat Lal, Chief Executive Director (From February 2023)
 Michael Jarrett, Director - Children and Education
 Gillian Douglas, Director of Housing
 Rashpal Bishop, Director of Adult Services
 Sally Giles, Assistant Director – Children's Commissioning, Partnerships, and Improvement
 Mandip Chahal, Senior Joint Commissioning Manager
 Balwant Bains, Head of Looked After Children in Education Virtual School
 Kelly Thomas, Skills & Employability Service Manager for Skills & Employment Service

Young people

Ieasha Khan (Hamrahi), Chair of the Voices of Sandwell
 Helen Kimber, Co-Chair of the Voices of Sandwell
 Voices of Sandwell – Representatives

Sandwell Children's Trust

Jacqui Smith, Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust Board
 Emma Taylor, Chief Executive
 Tara Malik, Director of Strategy and Transformation
 Steven Gauntley, Director of Operations
 Teodora Bot, Director of Practice Quality and Partnerships
 Sarah Grant, Head of Service – Children in Care
 Tom Davies, Partnership and Engagement Manager
 Abdul Kahar, Looked After Children Participation Team Manager

NHS

Dr Indu Mahabeer, Designated Doctor for Looked After Children, Black Country ICB
 Jane O'Reilly, Designated Nurse Children and Young People in Care, Black Country ICB
 Claire Hickman, Designated Nurse Children and Young People in Care, Black Country ICB
 Wendy Harrison-Frazer, Consultant Counselling Psychologist/Professional Lead for Psychology CAMHS, Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust

Paulette Morris, General Manager, Children, Young People and Families, Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust

Other Agencies

West Midlands Police
 West Midlands Fire Service
 Department for Work and Pensions

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Report to Council

13 June 2023

Subject:	Sandwell Council Improvement Plan
Director:	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
Contact Officer:	Strategic Lead – Service Improvement, Kate Ashley kate1_ashley@sandwell.gov.uk Senior Lead Officer – Service Improvement, Rebecca Jenkins rebecca_jenkins@sandwell.gov.uk



1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council receive a recommendation from Cabinet (subject to Cabinet’s consideration on 7 June) that the Improvement Plan Progress Reports (included at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2), the Improvement Plan Annual Report (included at Appendix 3) and an accompanying letter (Appendix 4) be submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to form the Council’s six-monthly update on progress against the Improvement Plan.
- 1.2 That Council note the significant progress against the Council’s Improvement Plan.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 On 22 March 2022 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced an intervention package and a set of Directions to ensure the council was able to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. These Directions were in-part influenced by the Grant Thornton report following their Value for Money Governance Review of December 2021.
- 2.2 A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022.
- 2.3 Under the Statutory Directions, the council is required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months following approval of the Plan. The first report was submitted in December 2022. The next report is due in June 2022.
- 2.4 Cabinet considers the progress of the Improvement Plan on a quarterly basis and will receive their next quarterly progress report on 7 June. The publication date for Council papers takes place prior to Cabinet’s consideration of the quarterly progress report and therefore the Leader will provide an update to Council on Cabinet’s recommendation to Council.
- 2.5 Significant progress has been made in delivering the actions contained within the Improvement Plan and this is summarised within the quarterly reports to Cabinet and the Improvement Plan Annual Report.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

		<p>Sandwell Council’s Improvement Plan focuses on the governance arrangements of the council and areas of improvement across the organisation. The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure that the council is able to deliver on the aims and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The deliverables set out in this Improvement Plan will achieve long-term sustainable improvements in how the council operates and is able to make effective decisions focused on improving outcomes for residents and experiences of service users. Therefore, this impacts on the council’s ability to deliver all the objectives in the Corporate Plan.</p>
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3 Context and Key Issues

3.1 Background

3.1.1 A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022 to address recommendations from a Value for Money Review into the council's governance arrangements, a CIPFA financial management review, an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, and Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The single Improvement Plan replaced the Governance Review Improvement Plan which was approved by Council in January 2022.

3.1.2 To ensure that senior officers and members have oversight of delivery against the Improvement Plan, Council approved that progress will be monitored by Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet quarterly. This will continue until all actions have been completed, or changes have been embedded into business as usual.

3.1.3 The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. The Improvement Plan report to Council in June 2022 set out that changes (which may include the addition of new workstreams or objectives, or the amendment of timescales for delivery of actions) will be tracked through programme management mechanisms and that Cabinet will retain oversight of changes through regular formal reporting. A summary of changes is provided in the quarterly reports to Cabinet and provided in full as an appendix.

3.1.4 Cabinet have considered quarterly updates on progress of the Improvement Plan in September 2022, December 2022 and March 2023.

3.1.5 The third quarterly update on progress of the Improvement Plan was considered by Cabinet in March 2023. The fourth quarterly update on progress of the Improvement Plan is being considered by Cabinet on 7 June 2023. These reports are included at Appendix 1 and 2. They set out:

- Progress against each of the six Improvement Plan themes including an outline of key achievements this quarter, and a summary of any progress issues

- Progress against the three statutory recommendations made by Grant Thornton in their Value for Money Governance Review, 2021
- An outline of the governance arrangements including the regular review of the Improvement Plan from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Scrutiny, and monthly monitoring from Leadership Team
- Responses to the findings from the Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPFA follow-up reviews and associated revisions to the Improvement Plan
- Alignment of the improvement plan activity to the Corporate Plan and business plans, as appropriate
- The current status of risks associated with the Improvement Plan
- Details of changes to the Improvement Plan as per the agreed change control process

3.1.6 An Improvement Plan Annual Report has been prepared to provide an annual summary of achievements along with details of the impact of changes and measures of success. This is attached at Appendix 3.

3.2 **Reporting to Secretary of State for Levelling up Housing and Communities**

3.2.1 Under the Statutory Directions, the council is required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months. The first report was submitted in December 2022. The next report is due in June 2022.

3.2.2 The draft letter to the Secretary of State at Appendix 4 sets out:

- the significant progress made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan
- the achievement of key milestones including the council welcoming a new permanent Chief Executive and the launch of the One Team Framework (organisational values and behaviours)
- receipt of the findings of the Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPFA follow-up reviews and their recognition of the council's clear progress

- acknowledgement of the amount of work ahead to continue the council's improvement and our focus on organisational culture, customer journey, transformation and delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy

3.2.3 The Commissioners report progress to the Secretary of State every six months and these reports are published in line with the Secretary of State's response. The Commissioners will be making their next report in June 2023.

4 Alternative Options

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

5 Implications

Resources:	Resources to deliver the Improvement Plan have been allocated from within existing commitments in majority of cases. Where one-off funding is required to deliver improvements, this will either be funded from the Improvement and Capacity Fund or from earmarked reserves created from 2021/22 underspend position. Where funding is required for longer-term change, this will be incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. There are no land or building implications of this report.
Legal and Governance:	On 22 March 2022, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued Directions under Section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (the 1999 Act) in order to ensure that the council can comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the 1999 Act. Failure to comply with these Directions may lead to further intervention measures for the council.

	<p>One of the Directions included that the council should report progress to the Secretary of State on a six-monthly basis. This report outlines the contents of this six-monthly report.</p> <p>The delivery of the Improvement Plan and achievement of the desired outcomes will meet the remainder of the Directions.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively deliver its strategic priorities and ensure it is delivering value for money for Sandwell.</p>
Risk:	<p>If the Council fails to take appropriate action to meet the requirements set out in the government Direction, or the Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State do not have sufficient confidence that appropriate actions are being taken to implement and sustain the required improvements, then the council risks not having appropriate arrangements in place to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the 1999 Act. This could lead to further government intervention, increased costs and damage to reputation.</p> <p>A risk register is being maintained for the duration of the Improvement Plan which will underpin the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). This is reported monthly to Leadership Team and quarterly to Cabinet.</p>
Equality:	<p>The successful delivery of this Improvement Plan will require the development and review of many of the council's policies and procedures. These changes will build in consideration of the impact on equalities throughout the development and will include an Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities focus on improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way.</p>

	Therefore, any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to deliver services that will improve the health and wellbeing of Sandwell.
Social Value	Within the Improvement Plan, the council is committed to developing its Social Value Policy in conjunction with the refresh of the Procurement & Contract Procedure Rules. Through strengthening our asks of contractors through this Social Value Policy and linking them to the Corporate Plan objectives, the council will be able to maximise its social value return
Climate Change	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. 'Green in everything we do' is one of the Fairer Sandwell principles running throughout the Corporate Plan. Any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to embed this principle and further the climate change agenda.
Corporate Parenting:	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities include being a good Corporate Parent for the children in our care and supporting young people once they leave care. Therefore, any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to be a good Corporate Parent.

7. Appendices

1. Improvement Plan Progress Report to Cabinet March 2023
2. Improvement Plan Progress Report to Cabinet June 2023
3. Improvement Plan Annual Report June 2023
4. Draft letter to Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

8. Background Papers

- [Sandwell Council Improvement Plan](#)
- Approval of Sandwell Council Improvement Plan [Report to Council 7 June 2022](#)
- Reports to the Secretary of State for Levelling up Housing and Communities:
 - [Sandwell Council Report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022](#)
 - [Sandwell Council Commissioners: second report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022 \(published March 2023\)](#)
 - [Ministerial response to second letter \(March 2023\)](#)
- Improvement Plan Progress Reports:
 - To Council: [13 December 2022](#)
 - To Cabinet:
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [December 2022](#) including LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report Nov 2022
 - [September 2022](#)
 - To Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [January 2023 \(External Review Reports\)](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
 - [June 2022](#)
 - To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
- External Review Reports
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report 2022](#)
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review December 2021 – reissued October 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report February 2022](#)
 - [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2023](#)
 - [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2022](#)

Report to Cabinet

15 March 2023

Subject:	Improvement Plan Progress & Phase 2 Refresh
Cabinet Member:	Leader of the Council Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
Director:	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
Key Decision:	No
Contact Officer:	Strategic Lead – Service Improvement Kate Ashley Kate1_ashley@sandwell.gov.uk Senior Lead Officer – Service Improvement Rebecca Jenkins Rebecca_jenkins@sandwell.gov.uk

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. That progress against the Improvement Plan up to 2 February 2023 be received.
- 1.2. That the CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report be received.
- 1.3. That the responses to the recommendations and improvement points made in the Grant Thornton reissued Value for Money Governance Review Report, Grant Thornton Follow Up Review Report and the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review be received.
- 1.4. That the Improvement Plan Risk Register as now submitted be received.



- 1.5. That details of changes to the Improvement Plan as a result of the follow-up external reviews and change to the Improvement Plan monitoring method be received.
- 1.6. That any recommendations or comments made by Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in relation to the Improvement Plan will be reported to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report provides a quarterly update on progress against the Improvement Plan agreed by Council on 7 June 2022. The Improvement Plan incorporates all recommendations from the original Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and the CIPFA Financial Management Review, as well as the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 2.2 As part of the council's assurance framework for the Improvement Plan, the LGA, Grant Thornton and CIPFA conducted follow-up reviews in Autumn 2022 to evaluate the council's progress on implementing the specific recommendations from those individual reviews. The findings from the follow-up visits from Grant Thornton and the LGA were reported to Cabinet in December 2022 and the responses to these findings are included within this report. The CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report has now been received.
- 2.3 The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. Changes to the Improvement Plan are tracked through programme management mechanisms. As a result of the findings from the Grant Thornton and LGA follow up reviews, new and/or updated activity has been required within the Improvement Plan. This has been managed through the established change control process to form a refresh of the Improvement Plan.
- 2.4 The actions to respond to the CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report will be incorporated in the next update to the Improvement Plan.








2.5 Risk management is embedded within the council’s programme management of the Improvement Plan. A risk register is in place which underpins the council’s strategic risk relating to the Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). Cabinet is asked to receive the Improvement Plan Risk Register to provide assurance that risks are being managed effectively and to provide contextual information for future decision making.

2.6 As part of the governance and assurance arrangements for the Improvement Plan, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board review progress of the Improvement Plan and utilise the plan for work programming purposes. Both Committees are due to consider progress at their meetings in March and any recommendations or comments will be presented for Cabinet’s consideration.

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

3.1 Sandwell Council’s Improvement Plan focuses on the governance arrangements of the council and areas of improvement across the organisation. The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure that the council is able to deliver on the aims and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The deliverables set out in this Improvement Plan will achieve long-term sustainable improvements in how the council operates and is able to make effective decisions focused on improving outcomes for residents and experiences of service users. Therefore, this impacts on the council’s ability to deliver all the objectives in the Corporate Plan.

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	A strong and inclusive economy





4. Context and Key Issues

4.1. Background

- 4.1.1. A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022 to address recommendations from a Value for Money Review into the council's governance arrangements, a CIPFA financial management review, an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, and Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The single Improvement Plan replaced the Governance Review Improvement Plan which was approved in January 2022.
- 4.1.2. To ensure that senior officers and members have oversight of delivery against the Improvement Plan, Council approved that progress will be monitored by Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet quarterly. This will continue until all actions have been completed, or changes have been embedded into business as usual.
- 4.1.3. This report is the third quarterly update to Cabinet on progress of the Improvement Plan.

4.2. Improvement Plan Progress

- 4.2.1. Over this quarter, significant progress has continued to be made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan. This includes the completion of the Phase 1 Governance Review with changes to the Constitution agreed, preparations for the new Chief Executive taking up post on 6 February 2023, approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the completion of the reviews of the Serco and Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) contracts.



4.2.2. A comprehensive monitoring tool has been developed to include both a risk rating for each main action within the Improvement Plan and a progress status rating for all actions. The monitoring tool provides quick reference around which actions are on track for delivery, as well as highlighting areas that may require remedial action or additional levels of assurance. The Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool is included at Appendix 1.

4.2.3. Progress against each theme of Improvement Plan is contained within Appendix 2. This includes a description of workstream progress including progress against milestones and achievements, and any progress issues. A summary by theme is provided below.

4.2.4. Organisational Culture Theme

4.2.4.1. Achievements this quarter:

- Regular meetings of Commissioners, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer, and Chief Whips have commenced
- Mentoring Programme with LGA in place and ongoing
- Initial data gathering has taken place to identify the options for an employee recognition scheme
- Preparations for the new Chief Executive taking up post on 6 February 2023

4.2.4.2 Organisational Culture Progress Issues:

- **Workforce Strategy**
 - Slippage from original delivery date of March 2023 to May 2023 due to slippage in the One Team Framework. The One Team Framework will be approved in March.
 - Scope and drafting have commenced. Many priority workstreams are already in progress. Working towards Cabinet sign off in May 2023
- **Effective Decision-Making Training** (also reported in the Decision Making theme)
 - Slippage from original date due to a revised approach to training delivery.
 - The revised programme will involve roll out through to the end of the current Municipal Year.



- The impact of the training delivered to date is evidenced by positive feedback on how Council meetings and Committee meetings are running.

4.2.5 Corporate Oversight Theme

4.2.6.1 Achievements this quarter

- Q2 Performance Management report considered by Cabinet and Scrutiny. Preparations underway for Q3 Performance Management Report to Cabinet
- External training provided to corporate finance staff
- Realignment to create Corporate Transformation PMO has commenced

4.2.6.2 Corporate Oversight Progress Issues:

- **Customer Journey Programme Board in place and regular meetings scheduled**
 - Slippage against original timescales due to resources.
 - Board members are being confirmed, and future board dates will be scheduled commencing in Feb 2023. Project Manager will be confirmed prior to February board.
- **Performance Management Framework (PMF) - Review of KPIs**
 - Slippage against original timescales due to need for alignment with workforce strategy approval, alignment with customer journey programme and resources.
 - KPIs for organisational health need to be updated to reflect workforce strategy. The Workforce Strategy is in development and is due for approval in May.
 - KPIs for customer experience need to be updated to reflect the customer journey programme.
 - Review of the KPIs will commence from March 2023
- **Programme and Project Management System Implementation**
 - Slippage occurred due to resources
 - Implementation is now underway supported by Corporate Transformation Team. Implementation end date to be confirmed.



4.2.7 Strategic Direction Theme

4.2.7.1 Achievements this quarter

- Approval of the Corporate Asset Management Strategy, Equality Policy, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Strategy
- Progress of the Regeneration Strategy and Pipeline reported
- Phase 1 of the new Asset Database implemented
- EDI Workforce action plan review complete
- Review of Council EDI decision making process complete
- Proposal approved for the next phase of resident consultation and engagement and budget consultation.

4.2.7.2 Strategic Direction Progress Issues

- **Commercial Strategy: Business Cases**
 - Slippage against original timescale of January 2023 due to work taking longer than expected
 - Strategic Business Cases have been prepared and are being reviewed by Leadership Team
- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**
 - Issues being encountered due to resources focusing on responding to reporting of historic EDI issues. These issues are having an impact of the effectiveness of staff networks.
 - Revised plan for EDI strand is in place with re-profiled timescales, and preparation of a proposal around staff networks
- **Customer Journey Strategy**
 - Slippage against original timescale of August 2023 due to resources
 - Work is underway to develop the strategy with Cabinet holding priority focus sessions in December 2022 and February 2023.
 - Next steps are for engagement sessions to be held to capture Customer/Resident feedback to shape the strategy.

4.2.8 Decision Making Theme

4.2.8.1 Achievements this quarter

- All major milestones in this theme have been achieved



- Phase 1 of the Governance Review complete with agreement this quarter to the revised Council Procedure rules and revised Scheme of Delegations agreed

4.2.8.2 Decision Making Progress Issues

- **Effective Decision-Making Training** (as reported in the Organisational Culture Theme)
 - Slippage from original date due to a revised approach to training delivery.
 - The revised programme will involve training being delivered over a longer period and through to the end of the current Municipal Year.
 - The impact of the training delivered to date is evidenced by positive feedback on how Council meetings and Committee meetings are running.

4.2.9 Procurement and Commercial Theme

4.2.9.1 Achievements this quarter

- Implementation of Phase 1 of Asset Management System
- Review of Serco Contract Complete
- Street Cleansing revised plan approved at Waste Board.
- Lion Farm statement of facts agreed
- Chief Officer for Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) has started, and a clear project plan is in place.
- SEND lessons learnt capture reported to Leadership Team

4.2.9.2 Procurement and Commercial Progress Issues:

- **Lion Farm Options Agreement**
 - Issues encountered
 - Delivery timescales for the Expert Determination process are being decided by a third party.
 - The anticipated date for resolution is 24 March 2023

4.2.10 Partnerships and Relationships Theme

4.2.10.1 Achievements this quarter



- Delivery of the Early Help and Corporate Parenting Strategies has continued across partners.
- KPI suite for Sandwell Children's Trust reviewed.
- SCT Review of contract has concluded.
- Attendance and participation with key regional and sub-regional groups (including WMCA, ABCA, and BCLEP) has continued
- VCS Strategy development has commenced, and engagement sessions have been held. This work builds on positive relationships fostered between the council and VCS, including recent provision of Warm Spaces across the borough in community settings.

4.2.10.2 Partnerships and Relationships Progress Issues

- **Partnership structures in relation to transition from children's to adults' services**
 - Slippage in timescales due to recruitment difficulties for this project
 - Two unsuccessful attempts at recruitment for a project manager. The approach will be reviewed.
 - Work is progressing, albeit at a slower rate, without this capacity being in place. Draft Project Initiation Document (PID) is in place, agreement has been reached to engage with key external stakeholders and the Trust's sign-off process has been incorporated into the project governance structure.
 - Next steps are for PID to be completed and approved and monthly project meetings established.

4.3 Statutory Recommendations

4.3.1 The Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review 2021 included three statutory recommendations that the council has a legal obligation to respond to. These recommendations are incorporated into the single Improvement Plan and are embedded across each of the six themes.

4.3.2 In their follow up review 2022, Grant Thornton recognised progress against all three statutory recommendations.



- 4.3.3 To provide an overview of progress against these three specific recommendations, Appendix 3 extracts the key actions that respond to each of the recommendations and they are summarised below.
- 4.3.4 **Statutory Recommendation 1** - It is imperative that senior officers and senior members take effective corporate grip of long-standing service issues highlighted by the findings in this report (including SLT, SCT, the waste service, the ERP system, and Lion Farm) and prioritise corporate effort in managing the issues identified and embed the solutions into the Council.

Progress update:

- Continuing to implement strategies to address the service issues highlighted in the Grant Thornton report.
- Sandwell Leisure Trust – progressing the approach agreed by Cabinet in June 2022 to transfer services to a Local Authority Trading Company.
- Sandwell Children’s Trust – Governance arrangements remain in place. Joint work in place with SCT in relation to corporate parenting and early help. Revised contract will commence in April 2023
- Waste Contract – Contract Monitoring framework progressing well and embedded in PMF reporting. Review of the Contract is complete.
- ERP (Oracle Fusion) – support provider in place and implementation commenced. Project Management and Governance arrangements are in place.
- Lion Farm – expert determination process has commenced, anticipated date for resolution of 24 March 2023. Formal document detailing the respective roles and responsibilities of Council and the developer complete.
- Regeneration Strategy and Pipeline to underpin significant regeneration in Sandwell approved by Cabinet 23 March 2022. First monitoring provided to Cabinet in November.

- 4.3.5 **Statutory Recommendation 2** - The Council must ensure that the learning in relation to commercial decisions, procurement and contract management highlighted in this report are understood through the organisation.



Progress Update

- The first phase of the Governance Review has completed with approval granted to the revised Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules, thresholds for decisions, Sale of Land and Buildings Protocol, Scheme of delegations and refresh
- Corporate Governance Training - Programme of training and development commenced in September 2022 on effective decision-making, good governance, and revised contract procedure rules. Next phase of Corporate Governance Development is being planned for roll out during 2023-2024.
- Commercial Strategy in draft and due to be considered by Cabinet in March 2023.
- Corporate Asset Management Strategy approved by Cabinet in November 2023.

4.3.6 **Statutory Recommendation 3** - Senior leadership, both officers and members, must demonstrate that they can continue to work together effectively, that they operate in line with the Council's values, codes, policies and procedures, and that there is zero tolerance to inappropriate behaviours. This includes changing the organisational culture in relation to complaints so that they restore balance and proportionality.

Progress Update

- Member Development – New Member induction complete and Member Development Programme is being delivered and regularly reviewed by Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee. Next update to the Member Development Programme is due to be agreed in March which will incorporate analysis of Members' Personal Development Plans.
- Officer Development – A consolidated programme of fundamental training for managers on Corporate Governance matters has commenced. A broader Management Development Programme will be rolled out in 2023 following the approval of the Workforce Strategy.
- Organisational Culture – Extensive engagement held and in final stages of developing the One Team Framework (Values and Behaviours). Due for approval in March 2023.
- Meeting structures to facilitate Cabinet Member and Leadership Team cross-working in place and meeting needs.



4.4 Reporting Framework, Governance and Assurance

- 4.4.1 To ensure that senior officers and members have oversight of delivery, Council approved the reporting mechanism for the Improvement Plan in June 2022. This set out that progress will be monitored by Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet quarterly until all actions have been completed, or changes have been embedded into business as usual. The diagram included at Appendix 4 sets out the governance framework.
- 4.4.2 This report forms the third quarterly update to Cabinet on the Improvement Plan. Leadership Team have reviewed progress against the plan every month.
- 4.4.3 The Government Directions require reporting on the delivery of the Improvement Plan at six monthly intervals to the Secretary of State from the council and the Commissioners. The last report was made in December 2022. The next report is due June 2023
- 4.4.4 Member-led committees, such as the Governance & Constitution Review Committee, Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and Scrutiny Committees, are used for providing a steer and maintaining oversight of the actions and implementation of the Improvement Plan.
- 4.4.5 The Governance & Constitution Review Committee and cross-party Working Group have been integral to the development and review of the governance documents, ahead of decisions taken by Council last year.
- 4.4.6 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee receive quarterly updates on the Improvement Plan and the Improvement Plan Risk Register and they received the external follow up reviews in January 2023. The Committee are due to consider this quarterly progress update on 16 March 2023.
- 4.4.7 Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board has included several elements of the Improvement Plan on their work programme as well as regular reports on overall progress. This has included a 'deep dive' focus on the work under the Organisational Culture theme and engagement with the workforce. The Board will receive this quarterly update along with the external follow up reviews on 1 March 2023.



4.4.8 Following consideration of the progress report to Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, those members will identify areas for further exploration and reporting. Any recommendations or comments from these committees for Cabinet's consideration will be presented to Cabinet

4.5 External Reviews

4.5.1 External assurance continues to play a part in our improvement journey to monitor our progress in addressing the recommendations made through external reviews. Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPFA conducted follow up reviews in late 2022. Cabinet received the Grant Thornton and LGA reports in December 2022.

4.5.2 The CIPFA FM Model Reassessment Report is included at appendix 5 with context and findings summarised below.

4.5.3 CIPFA Review – Background and Scope

4.5.3.1 CIPFA were commissioned by the council to undertake a review of the financial management and governance arrangements using the Financial Management Model to contribute to the development of the council's financial management operation and arrangements. It assessed the council's financial management capability, its internal processes, and operations. It also examined how the council plans its future financial management.

4.5.3.2 The report from CIPFA received in January 2022 set out that the council was financially stable and in recent years has been able to contribute towards reserves through achieving a balanced budget or an underspend, but that the authority has previously lacked ambition and innovation and has a very traditional approach to financial management.

4.5.3.3 The scoring process generated an overall star rating between one and five, five being the highest. Sandwell achieved an overall rating of two stars and was considered to be a progressive two-star authority with an encouraging direction of travel. CIPFA made 14 recommendations which were incorporated into the single Improvement Plan agreed by Council in June 2022.



4.5.3.4 CIPFA completed a Financial Management Model Re-assessment Review in December 2022.

4.5.4 CIPFA Financial Management Model Re-assessment Review – Key findings

4.5.4.1 The CIPFA Financial Management Model Re-assessment Report sets out that Sandwell has improved from a progressive two star rating to a three star rating.

4.5.4.2 Findings are arranged within the report according to CIPFA's model topic headings: Leadership, People, Processes and Stakeholders. All of these topic headings received increased individual scores.

4.5.4.3 Key points raised were that:

- Positive progress was evident and represents a step change in under a year, which is to be commended
- Finance is seen as a key function and priority and there is a positive commitment to the finance improvement programme
- The Director of Finance is well-respected
- The MTFS is now much stronger
- The budgetary process has improved
- The emphasis on business partnering has been broadly welcomed
- There is a coherent agenda and programme of financial reform
- There is clearer evidence of strategic and operational awareness

4.5.4.4 CIPFA raised a series of areas for the council to continue to focus on. Due to the date of receiving the CIPFA report, responses to these areas of recommendation will be incorporated within a further update of the Improvement Plan.



4.5.5 Responses to Follow up Reviews from Grant Thornton and the LGA

4.5.5.1 Grant Thornton and the LGA raised a series of recommendations and improvement points in their follow up reviews which have been considered. Responses to the recommendations are set out in Appendix 6.

4.5.5.2 Grant Thornton did not issue any new statutory recommendations in their follow-up review. They issued 4 new key recommendations. A summary of the response to these is outlined below:

- **Key Recommendation 1** - The Council must conclude the design of Phase 2 of the Improvement Plan, which will focus on organisational culture, values and behaviours required to deliver change, and introduce a “golden thread” aligning corporate KPIs to individual’s performance objectives, so that planned improvements and changes become embedded across the organisation. The Council must also use the improvement building blocks now in place to bring a greater focus on service user responsiveness and outcomes.



Phase 2 of the Improvement Plan will include milestones around organisational culture and the actions to embed a golden thread including refreshing Vision 2030 and finalising Directorate level business plans. The response also sets out that a greater focus on outcomes for residents is being reflected in the One Team Framework and Workforce Strategy. These are reflected through the January changes to the Improvement Plan.

- **Key Recommendation 2** - The Council needs to ensure that the new corporate PMO remains appropriately resourced, integrates all transformation and change activity being undertaken across the Council, and has access to appropriate data sources to be able to effectively monitor the delivery.

The establishment of the Corporate PMO is being progressed with support from Local Partnerships to ensure that we draw on best practice. The Corporate Transformation Office has been established and there is an agreed framework to integrate all transformation and change activity.

- **Key Recommendation 3** - The Council should progress and finalise outstanding actions relating to our previous recommendations, in particular introducing a commercial strategy and an asset management strategy and conclude the service based actions arising from our previous recommendations including finalising the outstanding Service Delivery Contract with Serco, and the creation of the new leisure services company. The Leadership Team needs to ensure there is appropriate corporate focus on medium term financial planning and financial statement production.

The council continues to have oversight of the progress against the service issues raised in the 2021 Grant Thornton review. The commercial strategy is in its final stages of preparation, the asset management strategy has been approved, good progress is being made in relation to the contract with SERCO and the establishment of the LATC. Leadership Team retains a robust corporate focus on medium term financial planning.



- **Key Recommendation 4** - Once all the planned revisions to the Constitution have been agreed, the Council will need to embed these changes and demonstrate sustainable improvements in governance and scrutiny of decision making.

Work has already commenced to embed the revisions to the Constitution in working practice. Phase 2 of the Governance Review focuses on embedding changes and the next milestone is to agree the project plans.

4.5.6 The responses to all the recommendations from Grant Thornton and the LGA are incorporated into a refresh of the Improvement Plan which has been managed through the established change control process. The changes are set out in section 4.8 of this report.

4.6 Resources

4.6.1 In the development of the Improvement Plan, a review of the resources available to deliver the Plan was carried out. Resources to deliver the Improvement Plan have been allocated from within existing commitments in the majority of cases. Council approved funding of approximately £1.768m for one-off funding to progress improvement plan actions.

4.6.2 Recruitment to key positions has taken place including interim corporate transformation capacity to establish programme and project management governance arrangements. Other elements of recruitment are underway. Consultants have been commissioned to support the council's work on organisational culture and resources have been deployed to support the implementation of finance improvements and the Governance review. A summary of the Q3 position on all Council reserves is provided within the Q3 budget monitoring report considered by Cabinet in February.

4.7 Risk Management

4.7.1 The Improvement Plan Risk Register underpins the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22) and is currently rated as an overall Amber risk. The risk register is reported monthly to Leadership Team and quarterly to Cabinet and Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.



4.7.2 The current risk register is attached as Appendix 7. The main risks are associated with:

- **Resources** – for delivery of key components of the plan including the performance management framework, asset management system implementation and culture change programme. The financial resources required have been identified and were approved by Council in June.
- **Organisational Culture** – If the organisational culture doesn't change, this will limit the improvements that can be made. A theme within the Improvement Plan focuses on organisational culture. A comprehensive engagement programme with staff has taken place and the resulting One Team Framework is due for approval in March. External reviews have provided assurance around the positive changes to the Member and Officer relationship.
- **Communication** – to ensure everyone is aware of their respective roles and responsibilities. Communication is taking place through a range of methods including briefings, live events, and regular messages.
- **Performance Management Framework** – to ensure that we can effectively monitor progress and evidence improvement. Each theme includes an outline of how success will be evidenced. Processes for monitoring progress are in place
- **Investment and Financial Resources** – to ensure financial resources are made available resource gaps/ pressures associated with the Improvement Plan have been identified
- **Programme Management Arrangements**- to ensure appropriate programme management arrangements are in place existing experienced resource is being used. Governance arrangements in place for the Improvement Plan
- **Constitutional Changes (new risk)**- If key governance changes (agreed during 2022) are not embedded throughout the organisation then opportunities will be missed. First round of training has been delivered along with revised templates and guidance. Phase 2 of the Corporate Governance Review is underway and this will focus on embedding the constitutional changes

4.7.3 Since the last quarterly report to Cabinet, the following risks have reduced:

- IP9 - Constitutional Changes (Amber to Green and now closed).



- IP10 - Performance Management Framework (PMF) and Data Quality (Red to Amber).
- IP11 - Continued focus and resources allocated to historic issues (Amber to Green).
- IP 12 - Risk approach and progress monitoring (optimism bias) – (Amber to Green)

4.8 Changes to the Improvement Plan and Monitoring Method – Phase 2 Refresh

4.8.1 The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes.

4.8.2 The Improvement Plan report to Council in June 2022 set out that changes (which may include the addition of new workstreams or objectives, or the amendment of timescales for delivery of actions) will be tracked through programme management mechanisms and that Cabinet will retain oversight of changes through regular formal reporting.

4.8.3 This refresh to the Improvement Plan includes the responses to the Grant Thornton and LGA follow up reviews. The refresh reflects that the majority of key milestones outlined in June 2022 have been delivered and an increasing focus is being taken on embedding and sustaining changes. As such, the refresh is referred to as the Phase 2 Improvement Plan.

4.8.4 The list of all changes is provided in Appendix 8. Where new actions have been added to the Improvement Plan, these are displayed within the monitoring tool with red font colour. Changes as a result of the Grant Thornton and LGA follow up reviews are also referenced within Appendix 6.

4.8.5 The changes made are summarised below.

- 4 new workstreams have been added/amended
- 5 main actions, 26 sub-actions, and 1 assurance action have been added
- 32 changes made to action delivery timescales, and milestones (4 of which are of more than 3 months)
- 16 changes to replace/move actions/milestones
- 6 changes made to descriptions of actions



- 1 change to delivery lead throughout the plan (from Director – Business Strategy and Change to relevant Director/lead)
- 11 actions have been closed as the activity is complete

4.8.6 The monitoring method that has been in place for the Improvement Plan since June 2022 has involved actions being attributed with a risk rating and a ‘progress against plan’ status rating. These ratings have been combined to form an overall theme status rating to provide Leadership Team with oversight of progress and delivery issues.

4.8.7 As part of this Phase 2 refresh to the Improvement Plan, the monitoring method has been reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The review included consideration of some queries raised around the theme status ratings and the approach to attribute all actions a risk rating due to duplication with Directorate Risk Registers, Strategic Risk Register, and project risk registers.

4.8.8 Following the review, the changes made to the monitoring method are for action risk ratings to be replaced by a focus rating (to express areas of the plan that are a current delivery focus for leadership team), and for theme status ratings to no longer be used within the monitoring method.

5 Alternative Options

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



- 5.2 The Directions issued by the Secretary of State are a statutory requirement and the council has a legal obligation to respond appropriately. Failure to do so would likely result in further intervention measures.
- 5.3 Reviewing progress against the Improvement Plan enables senior officers and members have oversight of delivery, and take corrective action, as necessary. Alternative methods of monitoring progress could be adopted. The current monitoring method is regularly reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose and provides Leadership Team with the oversight they require.

6 Implications

Resources:	The monitoring of the Improvement Plan is being carried out within existing resources. Council's approval of the single Improvement Plan included allocation of resources to ensure delivery of the Improvement Plan. These resources are monitored regularly by the Programme Management Office and Leadership Team.
Legal and Governance:	<p>On 22 March 2022, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued Directions under Section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (the 1999 Act) in order to ensure that the council can comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the 1999 Act. Failure to comply with these Directions may lead to further intervention measures for the council.</p> <p>The delivery of actions within the Plan agreed by Council in June 2022, as well as any subsequently identified actions, will support the council to achieve sustainable improvement. This will support the end of government intervention.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively deliver its strategic priorities and ensure it is delivering value for money for Sandwell.</p>



<p>Risk:</p>	<p>If the Council fails to take appropriate action to meet the requirements set out in the government Direction, or the Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State do not have sufficient confidence that appropriate actions are being taken to implement and sustain the required improvements, then the council risks not having appropriate arrangements in place to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the 1999 Act. This could lead to further government intervention, increased costs and damage to reputation.</p> <p>A risk register is in place and will be maintained for the duration of the Improvement Plan which will underpin the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). This will be reported monthly to Leadership Team, quarterly to Cabinet and will be regularly reported to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>The successful delivery of this Improvement Plan will require the development and review of many of the council's policies and procedures. These changes will build in consideration of the impact on equalities throughout the development and will include an Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate.</p>
<p>Health and Wellbeing:</p>	<p>The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities focus on improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way. Therefore, any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to deliver services that will improve the health and wellbeing of Sandwell.</p>
<p>Social Value</p>	<p>Within the Improvement Plan, the council is committed to developing the Social Value Policy in conjunction with the refresh of the Procurement & Contract Procedure Rules. Through strengthening our asks of contractors through this Social Value Policy and linking them to the Corporate Plan objectives, the</p>



	council will be able to maximise its social value return.
Climate Change	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. Green in everything we do is one of the Fairer Sandwell principles running throughout the Corporate Plan. Any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to embed this principle and further the climate change agenda.

7. Appendices

1. Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool January 2023
2. Improvement Plan Theme Progress Summary January 2023
3. Statutory Recommendations Reporting January 2023
4. Improvement Plan Governance Diagram
5. CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report
6. Responses to Grant Thornton and LGA Follow Up Reviews
7. Improvement Plan Risk Register January 2023
8. Changes to the Improvement Plan January 2023

8. Background Papers

- [Sandwell Council Improvement Plan](#)
- Approval of Sandwell Council Improvement Plan [Report to Council 7 June 2022](#)
- Improvement Plan Progress Reports:
 - To Council: [13 December 2022](#)
 - To Cabinet:
 - 7 [December 2022](#) including LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report Nov 2022
 - [September 2022](#)
 - To Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
 - [January 2023 \(External Review Reports\)](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
 - [June 2022](#)
 - To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)



- External Review Reports
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report 2022](#)
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review December 2021 – reissued October 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report February 2022](#)
 - [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2022](#)



Report to Cabinet

07 June 2023

Subject:	Improvement Plan Progress & Phase 3 Refresh
Cabinet Member:	Leader of the Council Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
Director:	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
Key Decision:	No
Contact Officer:	Strategic Lead – Service Improvement Kate Ashley Kate1_ashley@sandwell.gov.uk Senior Lead Officer – Service Improvement Rebecca Jenkins Rebecca_jenkins@sandwell.gov.uk Lead Officer – Service Improvement Dawn Webster Dawn_webster@sandwell.gov.uk

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. That progress against the Improvement Plan up to 11 May 2023 be received
- 1.2. That Cabinet receive the response to the CIPFA FM Model Re-Assessment Report
- 1.3. That Cabinet receive the Improvement Plan Risk Register
- 1.4. That Cabinet receive changes to the Improvement Plan



- 1.5. That Cabinet receive any recommendations or comments made by Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in relation to the Improvement Plan progress.
- 1.6. That Cabinet recommend to Council that this report along with the March progress report, the Improvement Plan Annual Report, and an accompanying letter be submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to form the Council's six-monthly update on progress against the Improvement Plan.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report provides a quarterly update on progress against the Improvement Plan agreed by Council on 7 June 2022. The Improvement Plan incorporates all recommendations from the original Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and the CIPFA Financial Management Review, as well as the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 2.2 As part of the council's assurance framework for the Improvement Plan, the LGA, Grant Thornton and CIPFA conducted follow-up reviews in Autumn 2022 to evaluate the council's progress on implementing the specific recommendations from those individual reviews. The responses to the findings from the follow-up visits from Grant Thornton and the LGA were reported to Cabinet in March 2023. The response to the CIPFA FM Model Re-Assessment Report is included within this report.
- 2.3 The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. Changes to the Improvement Plan are tracked through programme management mechanisms. As a result of the findings from the CIPFA FM follow up review, new and/or updated activity has been required within the Improvement Plan. This has been managed through the established change control process to form a refresh of the Improvement Plan.
- 2.4 Risk management is embedded within the council's programme management of the Improvement Plan. A risk register is in place which underpins the council's strategic risk relating to the Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). Cabinet is asked to receive the Improvement Plan Risk






Register to provide assurance that risks are being managed effectively and to provide contextual information for future decision making.




- 2.5 As part of the governance and assurance arrangements for the Improvement Plan, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board review progress of the Improvement Plan and utilise the plan for work programming purposes. Both Committees are due to consider progress at their meetings in June and any recommendations or comments will be presented for Cabinet’s consideration.
- 2.6 Under the Statutory Directions, the council is required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months. The first report was submitted in December 2022. It is proposed that this report, the quarterly update received by Cabinet in March (appendix 9) and the Improvement Plan Annual Report (appendix 2) form the basis of the report to the Secretary of State along with a covering letter (appendix 10). Council are responsible for approving the report made to the Secretary of State and Cabinet will make a recommendation to Council.

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

- 3.1 Sandwell Council’s Improvement Plan focuses on the governance arrangements of the council and areas of improvement across the organisation. The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure that the council is able to deliver on the aims and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The deliverables set out in this Improvement Plan will achieve long-term sustainable improvements in how the council operates and is able to make effective decisions focused on improving outcomes for residents and experiences of service users. Therefore, this impacts on the council’s ability to deliver all the objectives in the Corporate Plan.

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities



	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

4. Context and Key Issues

4.1. Background

- 4.1.1. A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022 to address recommendations from a Value for Money Review into the council's governance arrangements, a CIPFA financial management review, an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, and Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The single Improvement Plan replaced the Governance Review Improvement Plan which was approved in January 2022.
- 4.1.2. To ensure that senior officers and members have oversight of delivery against the Improvement Plan, Council approved that progress will be monitored by Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet quarterly. This will continue until all actions have been completed, or changes have been embedded into business as usual.
- 4.1.3. This report is the fourth update to Cabinet on progress of the Improvement Plan.

4.2. Improvement Plan Quarterly Progress

- 4.2.1. Over this quarter, significant progress has continued to be made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan. This includes reaching a significant milestone in the Lion Farm Expert Determination process and this action moving to business as usual.



4.2.2. A comprehensive monitoring tool has been developed which includes a progress status rating for all actions. The monitoring tool provides quick reference around which actions are on track for delivery, as well as highlighting areas that may require remedial action or additional levels of assurance. The Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool is included at Appendix 1.

4.2.3. Progress against each theme of Improvement Plan is contained within the Improvement Plan Annual Report included at Appendix 2. The Annual Report includes milestones achieved since June 2022, the next areas of focus, and commentary on our progress against measures of success. This provides information around the impact our improvements. A summary of the quarterly achievements along with any progress issues is provided below.

4.2.4. Organisational Culture Theme

4.2.4.1. Achievements this quarter:

- Revision of Corporate Induction
- Effective decision-making training (report writing) complete
- Member- Officer survey launched
- Project plan in place for embedding constitutional changes

4.2.4.2 Organisational Culture Progress Issues:

- **Identify mechanisms for ongoing insight and assurance around the Officer and Member Relationship**
 - A Member-Officer relationship survey was launched in April.
 - The reason for the exception report is that the survey received a lower response rate from Officers and Members than was expected.
 - An initial analysis of the survey findings was considered by Leadership Team in May. Next steps are to identify actions and to discuss findings with Members. Consideration will be given to timescales for repeat survey and reasons for response rate as part of lessons learnt.



- **Approval of next iteration of the Member Development Programme (MDP) that includes actions as a result of Member Personal Development Plan analysis**
 - The MDP is regularly updated and approved by Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee. A delegation has been put in place for the Chair of the Committee to agree next update, which will include the updated Member Induction plan.
 - The reason for the exception report is that there has been slippage in the timescale. This occurred due to revisions needed to the Member Induction arrangements as a result of the number of new Councillors following the election.
 - The induction has now been finalised and a new Member toolkit is being produced to support new Members.

4.2.5 Corporate Oversight Theme

4.2.6.1 Achievements this quarter

- Workforce development engagement sessions have been completed to inform the financial services workforce plan
- Draft report and recommendations received for the Corporate Debt Recovery business process review.
- Transactional Finance Reviews completed, and recommendations being implemented.

4.2.6.2 Corporate Oversight Progress Issues:

- **Corporate Transformation**
 - Transformation activity is taking place across the council including the Oracle Programme, a review of business support arrangements and financial services business process reviews. Resources from across the council have been brought together to consolidate resources.
 - Local Partnerships are supporting a review of Corporate Transformation and PMO arrangements in the council. This is underway and is due to report in June.
 - The reason for exception report is that timescales for the establishment of the of the Corporate Transformation PMO, associated governance, and the implementation of a



programme and project management system have exceeded the original dates within the Improvement Plan. The dates did not reflect the review that is being undertaken by Local Partnerships.

- The dates have been reprofiled through change control for the Corporate Transformation PMO to be established in September 2023 (subject to the recommendations of the Local Partnerships Review), the Programme and Project Management System to be implemented in July 2023, and the Corporate Transformation Board to be operational in June 2023.

- **Develop a Continuous Improvement framework and Lessons Learnt Framework**

- Continuous improvement and lessons learnt activity is underway throughout the council. Examples include continuous improvement around the scrutiny function and lessons learnt around SEND transport and a case study around supporting residents around damp and mould.
- A Continuous Improvement Framework and Lessons Learnt Framework are intended to provide a set of standards, tools techniques and guidance around how continuous improvement and lessons learnt are to be conducted across the council. The intention was for these to be prepared and reported to Leadership Team in June 2023.
- The reason for the exception report is that the June date will not be met due to resource availability, as work on the Levelling Up Partnership has taken priority. The Continuous Improvement and Lessons Learnt Frameworks have been reprofiled for October 2023 through change control.

- **Directorate level restructuring and review of Spans and Layers**

- Recruitment for Assistant Chief Executive is underway.
- The reason for the exception report is that the Directorate-level structure is under discussion, and the spans and layers review is being considered in line with the workforce strategy implementation.
- Actions are currently placed on hold.



- **Workforce development plan implemented for financial services section**
 - Engagement sessions have been completed and the report has been received. The recommendations include a competency framework, which will be aligned to the One Team Framework.
 - The reason for the exception report is that the planned due date of March 2023 has not been met and the workforce development plan is now due to be finalised by July 2023.

4.2.7 Strategic Direction Theme

4.2.7.1 Achievements this quarter

- Commercial Strategy approved by Cabinet Member
- Early Help 'one year on' event held to capture impact and partnership focus on next steps.
- Direct awarded offer to data analysis consultant for the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- 5 Surveys published on Citizenspace (consultation platform)

4.2.7.2 Strategic Direction Progress Issues

- **Regeneration Pipeline: Internal infrastructure established for delivery (strategic delivery partner)**
 - The intention is to procure a strategic delivery partner to support the delivery of the regeneration pipeline. Engagement with one of the framework providers is being carried out and a report is being prepared for July Cabinet.
 - The reason for the exception report is that this is later than the original date of March 2023. This has been reprofiled to July through change control.
- **Customer Journey Strategy**
 - Work is progressing on the Customer Journey Programme with governance arrangements now established and workstreams in place.



- The reason for the exception report is that a small response rate was achieved for a Member-survey around the customer journey.
 - Meetings with Members are being arranged focusing on ward and casework management.
- **HRA Business Plan: Stock condition surveys**
 - The HRA Business Plan was agreed by Cabinet in February.
 - A range of factors need to be taken into account in reviewing and amending the plan in future years including the results of stock condition surveys. Procurement of stock condition surveys has commenced.
 - The reason for the exception report is that only one tender was received through the procurement and an award was not made.
 - The next steps are for the specification to be reviewed and re-tendering to take place.

4.2.8 Decision Making Theme

4.2.8.1 Achievements this quarter

- All major milestones in this theme have been achieved

4.2.8.2 Decision Making Progress Issues

- No issues in this theme

4.2.9 Procurement and Commercial Theme

4.2.9.1 Achievements this quarter

- Lion Farm key milestone in Expert Determination process reached and moved to business as usual for managing at directorate level and reporting to Leadership Team and members at an appropriate point in the future.

4.2.9.2 Procurement and Commercial Progress Issues:

- **Performance Management System: Options Appraisal**
 - A performance management system is being explored to support business intelligence across the council and facilitate reporting within the performance management framework.



- The reason for the exception report is that the original timescales to bring forward an options appraisal have been delayed due to resources.
- Resources and a project plan are now in place. The options appraisal includes consideration of utilisation of current systems/tools, including Verto, Oracle Fusion and Power BI or the procurement of a new Performance Management System.
- The options appraisal is due to be completed by August 2023, with recommendation to Leadership Team to follow.

4.2.10 Partnerships and Relationships Theme

4.2.10.1 Achievements this quarter

- SCT performance reports considered by Children and Education Scrutiny Board

4.2.10.2 Partnerships and Relationships Progress Issues

- **Consultation on VCS Draft Strategy**
 - A VCS Strategy is being prepared for approval in Autumn.
 - The reason for the exception report is that the strategy is being developed over a longer period to enable a more fundamental look at the relationship with the VCS to take place. An annual report is being prepared focusing on investment and impact. A Cabinet session is then planned for June / July, with the strategy due for approval in Autumn 2023.

4.3 Statutory Recommendations

4.3.1 The Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review 2021 included three statutory recommendations that the council has a legal obligation to respond to. These recommendations are incorporated into the single Improvement Plan and are embedded across each of the six themes.

4.3.2 In their follow up review 2022, Grant Thornton recognised progress against all three statutory recommendations.



4.3.3 To provide an overview of progress against these three specific recommendations, Appendix 3 extracts the key actions that respond to each of the recommendations and they are summarised below.

4.3.4 **Statutory Recommendation 1** - It is imperative that senior officers and senior members take effective corporate grip of long-standing service issues highlighted by the findings in this report (including SLT, SCT, the waste service, the ERP system, and Lion Farm) and prioritise corporate effort in managing the issues identified and embed the solutions into the Council.

Progress update:

- Continuing to implement strategies to address the service issues highlighted in the Grant Thornton report.
- Sandwell Leisure Trust – progressing the approach agreed by Cabinet in June 2022 to transfer services to a Local Authority Trading Company.
- Sandwell Children’s Trust – Governance arrangements remain in place. Joint work in place with SCT in relation to corporate parenting and early help. Revised contract commenced April 2023
- Waste Contract – Contract Monitoring framework progressing well and embedded in PMF reporting. Review of the Contract is complete.
- ERP (Oracle Fusion) – support provider in place and implementation commenced. Project Management and Governance arrangements are in place.
- Lion Farm – key milestone reached in expert determination process and has now moved to business as usual.
- Regeneration Strategy and Pipeline to underpin significant regeneration in Sandwell approved by Cabinet 23 March 2022. First monitoring provided to Cabinet in November.

4.3.5 **Statutory Recommendation 2** - The Council must ensure that the learning in relation to commercial decisions, procurement and contract management highlighted in this report are understood through the organisation.

Progress Update

- The first phase of the Governance Review has completed with approval granted to the revised Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules, thresholds for decisions, Sale of Land and Buildings Protocol, Scheme of delegations and refresh



- Corporate Governance Training - Programme of training and development commenced in September 2022 on effective decision-making, good governance, and revised contract procedure rules. Next phase of Corporate Governance Development is being planned for roll out during 2023-2024.
- Commercial Strategy approved in April 2023.
- Corporate Asset Management Strategy approved by Cabinet in November 2023.

4.3.6 **Statutory Recommendation 3** - Senior leadership, both officers and members, must demonstrate that they can continue to work together effectively, that they operate in line with the Council's values, codes, policies and procedures, and that there is zero tolerance to inappropriate behaviours. This includes changing the organisational culture in relation to complaints so that they restore balance and proportionality.

Progress Update

- Member Development – New Member induction arrangements are in place. Member Development Programme is being regularly reviewed by Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee.
- Officer Development – A consolidated programme of fundamental training for managers on Corporate Governance matters has commenced. A broader Management Development Programme will be rolled out in 2023 following the approval of the Workforce Strategy.
- Organisational Culture – Extensive engagement held to inform the One Team Framework (Values and Behaviours) which was approved in March 2023. Launch of values and behaviours taking place.
- Meeting structures to facilitate Cabinet Member and Leadership Team cross-working in place and meeting needs.

4.4 Reporting Framework, Governance and Assurance

4.4.1 To ensure that senior officers and members have oversight of delivery, Council approved the reporting mechanism for the Improvement Plan in June 2022. This set out that progress will be monitored by Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet quarterly until all actions have been completed, or changes have been embedded into business as



usual. The diagram included at Appendix 4 sets out the governance framework.

- 4.4.2 This report forms the fourth quarterly update to Cabinet on the Improvement Plan. Leadership Team have reviewed progress against the plan every month.
- 4.4.3 The Government Directions require reporting on the delivery of the Improvement Plan at six monthly intervals to the Secretary of State from the council and the Commissioners. The last report was made in December 2022. The next report is due June 2023
- 4.4.4 Member-led committees, such as the Governance & Constitution Review Committee, Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and Scrutiny Committees, are used for providing a steer and maintaining oversight of the actions and implementation of the Improvement Plan.
- 4.4.5 The Governance & Constitution Review Committee and cross-party Working Group have been integral to the development and review of the governance documents, ahead of decisions taken by Council last year.
- 4.4.6 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee receive quarterly updates on the Improvement Plan and the Improvement Plan Risk Register and they received the external follow up reviews in January 2023. The Committee are due to consider this quarterly progress update in June 2023.
- 4.4.7 Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board has included several elements of the Improvement Plan on their work programme as well as regular reports on overall progress. This has included a 'deep dive' focus on the work under the Organisational Culture theme and engagement with the workforce. The Board will receive this quarterly update in June 2023.



4.4.8 Following consideration of the progress report to Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, those members will identify areas for further exploration and reporting. Any recommendations or comments from these committees for Cabinet's consideration will be presented to Cabinet

4.5 External Reviews

4.5.1 External assurance continues to play a part in our improvement journey to monitor our progress in addressing the recommendations made through external reviews. Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPFA conducted follow up reviews in late 2022. Cabinet received the Grant Thornton and LGA reports in December 2022 and actions to respond were embedded in the Improvement Plan and Business Plans as reported to Cabinet in March 2023.

4.5.2 The CIPFA FM Model Reassessment Report was reported to Cabinet in March 2023 and is included at appendix 5. The CIPFA Financial Management Model Re-assessment Report set out that Sandwell has improved from a progressive two star rating to a three star rating.

4.5.3 Key points raised were that:

- Positive progress was evident and represents a step change in under a year, which is to be commended
- Finance is seen as a key function and priority and there is a positive commitment to the finance improvement programme
- The Director of Finance is well-respected
- The MTFS is now much stronger
- The budgetary process has improved
- The emphasis on business partnering has been broadly welcomed
- There is a coherent agenda and programme of financial reform
- There is clearer evidence of strategic and operational awareness

4.5.4 In their report, CIPFA raised a series of additional improvement points which have been considered. Responses to the recommendations are set out in Appendix 6 and changes required to the Improvement Plan as a result have been managed through the established change control process. The changes are set out in section 4.8 of this report.



4.6 Resources

- 4.6.1 In the development of the Improvement Plan, a review of the resources available to deliver the plan was carried out. Resources to deliver the Improvement Plan have been allocated from within existing commitments in the majority of cases. Council approved funding of approximately £1.768m for one-off funding to progress improvement plan actions. A summary of the year end position on all Council reserves is provided within the year end budget monitoring report
- 4.6.2 The fund has enabled recruitment to key positions including corporate transformation capacity, work on organisational culture and resources to support the implementation of finance improvements and the Governance review. Where longer-term staffing capacity has been required, this has been built into base budgets to ensure sustainability.
- 4.6.3 To provide additional capacity across improvement activities, the Improvement Reserve is also being used to fund graduate placements within the National Graduate Development Programme which will commence from September 2023.

4.7 Risk Management

- 4.7.1 The Improvement Plan Risk Register underpins the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22) and is currently rated as an overall Amber risk. The risk register is reported monthly to Leadership Team and quarterly to Cabinet and Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.
- 4.7.2 The current risk register is attached as Appendix 7. The main risks are associated with:
- **Resources** – for delivery of key components of the plan including the performance management framework, asset management system implementation and culture change programme. The financial resources required have been identified and were approved by Council in June.
 - **Communication** – to ensure everyone is aware of their respective roles and responsibilities. Communication is taking place through a range of methods including briefings, live events, and regular messages.
 - **Performance Management Framework** – to ensure that we can effectively monitor progress and evidence improvement.



Each theme includes an outline of how success will be evidenced. Processes for monitoring progress are in place

- **Investment and Financial Resources** – to ensure financial resources are made available resource gaps/ pressures associated with the Improvement Plan have been identified
- **Constitutional Changes-** If key governance changes (agreed during 2022) are not embedded throughout the organisation then opportunities will be missed. First round of training has been delivered along with revised templates and guidance. Phase 2 of the Corporate Governance Review is underway and this will focus on embedding the constitutional changes

4.7.3 Since the last quarterly report to Cabinet, the following risks have reduced:

- IP2 Programme Management Arrangements- Amber to Green

4.7.4 Since the last quarterly report to Cabinet, the following risks have been closed:

- IP7- Organisational culture- moved to Strategic Risk Register.
- IP8- Impact of Covid 19 on the Project Resources- target score achieved.

4.8 Changes to the Improvement Plan – Phase 3 Refresh

4.8.1 The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes.

4.8.2 The Improvement Plan report to Council in June 2022 set out that changes (which may include the addition of new workstreams or objectives, or the amendment of timescales for delivery of actions) will be tracked through programme management mechanisms and that Cabinet will retain oversight of changes through regular formal reporting.

4.8.3 As we move through our improvement journey it is important that our key actions to deliver the required improvement become part of our normal business. For this reason, the key actions or ‘we wills’ that sit under the strategic outcomes in the Corporate Plan have been reviewed and, where appropriate, amended to ensure that core elements of the Improvement Plan are captured. Cabinet will consider the revised Corporate Plan in June 2023.



- 4.8.4 The Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool has been updated to include a cross-reference to the relevant actions within the Corporate Plan or business plans, as appropriate. This alignment paves the way for our improvement activity to be monitored within our performance management framework whilst retaining the assurance mechanisms to manage progress and performance.
- 4.8.5 This refresh to the Improvement Plan also includes the responses to the CIPFA FM follow up review. As such, this refresh of the Improvement Plan is referred to as the Phase 3 Improvement Plan.
- 4.8.6 The list of all changes is provided in Appendix 8. Where new actions have been added to the Improvement Plan, these are displayed within the monitoring tool with red font colour. Changes as a result of the CIPFA FM follow up review are also referenced within Appendix 6.
- 4.8.7 The changes made are summarised below.
- 10 sub-actions have been added, this includes 4 actions that are a result of the response to CIPFA follow-up review.
 - 18 changes have been made to action delivery timescales, and milestones (10 of which are of more than 3 months)
 - 3 changes have been made to descriptions of actions
 - 4 actions have been closed as the activity is complete

5 Alternative Options

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



- 5.2 The Directions issued by the Secretary of State are a statutory requirement and the council has a legal obligation to respond appropriately. Failure to do so would likely result in further intervention measures.
- 5.3 Reviewing progress against the Improvement Plan enables senior officers and members to have oversight of delivery, and take corrective action, as necessary. Alternative methods of monitoring progress could be adopted. The current monitoring method is regularly reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose and provides Leadership Team with the oversight they require.
- 5.4 Alternative formats for reporting to the Secretary of State could be adopted, however the proposal to submit a covering letter along with the quarterly reports made to Cabinet makes use of existing reports. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities confirmed that this would be an acceptable format to them.

6 Implications

Resources:	The monitoring of the Improvement Plan is being carried out within existing resources. Council's approval of the single Improvement Plan included allocation of resources to ensure delivery of the Improvement Plan. These resources are monitored regularly by the Programme Management Office and Leadership Team.
Legal and Governance:	<p>On 22 March 2022, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued Directions under Section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (the 1999 Act) in order to ensure that the council can comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the 1999 Act. Failure to comply with these Directions may lead to further intervention measures for the council.</p> <p>The delivery of actions within the Plan agreed by Council in June 2022, as well as any subsequently identified actions, will support the council to achieve</p>



	<p>sustainable improvement. This will support the end of government intervention.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively deliver its strategic priorities and ensure it is delivering value for money for Sandwell.</p>
Risk:	<p>If the Council fails to take appropriate action to meet the requirements set out in the government Direction, or the Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State do not have sufficient confidence that appropriate actions are being taken to implement and sustain the required improvements, then the council risks not having appropriate arrangements in place to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the 1999 Act. This could lead to further government intervention, increased costs and damage to reputation.</p> <p>A risk register is in place and will be maintained for the duration of the Improvement Plan which will underpin the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). This will be reported monthly to Leadership Team, quarterly to Cabinet and will be regularly reported to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.</p>
Equality:	<p>The successful delivery of this Improvement Plan will require the development and review of many of the council's policies and procedures. These changes will build in consideration of the impact on equalities throughout the development and will include an Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities focus on improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way. Therefore, improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the</p>



	council's ability to deliver services that will improve the health and wellbeing of Sandwell.
Social Value	Within the Improvement Plan, the council is committed to developing the Social Value Policy in conjunction with the refresh of the Procurement & Contract Procedure Rules. Through strengthening our asks of contractors through this Social Value Policy and linking them to the Corporate Plan objectives, the council will be able to maximise its social value return.
Climate Change	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. Green in everything we do is one of the Fairer Sandwell principles running throughout the Corporate Plan. Any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to embed this principle and further the climate change agenda.
Corporate Parenting:	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities include being a good Corporate Parent for the children in our care and supporting young people once they leave care. Therefore, any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to be a good Corporate Parent.

7. Appendices

1. Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool April 2023
2. Improvement Plan Annual Report 2023
3. Statutory Recommendations Reporting April 2023
4. Improvement Plan Governance Diagram
5. CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report
6. Response to CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Review
7. Improvement Plan Risk Register April 2023
8. Changes to the Improvement Plan April 2023
9. Improvement Plan Progress Report to Cabinet, March 2023
10. Draft Letter to Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities



8. Background Papers

- [Sandwell Council Improvement Plan](#)
- Approval of Sandwell Council Improvement Plan [Report to Council 7 June 2022](#)
- Reports to the Secretary of State for Levelling up Housing and Communities:
 - [Sandwell Council Report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022](#)
 - [Sandwell Council Commissioners: second report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022 \(published March 2023\)](#)
 - [Ministerial response to second letter \(March 2023\)](#)
- Improvement Plan Progress Reports:
 - To Council: [13 December 2022](#)
 - To Cabinet:
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [December 2022](#) including LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report Nov 2022
 - [September 2022](#)
 - To Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [January 2023 \(External Review Reports\)](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
 - [June 2022](#)
 - To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
- External Review Reports
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report 2022](#)
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review December 2021 – reissued October 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report February 2022](#)



- [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2022](#)



Improvement Plan

May 2023





Kerrie Carmichael
Sandwell Council Leader

A year on from the approval of our Improvement Plan, we are proud to look back over our achievements.

We have embarked on whole-scale organisational change at the same time as delivering on our Corporate Plan commitments.

The long-standing service issues raised by external reviews in 2021 have now either been addressed or are well-progressed with robust delivery plans in place. This has enabled the council to shift its focus to longer-term planning. We welcomed follow-up external reviews from Grant Thornton, the Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in Autumn 2022. Together with our Commissioners, they noted our significant progress.

Over the past year our achievements have been recognised. Sandwell's Emotional Wellbeing Programme has been shortlisted as one of eight finalists in the Innovation in Partnerships category at The Municipal Journal Awards. The project has supported more than 2,000 children and young people who are struggling with mental health issues. The prestigious Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) West Midlands Awards

for Planning Excellence 2022 honoured Sandwell Council's planners for shaping the regeneration of Smethwick. Our Housing Team were also shortlisted for an Inside Housing Development award for Best Older People's Housing Development - in 2022.

The launch of our One Team Framework, which sets out the organisational values and behaviours, was a significant milestone in our improvement journey. The five new organisational values and behaviours set out an ambition to be 'one team united and working together with a shared purpose of achieving great results' that is customer focused, inclusive, ambitious and accountable.

Over the past year, firm foundations have been laid and we have established mechanisms and approaches for new ways of working. More of our work is being driven by engagement, co-production, and using evidence effectively. We are also benefitting from strengthened relationships between Members and Officers and effective input from Audit and Scrutiny Committees as part of our One Council approach.

Examples of this include:

- Proposals around Brandhall Golf Course and consideration of the 4-Yearly Election Cycle, which involved resident engagement and consultation, and Scrutiny involvement to inform the decision-making process
- Using our resident's consultation to inform business planning and budget setting
- Development of the One Team Framework through staff engagement
- Developing our Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy through focusing on insight and data

This report presents our progress against each of the six Improvement Plan themes. It contains the objectives for each theme, a timeline of the milestones achieved, evidence of success, and the next areas of focus.

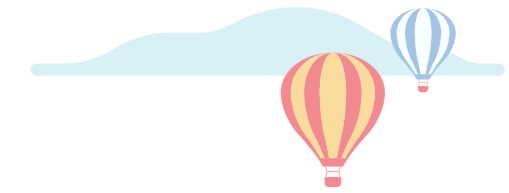
We have refreshed our Corporate Plan for 2023 to reflect priorities raised during our business planning process, the significant amount of change over the past 12 months, and the longer-term activity contained within the Improvement Plan. This paves the way for our improvement activity to be embedded within our Performance Management Framework and to move away from a stand-alone plan in forthcoming months.

Our ambition is not simply to see the end of Government intervention; we're striving for excellence.

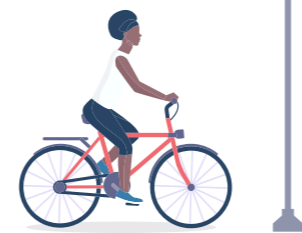
Within the Improvement Plan our key areas of focus over forthcoming months are driving our plans around Organisational Culture, Customer Journey, Transformation and Delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

We enter the year ahead with pride in our achievements and a commitment to continue to work as One Team to drive the council's improvement.

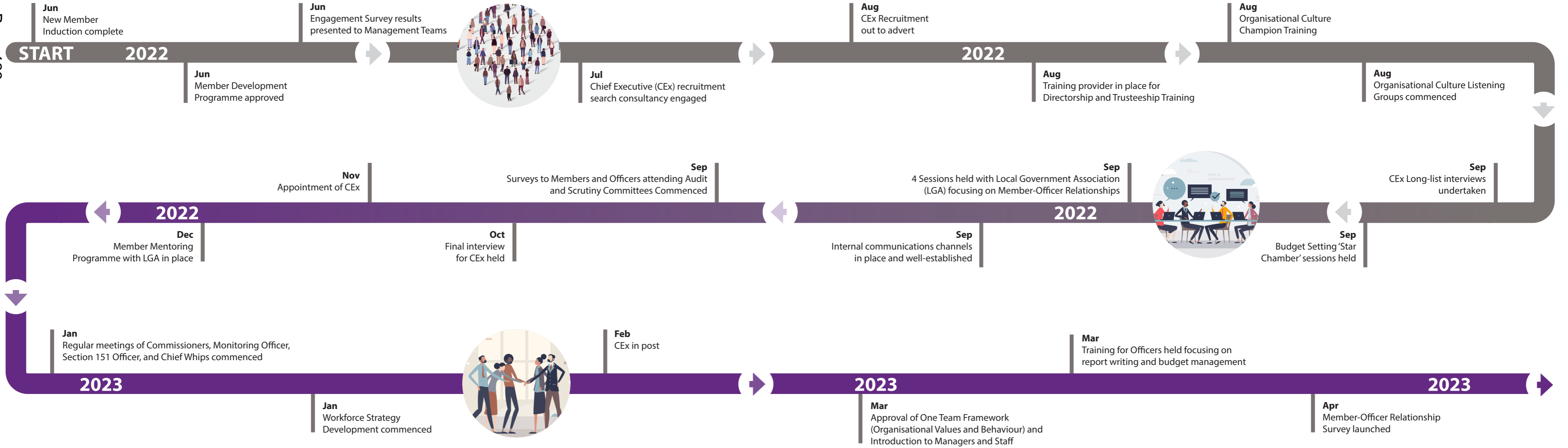
Our progress so far could not have happened without the commitment and dedication of Members and Officers alike and we want to pass on our thanks and appreciation to them.



Shokat Lal
Sandwell Council Chief Executive



Organisational Culture



Objectives

- For Senior Leadership (Officers and Members) to work together effectively
- That Officers receive appropriate support and direction from Senior Leaders
- For the council's organisational culture to change, ensuring sustainable improvement through a focus on improving outcomes for residents, empowering staff to make decisions at the right levels, learning lessons and embedding customer focus throughout the organisation

Evidence of Success

We said that when we have made progress towards embedding an effective organisational culture, we would see evidence of:

- Employee engagement results improving
- Managers demonstrating expected behaviours (via employee engagement survey results)
- Members demonstrating effective behaviours
- Officers and Members having confidence in their decisions
- Healthy and regular dialogue between Senior Leaders (Officers and Members)
- Improved take-up of Member Development Programme opportunities
- Improvements in external review outcomes

The launch of our One Team Framework (organisational values and behaviours) marks the start of the next phase of our organisational culture change programme. The framework is the result of cross-council staff engagement which was facilitated by an internal network of Culture Champions. It sets out an ambition to be one team 'united and working together with a shared purpose of achieving great results' that is customer focused, inclusive, ambitious and accountable.

The repeat of our employee engagement survey in Autumn 2023 will further our insight into how our organisational culture is changing and how well the values and behaviours are becoming embedded. We have learnt from our 2022 Employee Engagement Survey results and we are committed to involving staff in the changes that affect them. An example includes staff views being used to inform policy development around hybrid working through a survey which received more than 1,350 responses from staff and managers.

474

staff involved in developing the One Team Framework



Our comprehensive Member Development Programme has been developed based on Members' needs and learning from previous years. Member and Officer training around decision-making and governance has been well-received and is helping to embed the constitutional changes made during the year. Personal Development Plans have been developed for Members and learning needs are being addressed within the next update to the Member Development Programme.

We have made significant strides in the relationship between Members and Officers which was acknowledged by our external reviewers. Along with training and support, a range of meetings are in place to facilitate a healthy and regular dialogue which includes meetings with Group Leaders and Chief Whips and cross-party working groups. The strength of the relationship has enabled the council to move forward on difficult decisions such as the 4-Yearly Election Cycle, development of Brandhall Golf Course, the introduction of garden waste charging, and setting a balanced and sustainable budget for 2023/24 without reliance on reserves.

We know that culture change will take time. We are committed to continuous improvement

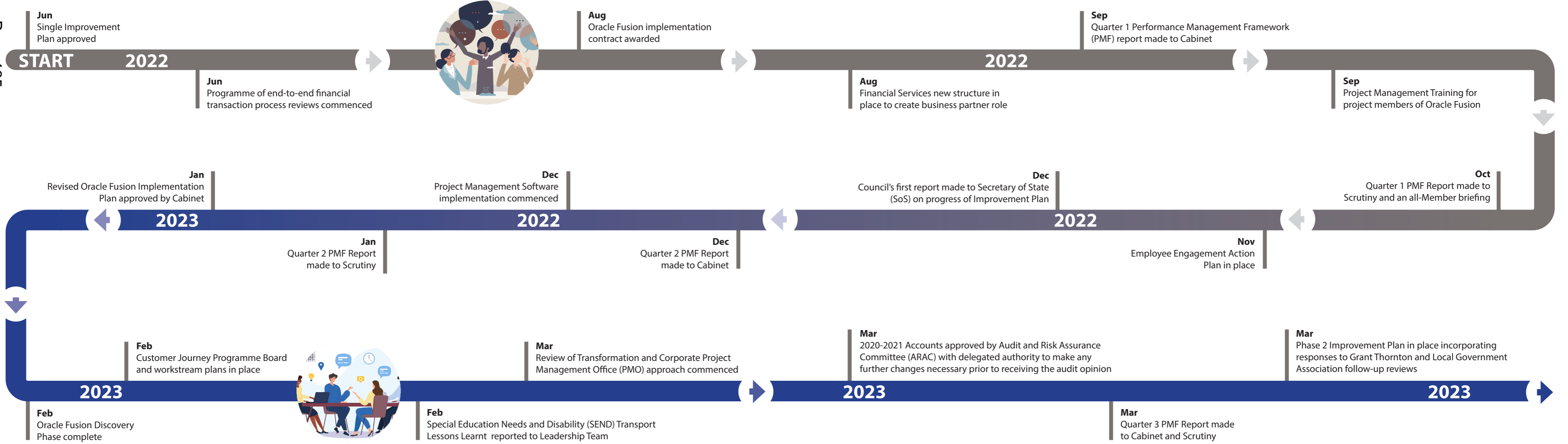
and have recently launched a Member-Officer Relationship Survey to build on insight gained to date through seeking views from Officers and Members participating in Audit and Scrutiny Committees and the Employee Engagement Survey.

'Cabinet and Leadership Team are working increasingly well'

LGA

Next Steps

- Roll out of the One Team Framework to embed values and behaviours
- Continued focus on Member-Officer Relationships and New Member Induction
- Workforce Strategy approved and implemented
- Continued focus on learning and development for Members and Officers to embed corporate governance changes
- Using insight to drive continuous improvement - Employee Engagement Survey and Member Officer Relationship Survey



Objectives

- Take effective corporate oversight of long-standing service issues and the council's overall improvement journey
- Embed learning from service issues identified in external reviews
- Provide a corporate approach to performance management and the delivery of programmes and projects
- Ensure the role of the Corporate Core is strengthened to enable front line services and staff to focus on outcomes for residents

Evidence of Success

When we are demonstrating effective corporate oversight, we said that we would see evidence of:

- Performance information being used by Leadership Team and Members to set strategic direction and respond to issues
- Improvement in performance measures relating to One Council
- Improvement in Employee Engagement Score
- Improvement in the views of external reviews

The long-standing service issues raised by Grant Thornton in their original Value for Money Governance Review have either been resolved or good progress has been made with a firm delivery plan in place. A major area of focus for the council is around improvements to the customer journey and we are developing a far-reaching programme of work linked to our One Team Framework.

'The council has a greater corporate grip over improvement, performance and decision making'

Grant Thornton Autumn 2022

In June 2022 we made our first quarterly report on our newly agreed Performance Management Framework. Over the past year we have reported quarterly on our progress in delivering the Corporate Plan along with our key performance measures around organisation health, finance and customer. Governance structures have been established to ensure regular monitoring and performance conversations are taking place. The Local Government Association (LGA) commented that 'the [Performance Management] Framework, and the information and insights it provides, act as a prime example of the way in which an increased evidence-base for decision-making can be seen in the council.'

Performance information is being used to set strategic direction and respond to issues. Examples include:

- Prioritising work around the customer journey
- Conducting additional analysis around recruitment and retention issues to inform a corporate approach
- Taking in-year action to manage the projected budget position e.g. through vacancy management arrangements
- Work to improve our response rates on Subject Access Requests (SAR) and Freedom of Information Requests (FOI) bringing them closer to target

- Reducing the number of Corporate Plan actions with significant progress issues
- Using an evidence bundle, including performance information and the outcomes from resident's consultation to inform our refreshed Business Plans and Corporate Plan
- Pulling together activity into a comprehensive transformation programme that will improve accessibility, systems, service and embed a customer focused culture

FOI response rate from
62% at Q1
to
82% at Q3

Strong governance arrangements were put in place to deliver the Commonwealth Games with regular updates to Leadership Team. Close working partnerships between the council, Commonwealth Games Organising Committee (CGOC) and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) allowed for the robust management of issues that arose throughout the project, resulting

in the successful cross-council delivery of the Commonwealth Games events at the Sandwell Aquatic Centre.

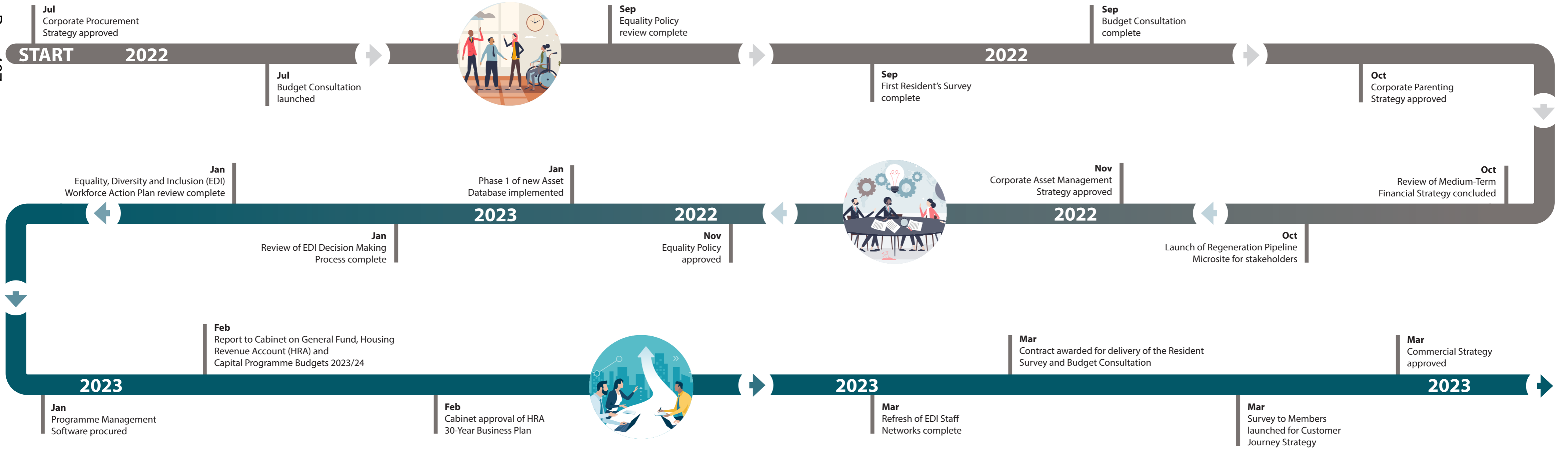
The Oracle Fusion Programme now has a more robust governance and resource model in place. A new Systems Integration Partner was procured in 2022 and a revised, realistic implementation plan and budget was approved by Cabinet in January 2023. A comprehensive Change Strategy is now in place.

We are taking time to reflect and learn. We completed a lessons learnt exercise around Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Transport Procurement. This is informing the council's overall approach to procurement such as through the creation of a procurement pipeline to help manage resources along with revised guidance and templates. It has also informed developing plans around the creation of a Programme Management Office and approach. This is currently under review with Local Partnerships. We are undertaking a lessons learnt exercise with Grant Thornton around the closure of our financial accounts and have sought out and have reflected on lessons learnt from a neighbouring local authority around their implementation of Oracle Fusion to assure ourselves around our approach and mitigations. A standard approach to lessons learnt is being developed.

Next Steps

- Continued focus on using performance information and insight to set strategic direction and respond to issues
- Implementation of service standards
- Creation of Corporate Project Management Office
- Transformation Programme in place
- Oracle Programme 'go live'
- Sign-off of final accounts for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023
- Delivery of Customer Journey Programme

Strategic Direction



Objectives

- Ensure that focus is maintained on longer-term direction through effective strategies being in place to support our Corporate Plan outcomes
- Ensure that sustainable financial planning is in place that is aligned to our priorities
- Conduct consultation and use the findings to inform budget setting and our understanding of how the council is performing

Evidence of Success

We said that when we are maintaining focus on our longer-term plans, we will see evidence of:

- Improvement to Corporate Plan Outcome Measures
- Sustainable Financial Planning in Place aligned to priorities
- Consultation and Engagement Shaping Strategic Direction and Financial Planning
- Examples of Sandwell's national profile showcasing the good work of the council

Through focused reporting, we have demonstrated significant progress on our Corporate Plan, and have reduced the number of areas with significant issues over the year (from 9 to 3, between quarter 2 and quarter 3). In July 2023 we will make our first report against Corporate Plan measures which will further grow our insight into performance to drive our strategic thinking and direction.

The original Grant Thornton Review of 2021 identified the disproportionate amount of time spent firefighting in recent years. In their follow-up review of 2022, Grant Thornton commented that 'by taking a grip of many long-standing operational challenges the leadership of the council is starting to create time and space to better consider the long-term'.

Our strategic capacity is growing. Leadership Team are dedicating more collective time to strategic thinking, for example through our recent work around the cost of living crisis and the customer journey.

We now have a set of new long-term strategies in place developed through engagement with partners. These include strategies around Early Help, Corporate Parenting, Green Spaces and Health and Wellbeing along with the £2.3bn pipeline of regeneration projects set to transform Sandwell's six towns in the coming years. We are monitoring the delivery of these strategies through the Performance Management Framework and we are making a positive impact. Of families who received multi-agency early help, 76.2% were not referred back to Early Help services or Children's Social Care within 12 months. New strategies around the Customer Journey, Workforce and Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion are in development. All of which are drawing on extensive engagement.

We have set a balanced budget for 2023-24 that is aligned to our Corporate Plan priorities. Our Medium-Term Financial Strategy has been fundamentally reviewed and looks ahead to 2026. It identifies medium term savings options, closer integrates capital and revenue planning and we are committed to reviewing this annually.



CIPFA rating from 2* to 3* rating for Financial Management

In Summer 2022 we conducted a Resident's Wellbeing and Perception Survey and Budget Consultation. This has informed our 2023-2026 budget and business planning. For example, residents' preferred way to close the budget gap was to introduce more charging for non-essential services and to make savings through reducing buildings. This shaped our considerations of charging for garden waste collections, and informed our Corporate Asset Management Strategy which was approved by Cabinet in November. We are committed to continuing this approach and have a commission in place for resident's engagement and budget consultation for the next three years.

We enjoyed national and international coverage of Sandwell through the Commonwealth Games, and we are continuing to build Sandwell's profile for example with coverage in Local Government press for the Assistant Chief Executive recruitment, and successes in awards. These include:

1,062

participants of resident's survey – providing a representative sample

- Sandwell's Emotional Wellbeing Programme which has been shortlisted for the Innovation in Partnerships category at the Municipal Journal Awards
- Our Planners being awarded for the shaping of the regeneration of Smethwick by the prestigious Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) West Midlands Awards for Planning Excellence 2022
- Our Housing Team being shortlisted for an Inside Housing Development award for Best Older People's Housing Development - in 2022.

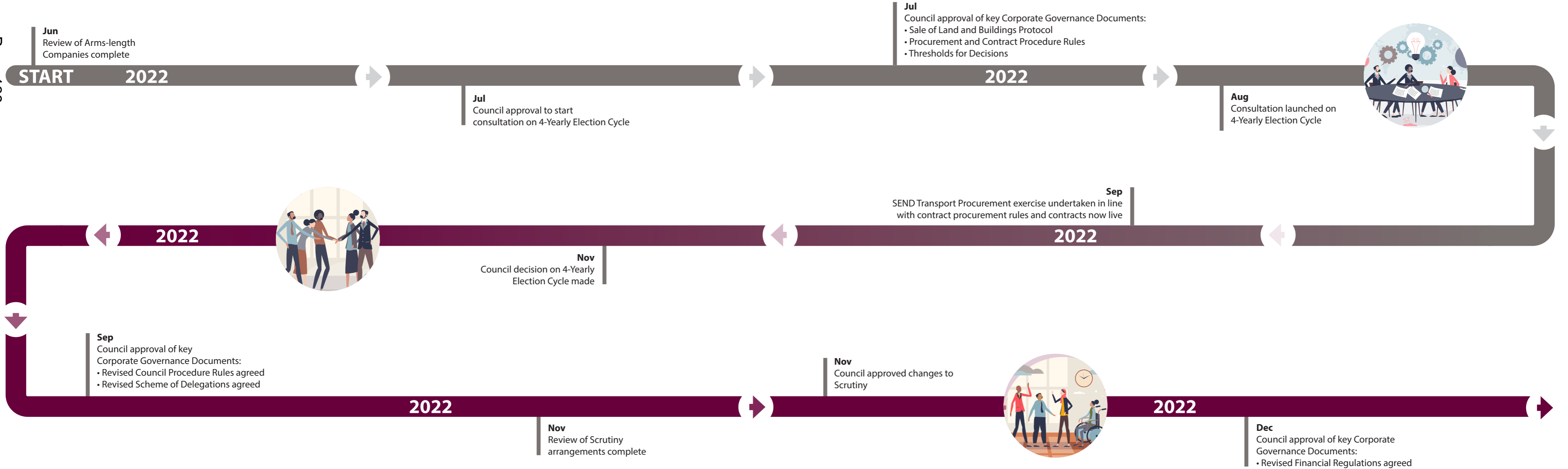
Sandwell has some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country and the challenges facing residents have been exacerbated by the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. Sandwell has been recognised as an area in need and we are excited to be working in partnership with the Government to bring forward proposals for a Levelling Up Partnership to further our regeneration aspirations.

Next Steps

- Development of our strategies around Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and Customer Journey
- Prioritising Leadership Team collective time on strategic matters
- Continuing to use insight from consultation and engagement and the Performance Management Framework to inform strategic direction



Decision Making



Objectives

- Review and refresh key corporate governance documents laying the foundations for robust decision-making, audit and scrutiny and culture change
- Create a clear and strong role for Scrutiny and Audit and embed in practice
- Explore options around a 4-yearly electoral cycle

Evidence of Success

When we are demonstrating clear effective decision making, we said that we would see evidence of:

- Decision reports written which set out options and an assessment of their impact on outcomes for residents
- Evidence of effective scrutiny work through robust scrutiny review / input into priority areas
- Audit input driving assurance and improvement
- Commissioners' role embedded and understood across the council

Over the last twelve months we have undertaken a comprehensive corporate governance review, building in best practice and taking a co-production approach by engaging Members and Officers throughout. As a result, key corporate governance documents have been revised that clearly set out roles and responsibilities at all levels improving the transparency in decision making and ensuring decisions are made at the appropriate level. These include Thresholds for Decisions, Financial Regulations, Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules, Sale of Land and Buildings Protocol, and a revised Scheme of Delegation.

The current focus of the governance review is to embed the constitutional changes. This involves a series of learning and development activities for

Members and Officers, implementation of phase 2 of the Mod.gov system, and developing a new set of performance measures within the Corporate Performance Management Framework to track our progress.

In October 2022 the LGA revisited us to review our progress and reported positively on the effective work of Scrutiny. Examples of effective scrutiny work include a call-in around the Brandhall development, scrutiny of the SEND Transport Procurement, work underway on the customer journey, and a review into the impact of lockdown on children and families.

'Scrutiny is going from strength to strength'

LGA 2022

Grant Thornton also provided feedback on their return visit around the positive contribution of Audit and acknowledgement of the focus on matters of strategic importance rather than historic matters. A series of improvements to Audit and Scrutiny have been embedded throughout the course of the Municipal Year including agenda setting meeting and pre-meeting briefings with Chair and Committee Members. In order to

provide continued assurance around the work of Scrutiny and Audit, a survey is sent out at the end of each meeting to collate Officer and Member responses that are used to aid the continuous improvement work around these committees. The insight has led to conversations around etiquette in meetings to clarify expectations, improving the robust questioning from panel members and it has informed the Member Development Programme.

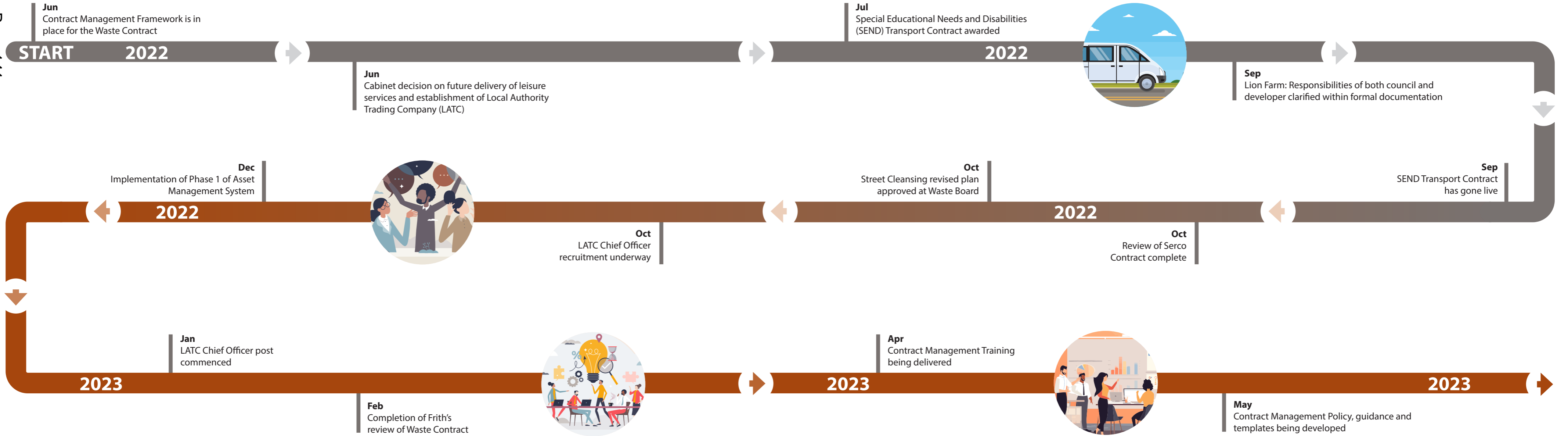
The Commissioners' role has been embedded within the council and the understanding of the role has been aided by regular staff communications. This included an 'All Staff Briefing' held January 2023 where updates were provided on the transition arrangements when the new incoming Chief Executive was due to join the council. The Commissioners' priorities were also shared at this meeting and live Q&A allowed for staff to ask questions.

Next Steps

- Continuing to embed constitutional changes
- Focus on continuous improvement in decision-making including the development of metrics within the Performance Management Framework



Procurement and Commercial



Objectives

- Conclude procurement and commercial matters in relation to key legacy issues
- Ensure that learning in relation to issues around commercial decisions, procurement and contract management are understood across the council
- Ensure corporate ownership and effective contract management of major contracts
- Ensure that major contracts have an effective focus on service quality and outcomes
- Conduct effective procurement for the new systems that are needed to support the delivery of the council's Improvement Plan

Evidence of Success

When we have robust systems and processes around procurement, commercial matters and contracts, we said we will see evidence of:

- Key contracts being effectively managed
- Improved outcomes from key contracts and commercial decisions as demonstrated by performance indicators for leisure, and waste
- Lessons learnt documented

In the original report from Grant Thornton, it was highlighted that contracts had been impacted by either poor specification during procurement, lack of clear contract management responsibility or poorly defined approaches to contract management. During their return visit in October 2022, they were able to see that there was clear evidence that the council was making better procurement and commercial decisions.

They pointed to Sandwell, Land and Property (SLaP) having been dissolved, Lion Farm and Providence Place being managed to a conclusion and notice having been served on Sandwell Leisure Trust. It was also noted that Sandwell Children's Trust had seen their rating improve on their most recent Ofsted inspection representing significant improvement.

Key major contracts are being managed across the council and they are embedded within the Corporate Performance Management Framework

to review their performance and service outcomes.

As a result of this focused monitoring, resident reported missed bins have been reducing month on month, and a clear plan is in place to improve street cleansing. Serco has now purchased a suite of new equipment including mini-sweepers, large mechanical sweepers and electric street vacuums, all of which should significantly improve the borough's cleanliness.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Transport Contract was awarded in September 2022 following a robust procurement process. Lessons learnt sessions were carried out with staff involved in the process and documented to aid continuous improvement. The findings are being shared and embedded within business plans.

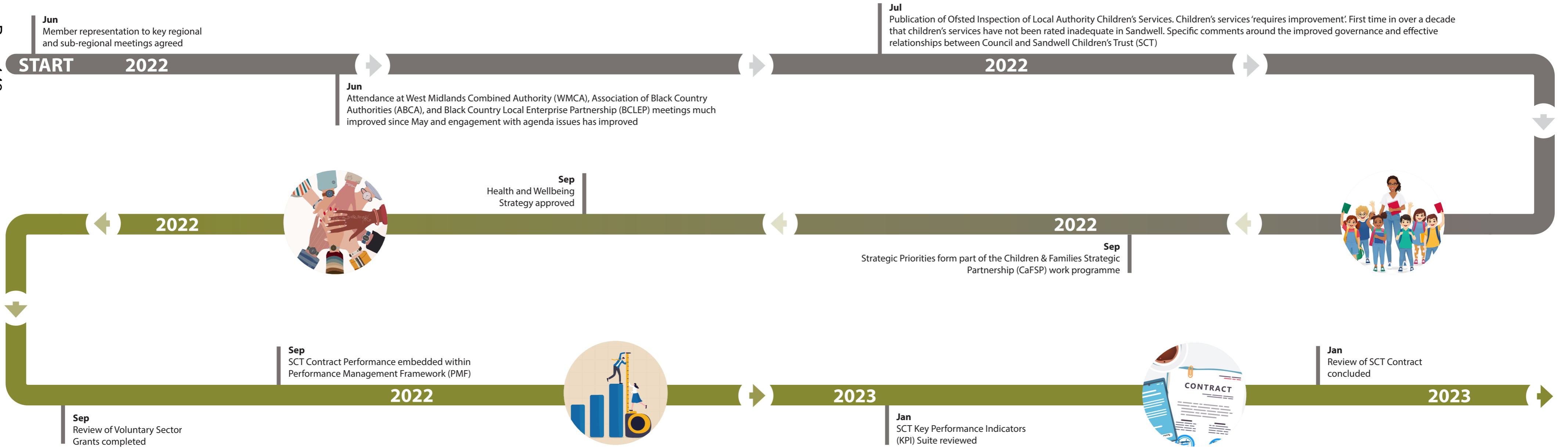
We have commissioned a piece of work to review the council's current contract management arrangements, provide training for relevant officers and develop a suite of contract management policies and templates. Specific contract management support is being provided externally for a small number of key contracts.

Next Steps

- Waste and Leisure Contracts being added to In-tend Contract Management Module to assist contract monitoring
- Review of council's current contract management arrangements
- Corporate Performance Management System in place
- Report to Cabinet on determination of position of developer for Lion Farm
- Establishment of Local Authority Trading Company for future delivery of leisure services
- Phase 2 of Asset Management System implementation



Partnerships and Relationships



Partnerships and Relationships

Objectives

- Improve Sandwell Council's standing with key partners and professional bodies at national, regional and local level
- Improve corporate approach to partner relationships
- Determine the future relationship between Sandwell Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and the approach to funding

Evidence of Success

When we have effective partnerships and relationships at all levels, we said that we will see evidence of:

- Improved outcomes for children and young people in Sandwell evidenced in Key Performance Indicators
- Improved external review outcomes
- Regular and active presence at regional and sub regional meetings resulting in more opportunities linked to Sandwell's priorities (e.g. Sandwell's financial asks realised)
- Improved performance in outcomes on the impact of health inequalities on individuals
- Clear understanding of the relationship between the council and the VCS that is embedded in practice – evidenced by feedback from VCS

Key Performance Indicators relating to the contract with Sandwell Children's Trust are reported and tracked through the Corporate Performance Management Framework to support senior leadership oversight. Over the year, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children in care and continued efforts across the Trust and council on workforce issues. New KPIs have been reviewed and will be introduced during Q1 following the commencement of the Sandwell Children's Trust

contract on 1 April 2023, and a dashboard of KPIs has been developed to support the Early Help Strategy delivery.

We regularly attend and participate in key regional and sub regional partnerships such as the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board, the WMCA Economic Growth Board, the WMCA Housing and Regeneration Board and the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) Leaders. This participation has meant that we have secured support from the Mayor and all Metropolitan Leaders to the agreed allocation of £2million from the Commonwealth Games 2022 budget underspend of £70million to fund increased utilities costs for the Sandwell Aquatic Centre. We have also fully participated in the negotiations and discussions on the proposals for a Devolution Deal with Government and formal decisions will be taken on this in the Autumn of 2023.

External Partners were spoken to by the Local Government Authority (LGA) when they returned in October 2022 and noted that Sandwell Council was much better again at sub-regional level, with the Leader of the Council being seen to engage in all the right places.

'Sandwell's voice is now being heard more widely'

LGA 2022

We are also working well with local partners, as demonstrated by our recent Cost of Living Emergency Summit. The summit brought together more than sixty public, private and voluntary sector partners to coordinate our efforts to support our community through this crisis. It resulted in a series of partnership-wide commitments and asks.

Our relationship with the VCS continues to deliver significant outcomes for Sandwell. A comprehensive review of grant funding across the sector demonstrated that our investment is to be aligned to our corporate objectives, and we continue to be committed to working in partnership in the long-term. Our partnerships are recognised as good practice, e.g., Community Cost of Living Champions and the Emotional Wellbeing Programme (shortlisted for MJ Award 2023 Innovation in Partnerships).

Next Steps

- Transitions Project (Children's to Adult Services) commences
- Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy to be formulated and approved
- Continuation of participation at regional and sub-regional level





Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Council Leader – Cllr Kerrie Carmichael

DRAFT

My Ref:

KC/JLP

Please ask for:

Kerrie Carmichael

Telephone Number:

Date:

xx June 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

A year on from the approval of our Improvement Plan, we are proud to look back over our achievements. We have successfully embarked upon whole-scale organisational change at the same time as delivering on our Corporate Plan commitments. I am delighted that the Secretary of State for Education has commenced the process to end intervention in Children's Services.

We recognise that there is more work ahead on our improvement journey. The long-standing service issues raised by external reviews in 2021 have now either been addressed or are well-progressed with robust delivery plans in place. This has enabled the council to shift focus to longer-term planning.

Over the past six months we have continued to deliver at pace. Some of our achievements since December are summarised below, arranged by the themes of our Improvement Plan.

Organisational Culture

In terms of our organisational culture, we have been delighted to welcome our new Chief Executive, Shokat Lal, who took up post in February 2023. Recruitment is now underway for an Assistant Chief Executive who will oversee many of the service areas that make up the

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'engine room' of the local authority, helping to shape our culture and how we transform ourselves as an organisation.

The launch of our One Team Framework (organisational values and behaviours) this Spring marked a significant milestone and the start of the next phase of our organisational culture change programme. The framework is a result of staff engagement, facilitated by an internal network of Culture Champions. The five new organisational values and associated behaviours set out an ambition to be one team 'united and working together with a shared purpose of achieving great results' that is customer focused, inclusive, ambitious, and accountable.

The impact of our 'One Team' approach can be seen through work such as our preparations for voter ID in the May 2023 elections. Teams from across the council were brought together (including electoral services, communications, adult social care, libraries, pest control and revenues and benefits) with the VCS to develop our approach and then to help share messages. The VCS also supported digitally excluded residents to complete the online application. Through our 'One Team' approach we achieved one of the highest figures in the country for issuing voter authority certificates.

We have made significant strides in the relationship between Members and Officers which was acknowledged by our external reviewers. Along with training and support, a range of meetings are in place to facilitate a healthy and regular dialogue which includes meetings with Group Leaders and Chief Whips, and cross-party working groups. The strength of the relationship has enabled the council to move forward on implementing difficult decisions such as the development of Brandhall, re-setting the relationship with Sandwell Leisure Trust and implementing a chargeable garden waste scheme.

Over the next six months we are focusing on embedding the One Team Framework with learning and development for senior leaders and managers, a refreshed staff appraisal process, and the launch of an employee recognition scheme. The updated Member Development Programme and new Member induction programme will also be delivered to further cement the positive working culture between Members and Officers.

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Corporate Oversight and Strategic Direction

Since our letter to you in December 2022, we received the reports from Grant Thornton, LGA (Local Government Association) and CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) from their follow-up reviews conducted in Autumn 2022. We were pleased that they recognised our clear progress. We have reflected on the further areas of recommendation to support our continuous improvement, and we have embedded actions to respond in our Improvement Plan and business plans.

Our performance management framework is maturing. Performance information and insight, including the results of consultation and engagement, is being used by Senior Leadership to set strategic direction and respond to issues. This approach has led to action being prioritised for example on the customer journey and targeted work to improve our response rates on Subject Access Requests (SARs) and Freedom of Information requests (FOIs).

As a result of this focus, SAR and FOI response rates have significantly improved and have been brought closer to target during the year. We have also reduced the number of Corporate Plan actions with significant progress issues. The performance management framework is also informing scrutiny work planning such as scrutiny's focus on customer journey work and the cost of living programme.

Since December we have put in place a framework for resident engagement along with a commission for delivery of regular resident surveys and budget consultation for the next three years. An evidence bundle, which included performance information and the outcomes from resident's consultation, has informed our refreshed business plans and Corporate Plan for 2023 onwards.

We are taking time to reflect and learn. We have recently completed a lessons learnt exercise on Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) transport procurement which is informing the council's overall approach to procurement. We sought out and have reflected on lessons learnt from a neighbouring LA around their implementation of Oracle Fusion and have assured ourselves that our approach is robust and

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that we have mitigations in place to avoid issues they encountered. We are also pursuing a joint lessons learnt exercise with Grant Thornton around the closure of our financial accounts.

Over the next six months, our refreshed Corporate Plan and Business Plans along with a newly developed set of service standards will continue to develop our insight and grow our performance culture. This will be supported by and intrinsically linked to how we embed the One Team framework. We have paved the way for our improvement activity to be monitored within our performance management framework through the refresh of our Corporate Plan. This will enable us to move away from a stand-alone improvement plan in forthcoming months, whilst retaining the assurance mechanisms to manage progress and performance.

In relation to financial strategy and management, our financial management improvements are demonstrated by the increase in our CIPFA rating from 2* to 3*. We continue to focus on developing financial acumen and skills through up-skilling budget holders and embedding a finance business partnering approach. Our approach to budget setting is embedded with conversations across Leadership Team and we have started the next budget setting cycle. We have an agreed budget in place that supports our Corporate Plan priorities and an agreed Medium-Term Financial Strategy. We have identified transformation programmes to bridge the budget gap in the medium term.

Transformation activity is taking place across the council including the Oracle Programme, a review of business support arrangements and financial services business process reviews. Resources from across the council have been brought together to consolidate resources. With the support of Local Partnerships, we are developing a Corporate Programme Management Office and approach to provide a strong corporate centre that enables transformation and project delivery across the organisation.

We recognise that we have a lot of work to do on our Customer Journey and see it as a corporate priority, establishing a robust framework, resources and performance improvement programme that should see

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visible improvements for customers, MPs and Councillors during 2023/24. The programme has a dedicated project manager and team and is being overseen by the Customer Journey Programme Board. Scrutiny are actively involved in shaping this work.

The Customer Journey Programme is ambitious and multi-faceted. Not only are we developing a Customer Experience Strategy, the programme also includes procuring a new telephony system, reviewing current technology and our customer processes so that they are responsive and efficient. We have also established a pilot Community Hub model for face-to-face contact for those who are digitally excluded or otherwise struggling to engage with the council and are reviewing our Contact Centres model, with regular reporting to senior leadership to monitor impact and inform future decisions on wider implementation. The programme will make the necessary improvements to our customer service to ensure our residents experience a seamless service when they need to contact us.

Now that the long-standing service issues raised by Grant Thornton in their 2021 Value for Money Governance Review have either been addressed or have a robust delivery plan in place, Leadership Team has been increasingly focusing on strategic matters using 'priority focus' sessions as a means for collective work across Cabinet and Senior Leaders. This approach is demonstrated by our work on the cost of living crisis. We convened a Cost of Living Emergency Summit in March 2023, bringing together more than sixty public, private and voluntary sector partners to coordinate our efforts to support our community through this crisis. The summit was full of energy and commitment from across all our partners to problem solve and collaborate and resulted in a series of partnership wide commitments and asks.

We enter the new municipal year with Cabinet that reflects the stability and continuity of the administration. We are focussed on working effectively together in the coming months to build on the improvements set out in the report.

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Decision Making

As we reported to you in December, our constitution has been fully refreshed. Since December, our attention has turned to further embedding the constitutional changes. Over the next six months, our learning and development activities will continue and will be strengthened by the role out of the One Team Framework.

We've continued to make key decisions focusing on long term planning such as approval of:

- the Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan in February, which includes flexibility to amend the plan subject to results of stock condition surveys
- the Friar Park Masterplan in March. This has set the strategic direction for the development of the Friar Park Urban Village based on public consultation and impact assessments

We are developing a set of new measures as part of the performance management framework to provide us with further insight into the quality of the decision-making process and drive our continuous improvement.

We are proud of the improvements that have taken place within Audit and Scrutiny Committees. Members and Officers have worked together to ensure that these functions are working effectively and holding the council to account. The Committees are well-managed and have focused work programmes and meetings. We are continuously improving and learning and are using feedback gained from Members and Officers of their experiences of meetings.

The Scrutiny review on the Impact of Lockdown on Children & Families reported to Cabinet in February 2023, included wide-ranging and significant recommendations to improve the service/approach to improve outcomes for children and their families. Scrutiny took an outcomes-focused approach to considering SEND transport with effective challenge provided on the wider issues of the service rather than procurement.

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Partnerships and Relationships, Procurement and Commercial

We are continuing to prioritise our work with partners. At a regional and sub-regional level regular attendance and participation is in place, for example, with the WMCA (West Midlands Combined Authority) Board, the CA Economic Growth Board, CA Housing and Regeneration Board and the ABCA (Association of Black Country Authorities) Leaders. This participation has meant that the council has secured support from the Mayor and all Met Leaders to the agreed allocation of £2million from the Commonwealth Games 2022 budget underspend of £70million to fund increased utilities costs for the Sandwell Aquatic Centre.

I am pleased to be leading the Inclusive Communities Portfolio for the WMCA which will include developing an inclusive communities strategy for the CA, progress participation and coproduction through the Young CA and the Faith Strategy Participation Group, and will oversee delivery of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Funding.

The council has also fully participated in the negotiations and discussions on the proposals for a West Midlands Devolution Deal with Government and formal decisions will be taken on this in Autumn 2023. We are excited to be developing proposals for a Levelling Up Partnership with Government to secure further regeneration in Sandwell.

In a Sandwell context, relationships with partners continue to mature. Our recent cost of living summit is one example along with our joint work on Early Help which is bearing fruit. Of families who received multi-agency early help, 76.2% were not referred back to Early Help services or Children's Social Care within 12 months.

Key major contracts are being managed across the council and the corporate performance management framework includes regular reporting on major contracts, with a focus on service outcomes. We are developing a corporate contract management approach and are rolling out training to those responsible for contracts to ensure a consistent level of knowledge and practice.

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Accompanying this letter is our Improvement Plan Annual Report June 2023. This report is a summary of our progress on our improvement journey including key milestones achieved, evidence of impact, and next steps. Our quarterly progress reports to Cabinet made in March and June 2023 are also attached which provide a greater level of detail around progress issues, risks, resources and changes to the Improvement Plan.

Our key areas of focus over forthcoming months are driving our plans around organisational culture, customer journey, transformation and delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

We enter the year ahead with pride in our achievements and a commitment to continue to work as One Team to drive the council's improvement.

Yours sincerely,

Signature ...

Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
Council Leader

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Report to Council

13 June 2023

Subject:	Proposed departure from the Development Plan At Forge Mill Farm, Forge Lane, West Bromwich B71 3SZ
Director:	Tony McGovern Director of Regeneration & Growth - Neighbourhoods
Contact Officer:	William Stevens Principal Planning Officer William_stevens@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations


- 1.1 That approval be given to an exception to the Development Plan in respect of planning application DC/23/67838 (Proposed Phase 1 - Conversion and change of use of existing barn 1 into cafeteria and natural play area, proposed single storey building containing support facilities (toilets, kitchen, lobby and draft lobby, classroom, stores and plantroom). Phase 2 - Proposed single storey education block containing 2 no. (30/40 students) classrooms and cloakroom area).

2 Reasons for Recommendations

The proposal is on land allocated as Green Belt land and as such any development is contrary to adopted Council policy. However, the proposed development serves the existing Forge Mill Farm with negligible Green Belt sprawl.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	A strong and inclusive economy
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Following a site visit by Members in April 2023, Planning Committee granted conditional approval on the meeting held on the 10th May 2023, which considered planning application DC/23/67838 (Proposed Phase 1 - Conversion and change of use of existing barn 1 into cafeteria and natural play area, proposed single storey building containing support facilities (toilets, kitchen, lobby and draft lobby, classroom, stores and plantroom). Phase 2 - Proposed single storey education block containing 2 no. (30/40 students) classrooms and cloakroom area).
- 4.2 The application was publicised by site and press notice without response.
- 4.3 Whilst Planning Committee Members approved the application, now Council will need to approve the departure from the Development Plan before planning permission can be granted.
- 4.4 The site is currently a Green Belt allocation and the proposed development would infill a small section of the farm. It is necessary for the Council to consider whether or not to grant an exception to adopted policy to allow the application to proceed.
- 4.5 The purpose of this report is to discuss the 'departure' from the Development Plan only. It is not the role of Council to reconsider the wider planning merits of the application which have already been considered by Planning Committee.
- 4.6 The Council's Highways, Planning Policy, and Environmental Health teams have also been consulted on the proposal. No overall objections have been received from consultees which cannot be overcome by condition.



5 Alternative Options

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

6 Implications

Resources:	The granting of exceptions to the Development Plan would not have any implications for the resources of the Council.
Legal and Governance:	The Planning Committee has delegated powers to determine planning applications within current Council policy. The decision to grant permission for this proposal would be contrary the Development Plan. Consequently, the Committee has referred the application to the Council to consider whether or not an exception to the development plan should be granted.
Risk:	None Relevant
Equality:	None Relevant
Health and Wellbeing:	None Relevant
Social Value	The proposal would create jobs
Climate Change	None Relevant

7 Appendices

None

8 Background Papers

Planning application reference DC/23/67838



Report to Planning Committee

10 May 2023

Application Reference	DC/23/67838
Application Received	3 rd January 2023
Application Description	Proposed Phase 1 - Conversion and change of use of existing barn 1 into cafeteria and natural play area, proposed single storey building containing support facilities (toilets, kitchen, lobby and draft lobby, classroom, stores and plantroom). Phase 2 - Proposed single storey education block containing 2 no. (30/40 students) classrooms and cloakroom area.
Application Address	Forge Mill Farm, Forge Lane, West Bromwich, B71 3SZ
Applicant	Mr Matthew Huggins, Sandwell Council
Ward	Newton
Contact Officer	William Stevens William_Stevens@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 Subject to no adverse comments from the Head of Highways, and subject to ratification at Full Council, that planning permission is granted subject to conditions relating to:

- i) Drainage/SUDS details,
- ii) Car park management plan,




- iii) External materials,
- iv) Extraction equipment,
- v) Low Nox Boilers, and
- vi) Archaeological findings.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 Despite the proposal being within the Green Belt, the proposed development is a small part of the future wider redevelopment of Forge Mill Farm, bringing jobs and education facilities to Sandwell as well as recreation opportunities that can be used all year round.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	A strong and inclusive economy
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4 Context

4.1 Before your last Planning Committee, Members visited the site, but the determination of this application was deferred for additional information which has now mainly been received. Members will be verbally updated on outstanding issues.

4.2 To assist members with site context, a link to Google Maps is provided below:

[Forge Mill Farm, Forge Lane, West Bromwich](#)

5 Key Considerations

5.1 The site is within a Green Belt allocation.

5.2 The material planning considerations which are relevant to this application are: -



Government policy (NPPF)
 Proposals in the Development Plan
 Traffic generation

6. The Application Site

6.1 The application site is situated on the eastern side of Forge Lane and relates to Forge Mill Farm, within the Green Belt. To east is the River Tame, and to the south is Forge Mill Car Park, and further south is Swan Pool Car Park, and Sandwell Valley Sailing Club.

7. Planning History

7.1 The application site been used as some sort of education needs since 1983 (planning applications DD/16371 and DD/16372). In 1985, a toilet block and farm shop were approved (DD/19040).

7.2 Almost twenty years ago a steel framed hay barn and cattle shed was built (DC/04/42795) which was cladded in fire protection material in 2007 (DC/07/48384).

7.3 Relevant planning applications are as follows:

DC/17/60630	Proposed flood defence works (Phase 2 of the proposed Perry Barr and Witton flood risk management scheme) to include construction of a flood storage embankment, spillway, control building, cycle path and access track, fencing, CCTV and associated works.	Grant Permission Subject to Conditions 31/08/2017
DC/16/59398	Request for scoping opinion for the Forge Mill part of the proposed Perry Barr and Witton flood risk management scheme.	Scoping Opinion 17/05/2016



DC/16/59152	Proposed re-siting of open sided hay barn and cattle shed.	Withdrawn 23/02/2016
DC/07/48384	Proposed cladding as fire protection to existing fire-damaged hay barn.	Prior Approval is Required and Granted 21/09/2007
DC/04/42795	Construction of steel framed hay barn and cattle shed.	Grant Permission 20/09/2004
DD/00/36368	Construction of steel framed hay storage barn.	Grant Permission 14/04/2000
DD/19040	Toilet block and farm shop/ refreshments servery buildings for farm visitors	Deemed Approved 17/07/1985
DD/16372	Redevelopment of Forge Hill Farm into a Farm Interpretation Centre, based on dairy herd with educational facilities and public access.	Deemed Approved 03/10/1983
DD/16371	Conversion & adaption of Old Hill building into seminar/ class room/ exhibition space with access for school children and the public. (part of farm interpretation centre)	Deemed Approved 03/10/1983



8. Application Details

- 8.1 The applicant proposes to increase visitor numbers to the farm and provide a variety of activities on site. This proposal incorporates two phases, namely Phase 1 and 2.
- 8.2 Proposed Phase 1 includes the conversion and change of use of existing barn 1 into a cafeteria and natural play area, proposed single storey building containing support facilities (toilets, kitchen, lobby and draft lobby, classroom, stores and plantroom).
- 8.3 The conversion of the existing barn would be extended to include a natural play area.
- 8.4 The applicant has described the natural play area as:

'Natural play' is a type of indoor play focused around experience, natural materials, organic spaces and themed areas that involve different play experiences from active play to role-play and everything in between. The principle is to bring the benefits of outdoor play inside to improve access to play opportunities all year round. Natural play is different to the commonly known 'soft play' in that it uses natural materials and incorporates concepts and themes specific to Forge Mill Farm to create more imaginative play rather than the over commercialised brightly coloured, padded plastics and vinyl, typically found in urban based play centres.

The natural play provision within the new facility will only be available to those visiting the farm and will not form a stand-alone visit ensuring that those accessing the facility will also be accessing the outdoors and the other experiences on offer at the farm.



8.5 Examples of natural play





- 8.6 Proposed Phase 2 includes a new build classroom. The applicant has stated that the reason behind the new school classrooms is:

To further meet the wider objectives of Forge Mill Farm ...the development of a new classroom structure in keeping with the rest of the farm to facilitate the education and outreach program in place at Forge Mill farm, Sandwell Valley Country Park and other green spaces within Sandwell. By 2028 the farm is aiming to host 500 school visits per year, however, currently it does not have any accessible or suitable facilities to safely and reliably accommodate for visiting students.

Work for phase 2 of the project will begin after phase 1 of the project is completed, open to the public and operating as planned.

- 8.7 The proposal for both Phases 1 and 2, it is anticipated to create approximately nine new full-time jobs, and parking for visitors would be expected at the two car parks south of the site.



9. Publicity

- 9.1 The application has been publicised by site and press notice without response.

10. Consultee responses

10.1 Planning Policy

The proposal is a departure from the Development Plan as it is contrary to one or more provisions of the development plan.

The indoor play area and café, and classrooms raises issues under the NPPF and Adopted SAD DPD Green Belt policy as they are inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The indoor play area and café are also contrary to Centres policy, which aim to regenerate Sandwell's town centres.

10.2 Highways

Highways have requested further information and Members will be verbally updated at the meeting.

10.3 Canal and Rivers Trust

No comments to make.

10.4 Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)

Further information has been sent to the LLFA. Whilst they recommend that this is provided before the application is determined, this can be conditioned accordingly.

10.5 Severn Trent

Drainage plans required via condition of any approval.



10.6 Urban Design Officer

No objection, the proposal fits in with the current setting.

10.7 West Midlands Police

Has recommended CCTV and external lighting to aid security. Whilst not conditioned, if the applicant decided to improve the security of the site, the Council would look favourably on sensitively designed schemes.

10.8 Birmingham Wildlife Trust

No objections have been raised.

11. National Planning Policy

11.1 National Planning Policy Framework promotes sustainable development but states that local circumstances should be taken into account to reflect the character, needs and opportunities for each area.

11.2 Section 13 of the NPPF, in particular paragraph 137 states that *'the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence'*. In addition to this, paragraph 149 states that local planning authorities should regard construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions which are relevant to this proposal and Sandwell are:

- a) Buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- b) The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of the land...) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including the land within it;



c) The extension or alteration of buildings, provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

d), e) and f) are not applicable in this case)

And

g) Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings) would:

- not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development;

The key starting point is whether these buildings would have detrimental effect on the openness of the Green Belt, in particular in terms of their size and location. Comparing the existing aerial photograph (Figure 1 overleaf) with what is proposed clearly shows the site has been significantly developed, and the proposed extension and new build, in particular the new classrooms would be situated on previously developed land and the extension to the barn is a modest single storey structure. Therefore, it is considered that the development itself, would not harm the openness of the Green Belt in this location.

Turning to the proposed uses, namely an indoor play area with ancillary café, toilets and an education facility. These uses clearly fall outside the definitions referred to above. Notwithstanding this, the ethos of this proposal is linked to encouraging children and young people to value agriculture and the outdoors within a learning environment. The play facilities as referred to in Paragraph 8.5 above shows that this facility will be aligned with natural play and learning about farming and agriculture. Again, the education facility will be integrated into an outdoor experience of the working farm. It is therefore considered that these uses, are very much aligned with the ethos of outdoor recreation and agricultural farming. In addition, it can align with other policy objectives, such as getting young people into the countryside, environmental and nature conservation education, healthy outdoor sports and recreation etc. In conclusion, it is considered that this justifies the proposed in terms of Green Belt policy.





Figure 1 – Aerial photo of the site in context to the wider Green Belt

11.5 Paragraph 87 of the NPPF states indoor play/leisure facilities should fall within 'Main Town Centres'. Therefore, if the proposals were considered purely as leisure uses in isolation of Forge Farm, it would be contrary to this policy. In my opinion the existing Farm and the proposed uses are not separate. Further discussion is set out within local policy (CEN4) in Section 12 below.



11.6 Paragraph 124 refers to good design, taking into account the views of the Council's Urban Design officer, I am of the opinion that the scheme is of a good design.

12. Local Planning Policy

12.1 The following policies of the council's Development Plan are relevant:

CEN4: Regeneration of Town Centre

ENV1: Nature Conservation

ENV5: Flood Risk

ENV8: Air Quality

SAD HE5: Archaeology & Development Proposals.

12.2 CEN4 is aligned with national policy in relation to leisure uses being located with Town Centres, this is to support their regeneration. As referred to above this proposal is a recreation use to support the activities associated with Forge Farm and the intended use of this play facility would be combined with a visit to the learn about the workings of the Farm and also re-enforced with the natural play facility that is proposed. To this effect, it is considered the use would not be contrary to CEN4 given the bespoke nature of the proposal.

12.3 ENV1: The proposal is in a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and a phase 1 ecology investigation had taken place. Members will be updated accordingly.

12.3 Under the Air Quality SPD & BCCS ENV8, any new parking spaces should provide 10% electric vehicle charge points (however no new parking is proposed in this scheme). If gas boilers are part of the development, they should be specified as low NOx types.

12.4 ENV5 Flood Risk, Sustainable Drainage Systems and Urban Heat Island requires permeable paving /parking areas to reduce surface water run off rates. An interception method (i.e. swale) should be considered, and



as Forge Farm is locally listed, the Conservation Officer can advise on this aspect along with the LLFA should it be conditioned.

12.5 HE5, the proposal is in an Area of Potential Archaeological Importance and a condition informing the local planning authority of any discoveries on site will be attached to any approval.

13. Material Considerations

13.1 National and local planning policy considerations have been referred to above in Sections 11 and 12. With regards to the other material considerations, these are highlighted below:

13.2 Access, highway safety, parking, servicing and traffic generation

Members will be verbally updated.

14 Alternative Options

14.1 Refusal of the application is an option if there are material planning reasons for doing so. In my opinion the proposal is compliant with relevant polices and there are no material considerations that would justify refusal.

15 Implications

Resources:	When a planning application is refused the applicant has a right of appeal to the Planning Inspectorate, and they can make a claim for costs against the Council.
Legal and Governance:	This application is submitted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
Risk:	None.
Equality:	There are no equality issues arising from this proposal and therefore an equality impact assessment has not been carried out.



Health and Wellbeing:	None.
Social Value	None.
Climate Change	Sandwell Council supports the transition to a low carbon future, in a way that takes full account of the need to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Proposals that help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure, will be welcomed.

16. Appendices

Context Plan

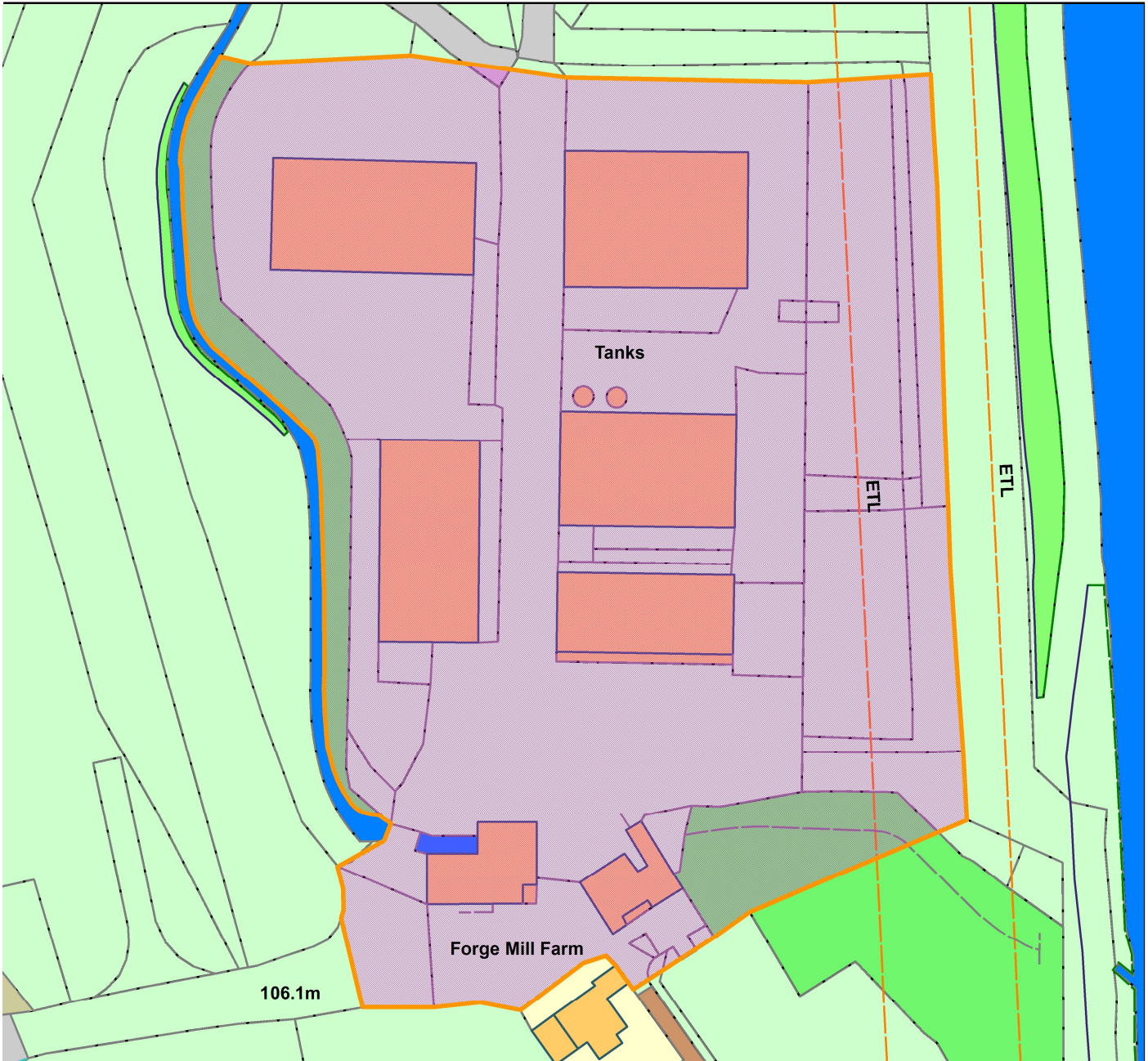
Site layout

Proposed elevations

Proposed floor plans



DC/23/67838
Forge Mill Farm, West Bromwich



Legend



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Organisation	Not Set
Department	Not Set
Comments	Not Set
Date	27 January 2023
OS Licence No	

Report to Council

13 June 2023

Subject:	Report from the Council's representative on West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
Director:	Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer Surjit_Tour@sandwell.gov.uk
Contact Officer:	Trisha Newton Trisha_newton@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council receives updates from the Council's representative on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority.







2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council, at its annual meeting on 24 May 2011, approved an arrangement whereby members nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to answer questions on the discharge of the functions of any joint authority or any joint board of which the Council is a constituent authority (Section 41 members) would report to the Council twice a year on important and contentious matters relating to the joint authority/board, and on any other occasion by exception. Procedural Standing Orders provide that any member of the Council shall be entitled to ask questions of the relevant members and the Council on these reports.

A report is attached in respect of West Midlands Fire and Rescue.



2 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

		The involvement of Council representatives in the decision-making process of joint authorities will encourage better understanding of local and wider needs and viewpoints.
		
		

3 Context and Key Issues

- 3.1 Council will receive an update on the work undertaken by West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority from the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 It is usual practice to receive six monthly update reports.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no strategic resource implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	<p>Under Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985, arrangements have been made for enabling questions on the discharge of a joint authority's functions to be put in the course of the proceedings of any constituent district council. A member is nominated by the joint authority for that purpose (the Section 41 member).</p> <p>It is customary for the Council to receive six monthly reports from those members appointed pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to answer questions put to them at council meetings relating to the discharge of functions of joint authorities.</p>
Risk:	There are no direct risks associated with this report.



Equality:	There is no requirement for an equality impact assessment.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no direct health and wellbeing implications from this report.
Social Value	There are no direct social value implications from this report.
Climate Change	There are no direct implications arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no direct implications arising from this report.

7. Appendices

Appendix A – West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority update.

8. Background Papers

None



WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier

wmfs.net

@WestMidsFire

Fire Service Headquarters,
99 Vauxhall Road, Birmingham B7 4HW

**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Section 41 Report – 2022/23
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier'

Report by Cllr Rizwan Jalil

Membership of the Authority

The Members of the Authority for the Municipal Year 2022-23 were as follows:

Local Authority	Councillor(s)
Birmingham	Councillor Zafar Iqbal* (Labour) <i>Vice-Chair</i> Councillor Gurdial Singh Atwal (Labour) Councillor Sybil Spence (Labour) Councillor David Barrie (Conservative)
Coventry	Councillor Catherine Miks* (Labour) Councillor Gavin Lloyd# (Labour)
Dudley	Councillor Ian Kettle* (Conservative) Councillor Peter Miller (Conservative)
Sandwell	Councillor Rizwan Jalil* (Labour) Councillor Zahir Hussain (Labour)
Solihull	Councillor Peter Hogarth MBE* (Conservative)
Walsall	Councillor Vera Waters* (Conservative) Councillor Ann Young (Labour)
Wolverhampton	Councillor Greg Brackenridge* (Labour) <i>Chair</i> Councillor Jas Dehar (labour)
Additional Member(s)	
Independent Member of the Audit and Risk Committee	Mr Mike Ager
Independent Member of Appointments, Standards and Appeals	Mr R Tomkinson (Standards Committee only)
Co-opted Members of the Authority	Professor Simon Brake Sarah Middleton
Police and Crime Commissioner: Represented by (if applicable):	Simon Foster Assistant PCC Wasim Ali Richard Castello – Head of Communications

* Section 41 member

Replaced Cllr Seamus Walsh as of 10 October 2022

Service Performance against Strategic Plan

Response times to the most critical and high-risk incidents were within target and attendance times remained within target across all four categories of incident, with performance remaining significantly below the respective targets for category 2, 3 & 4 incident types.

The majority of Service level performance indicators are within target and within the tolerance levels.

The number of accidental dwelling fires that have been recorded are below target and below the lower tolerance level and are the lowest number of incidents recorded in three years.

The number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings is above target and above the upper tolerance level. Due to their nature, these types of incidents are generally focussed in certain areas across the West Midlands, based on local geographic circumstances. The Service remains committed to working in conjunction with Local Authorities and other partners to secure derelict premises, to reduce the number of these types of incidents.

The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment is above target and above the upper tolerance level. The Service's Automatic Fire Alarm Policy to challenge calls reporting fire alarms actuating enables effective management of resources and reduces the number of responses to non-domestic and commercial premises that otherwise would be wasted. However, approximately 80% of all incidents result from domestic premises, rather than the site itself or commercial premises. Our Fire Safety Officers and operational crews are working together to engage with and educate residents around key areas such as cooking, smoking or vapor creating, supported through the delivery of Safe and Well visits where applicable, with the aim to reduce the number of calls.

Indicator	Target	Performance
Risk Based Attendance Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 (high risk) – 5 minutes Category 2 – 7 minutes Category 3 – 10 minutes Category 4 – 20 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 – 04:48 Category 2 – 05:30 Category 3 – 04:59 Category 4 – 06:54
Accidental dwelling fires	1573	1486 (-5.5%) – overperformance
Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (requiring hospital treatment)	48	51 (+6.3%) – performance on track
Safe & Well points achieved by the Brigade (visits to higher risk people bring a bigger point score)	260,000	246,251 (-5.3%) - underperformance Average Assessment Points 7.52
Deliberate fires in dwellings	195	182 (-6.7%) – performance on track

Deliberate rubbish fires	1366	1352 (-1.0%) – performance on track
Deliberate fires in derelict buildings	114	135 (+18.4%) - underperformance
Accidental fires in non-domestic premises	384	364 (-5.2%) – performance on track
False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment	5825	6752 (+15.9%) - underperformance

Note: the figures are correct at the time of writing and are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Local Authority performance and key statistics

In addition to the service level performance indicators above, specific statistics are available for the Sandwell area for Q3 and Q4 2022/23. As these are the latest figures, they are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Indicator	Performance	Notes
Accidental Dwelling Fires	169	10% below target and below the three-year average.
Deliberate Rubbish Fires	146	Below target and below the three-year average.
False Alarms (Equipment)	612	Above target and above the three-year average.
Safe and Wells completed	4138 (42.2% partner referrals)	Although below target (45%), increases in the percentage of referrals have been observed during the latter half of 2022/23, reflecting the change in approach focussing on quality referral pathway building and nurturing relationships to increase the number of referrals for those who the Service's Community Risk Management Plan identifies as being most at risk and vulnerable to fire.
Average Assessment Points*	7.57	The average assessment points remain positive.

** Assessment points measure the vulnerability of the individual or family we undertake a SAW with – the more vulnerable someone is, the more points that visit will garner. WMFS is committed to targeting our interventions at the most vulnerable in our communities.*

WMFS activities during the last six months

1. West Midlands Fire Service HMICFRS inspection report finds service to be “Outstanding” in three areas.

[In January 2023 WMFS received its second HMICFRS inspection report](#) and was delighted to receive an Outstanding rating for overall effectiveness, as well as for our understanding of fire and other risks. The Service also retained its Outstanding rating for responding to fires and other emergencies, while receiving a Good rating in all other areas.

This outcome meant the service is amongst the top performing in the country and has made significant improvements since the last round of inspections in 2018/19.

[Chief Fire Officer, Wayne Brown, said:](#) “Our three ‘outstanding’ assessments from HMICFRS are testament to the hard work of staff across West Midlands Fire Service and their dedication to making our communities safer, stronger and healthier. Our improvements in values, culture and development are key to supporting our staff. The better they’re cared for, the better they can keep our communities safe. Our continued improvement stems from their diligence and innovation.”

Cllr Greg Brackenridge, Chair of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, said: “The dedication of WMFS to continually improve is plain to see within the contents of this report. I'm proud to see that the work put in over the last three years to adapt the way that we deliver means that the people of the West Midlands can be assured but if they need the fire service, they will be in the best possible hands. All this amounts to a first-class fire and rescue service for our area, and we should feel fortunate to have such dedicated people keeping us safe.”

2. Appointment of new Chief Fire Officer

In November 2022, Phil Loach QFSM [announced his retirement](#), following nine years as Chief Fire Officer, leaving the service in January 2023.

Wayne Brown, who had served as Deputy Chief Fire Officer since 2019 and led the service as interim CFO following Phil’s departure, [was announced as the service’s permanent new CFO in April 2023](#) following a thorough application and interview process led by West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority’s Appointments Committee.

Councillor Greg Brackenridge, Chair of WMFRA, said of the appointment: “I and the rest of the Committee members were very impressed by Wayne’s vision for the Service, and we are confident he will continue to provide the excellent leadership the service requires to build on our existing successes and help us meet the challenges of the coming years.”

CFO Brown said; “It is my privilege to have been appointed on a permanent basis. I’m very much looking forward to building on, and enhancing, WMFS’s hard-earned position as one of the country’s leading and most respected fire and rescue services.”

3. WMFRA Annual Plan Published

In April 2023, WMFRA published its latest three year strategy, “[Our Plan](#)”, setting out the service’s priorities and plans to make the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier. Our Plan commits the service to driving further improvement across five areas:

- Prevention - Delivering interventions which support safer and healthier communities.
- Protection - Protecting life and property to make businesses stronger and communities safer.
- Response - Dealing excellently with incidents, including responding within five minutes to the highest risk incidents.
- People - Making West Midlands Fire Service a great place to work for the benefit of our communities and our people.
- Digital and Data - Providing intelligent services to our communities through our digitally-empowered workforce.

Our Plan is informed by our ongoing [Community Risk Management Plan \(CRMP\)](#) process, which is how we assess all the current and future risks facing our communities. This influences how we set our priorities and, in turn, helps us determine what specific projects we need to implement to address these risks.

4. Budget and Precept 2023-2024 and Budget Forecast 2024-2025 to 2025-2026

At the Fire Authority meeting on 13 February 2023, [the Authority approved the service’s budget](#) for 2023-2024 of £119.109 million. This included a Council Tax increase of £4.99 for Band D properties, which had been supported by District Leaders at a meeting with the Authority on 25 January 2023. Even with this increase, the service continues to be the lowest precepting authority in the country.

While the 2023-24 budget includes a welcome increase in funding it comes after over a decade of austerity leading to reductions in central government funding to fire and rescue services and to WMFS in particular. Even with this latest set of increases, total funding to the service is no higher than it was in cash terms in 2010/11.

As with all public services, WMFRA continues to face ongoing budget uncertainties and pressures arising from the cost-of-living crisis, particularly pay awards and inflation impacting on utilities and equipment costs. The service expects to make efficiency savings of approximately £1.9 million within the next year in order to balance our budget.

The authority and its members continue to lobby the government on the funding issues facing the service and the need for a longer-term financial settlement, following another single-year agreement.

5. UKISAR deployments to Türkiye and Malawi

West Midlands Fire Service specialists took part in two UKISAR deployments over the past six months, starting with rescue efforts following [the devastating earthquake that affected Türkiye and Syria](#) in February. Eight WMFS team members joined the team of 77 rescue experts from 14 different UK FRS, spending over a week in Türkiye rescuing a number of people trapped in collapsed structures and offering medical support. WMFS also hosted the coordination centre for the deployment from our Headquarters in Birmingham, providing around the clock support to crews on the ground.

Just a month later, the team were deployed again, this time as part of the international response [to widespread flooding in Malawi](#) and across other parts of southern Africa caused by Cyclone Freddy. Our staff formed part of a 27-strong team who undertook rescues of hundreds of trapped and stranded families, also providing medical care to those in need.

6. WMFS named the UK's most inclusive employer

West Midlands Fire Service was proud and honoured to have been named the [UK's Most Inclusive Employer 2022/2023](#) by Inclusive Companies in December 2022. The Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers List focuses on best practice across all areas of diversity including: age, disability, gender, LGBT+, race, faith and religion.

7. Ramadan Buddying experience

To help raise awareness and support colleagues within the Service observing Ramadan, the service organised an event for members of staff to have the opportunity to pair up with a member of staff observing Ramadan to experience a day of fasting. The event took place on Friday 24 March from 9am to 6:30pm and was hugely successful. Those taking part were invited to attend the West Midlands Fire Service Headquarters to open their fast together, with local community leaders/Mosques leaders attending.

National Fire and Rescue Service developments

8. HMICFRS Spotlight on Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services

Following the [independent cultural review of London Fire Brigade](#), which found examples of bullying, racism and misogyny within the service, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertook [a "Spotlight Review" of culture and values across the whole of the Fire and Rescue Service](#). This report drew on two rounds of HMICFRS inspections of all English fire and rescue services as well as submissions and reports made directly to the inspectorate. It was published on 30 March 2023.

The final report made for difficult reading, finding examples of bullying and inappropriate behaviour from every fire and rescue service. It made 35 recommendations to Chief Fire Officers, the LGA, NFCC and Home Office across a range of areas including vetting, discipline, diversity, inclusion, and governance.

[CFO Wayne Brown accepted the findings and recommendations of the review in full](#), with work already having begun in many areas even before the publication of the report. CFO Brown said; "As Chief Fire Officer, I find the report a difficult read. It cites reports of widespread bullying, harassment, discrimination, misogyny, racism and homophobia across our sector. It is offensive that some have dismissed such behaviour as 'banter'.

"Our recent HMICFRS report graded us as 'Good' in our approach to People, including: promoting the right values and culture; getting the right people with the right skills; ensuring fairness and promoting diversity; managing performance and developing leaders. I said at the time that we've worked exceptionally hard to achieve this recognition from our national inspectorate, and do not take it for granted. We have set ourselves incredibly high standards. Our challenge now is to continue to meet and exceed them."

9. Chief Inspector's "State of Fire" Report

In January 2023, Andy Cooke QPM, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, published his first ["State of Fire" annual report](#). The report recognised the dedication of firefighters and fire service staff, while also recognising the ongoing challenges around culture and values.

It also called on government to move forward with reforms to the sector that had been long called for by the Inspectorate and had formed part of the Fire Reform White Paper published in March 2022. This included:

- precisely determining the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity.
- removing unjustifiable variation between services, including in how they define risk.
- reviewing how effectively pay and conditions are determined; and
- investing chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner.

10. Fire Safety (England) Regulation 2022 come into force

New Fire Safety Regulations, brought in as a result of the Grenfell Tragedy and the findings of the resulting inquiry, came into force in January 2023. [The Fire Safety \(England\) Regulations 2022](#) place new expectations and requirements onto responsible persons for mid- and high-rise premises, as well as ensuring that Fire and Rescue Services receive more up to date information on building lay out and construction materials to aid in the event of a fire.

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Report to Council

13 June 2023

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

1 Recommendations







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

2 Reasons for Recommendations

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



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

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

4 Context and Key Issues

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

5 Alternative Options

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

6 Implications

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



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

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Appointment to Committees, Boards and Other Bodies

8. Background Papers

None.



Appendix A

Committee/Board/Other Body	Revision/nomination
Licensing Committee	Councillor J Singh to replace Councillor Uppal
Land & Asset Committee	Councillor Singh should read Singh Padda
West Bromwich Town Vice Chair	Remove Councillor J Giles
Mackmillan Educational Foundation	Extend Councillor Carmichael term for a further four years ending 2027
SIPS Education Board – one vacancy	Councillor J Giles
Harborne Parish Lands Charity	Replace Councillors Hinchliff and Hemingway with Councillors Davies and Muflihi
Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee – two substitute members	Cllr K Allcock and Cllr Hemingway



Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday 15 March 2023 at 3.30pm
at Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House**

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

In attendance: Councillors Taylor, EM Giles and J Giles.

Also present: Shokat Lal (Chief Executive), Surjit Tour (Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing), Michael Jarrett (Director of Children's Services), Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth), Simone Hines (Director of Finance), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager – Democracy), Matthew Huggins (Assistant Director: Green Spaces, Green Services, Events), Matt More (Communications & Corporate Affairs Manager), Victoria Lee (Head of Human Resources), Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager).

31/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Fenton and Moore.

32/23 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Hackett declared a pecuniary interest in relation to Minute No 35/23 (Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan) on the basis that he was a board member of the Millennium Centre located in Friar Park.

33/23 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2023 were approved as a correct record.

34/23 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider as a matter of urgency.

35/23 **Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan**

Approval was sought to the Friar Park Urban Village masterplan, as amended, and to authorise the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth and the Director of Regeneration and Growth to progress the procurement strategy as proposed in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board asked several questions on behalf of the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board. Clarification was sought regarding possible contingency plans for the potential soaring costs that may be incurred over the course of the project.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth reported that the WMCA had secured funding which was intended to be used towards the remediation of the site, although the exact details relating to how this funding was utilised was still to be determined. In addition, further specific details relating to both authority's expectations of the scheme (such as Building Regulations 2025+), were yet to be determined. Early consideration of the impacts of specification requirements would be undertaken as discussions progress, allowing for consideration of the need for any additional grant funding and/or any implications for the Council's land receipt. The resultant scheme specification would form the basis of bids to be submitted by developers, and the contractual outputs required to be delivered.

Once a developer was appointed to progress the scheme, the responsibility for the management of costs and funding required to undertake it would fall to the developer.

Part of the rationale for utilisation of the Homes England Framework, which was recommended, was that the financial capability of a developer to undertake a scheme of this nature was tested prior to selection for the Framework. This would ensure that the selected developer had the appropriate knowledge, experience and financial capability to deliver the scheme as required.

In response to questions around the poor number of respondents to consultation and plans to place Council properties in the site, it was confirmed that a wide range of consultation had taken place including targeted letter drops and a press release. Response forms were also available both physically and digitally. Further engagement was planned as the scheme progressed and it was expected that once a developer had been appointed, community consultation on the proposed scheme would be carried out as part of any subsequent planning application. Regarding Council Housing on the site, the scheme would require a 25% requirement for affordable homes which could be provided in many forms. No decision had yet been made as to whether such provision on the site would be undertaken directly. The use of a local lettings policy for this site would also be explored.

Reason for Decision

Sandwell significantly underperformed against the annual housing delivery target of 1467 new dwellings set out in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The 630 units on the Friar Park site would make a significant contribution to those targets although delivery would be over a number of years. A minimum of 25% of the new homes would be affordable in accordance with planning policy.

Alternative Options Considered

Not progressing with the masterplan would not give the surety and design framework to have brought the site forward in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Option 1: Do nothing - this option would signify a continuation of the status quo and fail to deliver against Sandwell's housing delivery targets. The site would continue to be underutilised, remain highly contaminated and would not deliver any wider regenerative benefit to Friar Park.

Option 2: Do not proceed with the masterplan and instead, the Council could look to dispose of the site to a developer without a level of surety. Alternatively, the Council could have chosen to sell their site in isolation. However, this would fail to deliver a comprehensive regeneration proposal.

Resolved:--

- (1) that the results of the public consultation undertaken on the Friar Park Redevelopment Project during November to December 2022 as set out in the Consultation Report be received;
- (2) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, approval be given to the Friar Park Urban Village masterplan as amended;
- (3) that approval be given to the proposed procurement strategy for developer selection, including the use of the Homes England Framework, and that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth and the Director of Regeneration and Growth be authorised to progress the procurement strategy as proposed in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- (4) that approval be given to the use of the Masterplan in assessing developer bids as part of the agreed procurement process;
- (5) that in light of community concerns arising from the consultation exercise, the Director of Regeneration and Growth be authorised to develop a potential scheme which accommodates the extension of the Millennium Centre, and that the outcome of that work, including the detailed proposals and funding strategy scheme implementation are reported to Cabinet at a future date;
- (6) that the comments made by the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board at their meeting held on 28 February be received;

- (7) that, the Director of Regeneration and Growth be authorised to ensure that:
- (a) the use of a Local Lettings Policy on the site be explored;
 - (b) regular air quality monitoring is undertaken as the development progresses and once it is complete;
 - (c) different options to utilise appropriate vegetation to help address air pollution is considered for the site.

(Councillor Hackett left the meeting during consideration of this matter)

36/23

Award of Unified Communications Telephony Contract

Approval was sought to authorise the Director of Regeneration and Growth and the Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer, to award a contract for corporate unified communications – replacement contact centre telephony, via the Crown commercial Services Network Services 2 (RM3808) framework for a 5-year period (3+2), following a successful competitive exercise.

In response to a question by the Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources clarified that approval was being sought to award a contract following a procurement exercised.

A further question was asked on behalf of the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board. Although supportive of the report, questions were asked on why considerations of merging all three Council contact centres had not been included, which had been discussed as part of the Customer Journey Scrutiny Review. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources stated that the procurement of a new system would take a considerable amount of time to implement following award of contract. The current system was outdated and was causing a number of issues and that is why the Council were trying to move quickly. Any decision to merge/not merge contact centres would not be impacted by this procurement.

Reasons for recommendations

The Council telephony system Avaya CS1000 and Avaya CS 1000 (AACC6) which were in use within the Council's Contact Centres had been in place since 2007. This system was out of date and unsupported as a result.

A large proportion of the Council's customer contact was still via telephony (2020-2021 - 617.7k calls received, 2021-2022 - 641.0k calls received and 2022 - March 2023 - 511k calls were received), despite continued digital solutions being offered and therefore, the Council required a system that was fit for purpose, responsive and future proof.

Alternative options considered

An options appraisal was completed as part of the Business Case for this project and the option presented was found to be the most appropriate.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director of Regeneration & Growth and the Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, be authorised to award a contract for Corporate Unified Communications – replacement Contact Centre telephony, via the Crown Commercial Services Network Services 2 (RM3808) framework for a 5-year period (3 + 2), following a successful further competitive exercise;
- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance – Monitoring Officer be authorised to execute any documentation necessary to enable the action referred to in Resolution (1) above to proceed;
- (3) that in relation to Resolution (2) above, approval be given to fund the costs in 2023/24 from a combination of HRA resources and the Customer Journey Priority Service Investment budget, and future costs be considered as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process strategy as proposed in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Haden Hill Leisure Centre – Levelling Up Fund Programme

Approval was sought to authorise the Director of Finance to provide the minimum 10% match funding contribution to the Haden Hill Leisure Centre Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Programme from the identified LUF contribution for the project of £2million, including via prudential borrowing if necessary.

The Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board requested information on what was planned for the old equipment that was used.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism confirmed that as part of the decommissioning of the facilities at Langley and Smethwick, the building inventories would be assessed and decisions would be made regarding the future of all the equipment, furniture and fittings. Where possible, equipment in good condition would be relocated to other centres. End-of-life equipment would be recycled or disposed of in the most efficient manner possible.

Reasons for Decision

Cabinet previously agreed partnership funding contribution of up to £8,000,000 for four Sandwell Levelling Up Fund submissions. On the basis that only one bid was successful, the match funding required was £2m for the Haden Hill project. Partnership funding was required to deliver the Haden Hill Leisure Centre programme as project costs exceeded £20,000,000 awarded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Alternative Options Considered

The original project scope be reduced to address the current funding gap if further partnership funding cannot be secured.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director of Finance be authorised to provide the minimum 10% match funding contribution to the Haden Hill Leisure Centre Levelling Up Fund programme from the identified LUF contribution for this project of £2,000,000, including via prudential borrowing if necessary;

- (2) that the Director of Finance be authorised to identify and provide an initial £300,000 capital budget in advance of receipt of grant monies and draw down of any partnership funding to enable necessary key project developments to be undertaken in the interim;
- (3) that in connection with Resolution (2) above, the Director of Regeneration and Growth be authorised to procure and appoint architects via an industry framework utilising identified capital budget prior to receipt of grant;
- (4) that in connection with Resolution (2) above, the Director of Borough Economy be authorised to take all the necessary steps to appoint the project team utilising identified capital budget prior to receipt of grant;
- (5) that the Head of Human Resources be authorised to provide exemptions for recruitment processes as necessary to ensure avoidance of project delays;
- (6) that the Director of Borough Economy be authorised to finalise and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities;
- (7) that the Director of Borough Economy be authorised to agree to the terms of the Levelling Up Funds Local Authority Assurance Framework provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities;
- (8) that the Director of Borough Economy be authorised to formally accept the grant awarded (£20,000,000) by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and all associated grant terms.

38/23

The Future Use of Langley Swimming Centre

Approval was sought to authorise the allocation of the site at Vicarage Road, Oldbury for the development of new affordable rent council housing, subject to planning permission being obtained.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth moved the following amendments to the recommendation:

That the Director Regeneration and Growth in consultation with the Director of Housing and Director of Finance be authorised to amend funding sources available from the balance of 1-4-1 replacement receipts or Homes England to ensure the most appropriate use of funding for the scheme to ensure expenditure of Homes England funding within the contracted timescales and ensure the use of the time limited receipts generated from the sale of properties within the specified time periods.

The Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board, on behalf of the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, sought clarification on what consultation had taken place with ward members from the affected wards.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth highlighted that at a meeting of Cabinet on 31 January 2018, a decision was taken to close Langley Swimming Centre once leisure provision was transferred to the Sandwell Aquatic Centre. Therefore, local ward members were aware that this site would become vacant and requiring a review to its future use. The proposal to look at a scheme for council housing for this site, and the proposals for the Smethwick Swimming Centre which would also become vacant, were outlined to Langley and Abbey Ward Members at the end of February 2023 by the Director for Regeneration and Growth. At that time, members were asked to raise any concerns or issues they may have although no major concerns were received for this site.

Reasons for decision

Following the Cabinet decision made on 31 January 2018 (Minute No. 18/18 refers) Langley Swimming Centre was due to close in summer 2023 when the leisure provision would be located at the new Sandwell Aquatics Centre, Smethwick. Following the opening of the new Aquatics Centre the Council had the opportunity to develop the site at Vicarage Road, Oldbury with circa 27 homes (subject to planning consent), as part of the new strategic approach to provide more and better housing in the borough.

Alternative options considered

Option 1 – Disposal of the site on the open market

The Council could have disposed of the site on the open market. This would have resulted in the loss of a Council asset that could have been used for the Council build programme. The Council would have had minimal control over the future use of the building. This option increased the risk of ASB should the building become vacant.

Option 2 – Clear the site and disposal on the open market

Clearing the site and disposal of the site on the open market would have reduced ASB issues but as identified in Option 1, would result in the loss of a Council asset that could be used for the Council build programme.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to allocate the site at Vicarage Road, Oldbury for the development of new affordable rent council housing, subject to planning permission being obtained;
- (2) that approval be given to allocate funding from the Council's Housing Revenue Account to demolish the existing buildings/structures at Vicarage Road, Oldbury as a pre-requisite for site investigation to facilitate compliance with the Homes England funding timescales;
- (3) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, the Director of Finance be authorised to allocate adequate resources from the Council's Housing Revenue Account, subject to being satisfied that the proposal provides value for money, to deliver the scheme and to utilise grant funding offered by Homes England, under any relevant Homes England Strategic Partnerships, to assist with the delivery of the project;
- (4) that subject to receiving the necessary Strategic Investment Unit appraisal approval mark of 65 or above, the Director of Regeneration and Growth in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Director of Housing be authorised to prepare tendering documentation and subsequently procure, in accordance with any statutory regulations and the Council's Procurement and Financial Regulations a contractor/contractors to develop, on behalf of the Council, the proposed housing scheme; to

enter into or execute under seal any financial agreement in relation to the Homes England grant on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Director of Finance;

- (5) that subject to Resolution (3) and (4) above, the Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into or execute under seal any documentation in relation to award of the contract and/or development/partnership agreement, Homes England developer status, licence, undertaking, framework joining agreement, any consents or applications required for Planning or Highways appertaining to the delivery of the scheme and any other agreements with the procured contractor(s) and with the Homes England, as may be deemed necessary to facilitate development of the site with a housing scheme on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Director of Regeneration and Growth;
- (6) that the Director of Regeneration and Growth in consultation with the Director of Finance and subject to confirmation of the funding rules applicable, to submit an application for funding to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and any other relevant funding sources and, in the event the funding bid is successful, the Director of Regeneration and Growth in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Director of Housing be authorised to accept the funding and execute under seal any financial agreement in relation to the WMCA and any other relevant funding sources grant on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Director of Finance;
- (7) that following practical completion of each property at the site of Vicarage Road, Oldbury, the Director of Housing be authorised to manage and let the properties built in accordance with the Council’s housing allocation policy;
- (8) that the Director of Finance be authorised to make any necessary adjustment required to appropriate the site at Vicarage Road, Oldbury, for housing purposes;

- (9) that the Director Regeneration and Growth in consultation with the Director of Housing and Director of Finance be authorised to amend funding sources available from the balance of 1-4-1 replacement receipts or Homes England to ensure the most appropriate use of funding for the scheme to ensure expenditure of Homes England funding within the contracted timescales and ensure the use of the time limited receipts generated from the sale of properties within the specified time periods.

39/23

The Future Use of Smethwick Swimming Centre

Approval was sought to advertise the site at Thimblemill Road, Smethwick on the open market to ascertain if there was any commercial or other interest to purchase the site.

Reasons for Decision

Following the Cabinet decision made on 31 January 2018 (see Minute No. 18/18) Smethwick Swimming Centre was due to close in summer 2023 when the leisure provision would be located at the new Sandwell Aquatics Centre, Smethwick. A working group of officers from Planning, including the Conservation Officer, Strategic Assets and Sports Strategy was created to look at options for the future use of the building. The working group assumption was that no other Council service would have use for the building once it closed and the Council could not afford to retain the building. The listed status of the building constrained uses to those that would interfere least with its significance as a designated heritage asset and consequently appropriate uses were limited. Proper maintenance of such buildings was both necessary and potentially costly.

Alternative Options Considered

In order to enforce the legislation and fulfil its statutory duty, the Council required a policy that outlined what fines would be for breaches of the legislation. The Council could have decided to construct its own framework for calculating the amount of a civil penalty however, this risked not being aligned with other authorities which could impact the Council's ability to justify in the event of any appeal against a penalty levied.

As a result of the requirement for all authorities in England to have regard to the policy of the Lead Enforcement Authority, the adoption of this policy would ensure that the approach was consistent with that of other authorities.

The Council had the opportunity to support the People's Orchestra, a community based non-profit organisation to convert the building into a music venue. This change of use would provide a 'community development and training hub' and concert hall, ensuring the building was retained as a community venue. Such a use would be expected to be compatible with the conservation of the building's significance. However, it would likely involve the Council underwriting building related revenue risk in the short to medium term.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to test the market and advertise the site at Thimblemill Road, Smethwick on the open market to ascertain if there is any commercial or other interest to purchase the site, subject to any planning consents that may be required for change of use;
- (2) that the Director for Regeneration and Growth be authorised to work with a community consortia, The People's Orchestra, in parallel with Resolution (1), to allow the group three months to develop proposals to determine their projects viability and allow them to undertake a business planning exercise to confirm whether they are able to take on the premises under a Community Asset Transfer;
- (3) that in connection with Resolution (2) above, a further report be submitted to the Cabinet in June 2023 which will outline the disposal options identified through market testing and full details of the community-led option.

40/23

Use of Compulsory Purchase Order Powers to enable strategic acquisitions in West Bromwich Town Centre

Approval was sought to authorise the Director of Regeneration and Growth to use Compulsory Purchase Order powers to acquire any land and property interest necessary to enable delivery of zones 1 & 2 identified in the West Bromwich Masterplan.

The Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board sought clarity on why Compulsory Purchase Order(CPO) powers could not be made on pockets of land that had stood dormant for years. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth reported that a CPO should only be made where there was a compelling case in the public interest. This was usually to facilitate major regeneration projects in line with the Local Plan. Instead, planning enforcement powers should be used to tackle pockets of untidy land and proactive dialogue with landowners should take place to understand issues around developments.

An additional question was asked on behalf of the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board. Clarification was sought on what the Council was proposing to acquire and any associated risks. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth confirmed that land and property interests were identified in the report. A more detailed risk register had been prepared as part of the full business case submission which would continuously be updated.

Reasons for recommendations

Use of a Compulsory Purchase Order would assist SMBC in the delivery of the aspirations outlined in the West Bromwich Masterplan, which sought comprehensive regeneration of the town centre.

Alternative options considered

Option 1: Continue to negotiate by agreement only - without proactive use of CPO powers it was likely that the status quo would persist. This would fail to deliver against the Council's regeneration agenda in West Bromwich and would fail to deliver against the Towns Fund outputs resulting in grant funding clawback. Reputation of the Council would be at risk as a result of failing to secure and spend government grant.

Option 2: Identify another site that could achieve the Town Fund project and submit another change request - this area of West Bromwich was specifically being targeted due to acutely high levels of vacancy. A comprehensive options appraisal had been conducted by officers and there were currently no other sites in the area that deliver similar strategic benefits and satisfy the grant funding criteria.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to authorise the Director of Regeneration and Growth to use Compulsory Purchase Order powers to acquire any land and property interests necessary to enable delivery of zones 1 & 2 identified in the West Bromwich Masterplan;
- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration & Growth, be authorised to take all preparatory actions to enable the making of a Regeneration Compulsory Purchase Order, subject to a further resolution to formally make the Compulsory Purchase Order and confirm the agreed (red-lined) order lands;
- (3) that the Director of Regeneration & Growth be authorised to procure any professional services required to advise the council on the preferred Compulsory Purchase Order strategy and execution, including a revised Property Cost Estimate (PCE) on any necessary interests

41/23

Demolition Framework 2023-2027.

Approval was sought to authorise the Director of Regeneration and Growth, in consultation with the S151 Officer, Director of Law & Governance-Monitoring Officer and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Growth, to commence procurement of contractors for a demolition framework agreement to undertake demolition works on council managed properties in accordance with the public procurement rules, the Council's procurement and contract procedure rules and financial regulations.

Reasons for recommendations

The Council operated a successful demolition framework agreement, this ended in March 2023. The new framework needed to be in place before the previous one ended to provide the Council with a continuity of demolition options and resources.

Alternative options considered

The alternative option to the demolition framework was that demolition projects would instead be undertaken individually and were procured on a project by project basis. This would result in the following:

- additional procurement costs;
- extended programme to appoint a contractor;
- inability to react quickly to urgent works;
- potential loss of income from external clients;
- loss of opportunity to develop close working relationship with specialist demolition contractor(s) and other local public sector bodies.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to authorise the Director of Regeneration and Growth, in consultation with the S151 Officer, Director of Law & Governance & Monitoring Officer and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Growth, to commence procurement of contractors for a demolition framework agreement to undertake demolition works on council managed properties in accordance with the public procurement rules, the Council's procurement and contract procedure rules and financial regulations;
- (2) that the Director of Regeneration and Growth be authorised to award contracts to the successful demolition framework contractors in accordance with Resolution (1) above.
- (3) that subject to Resolutions (1) and (2) above, the Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into and execute under seal as may be required, any documentation in relation to the award of framework contract and/or other agreements with the procured contractor(s) as deemed necessary;
- (4) that any necessary exemption be made to the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action referred to in Resolution (1) above to proceed.

Parking Enforcement Contract Exemption

Approval was sought to authorise the Director of Borough Economy to extend the contract to APCOA for a period until 30 June 2023 at a value of £994,510 to deliver Parking Enforcement Services representing an increase of £34,561 (3.6%) on the value for 2021/22 of £959,949.

Reasons for recommendations

Efforts to properly procure a new parking enforcement contract, with available internal resources and external commissions, over the last year had been unsuccessful. The scope of the contract requirements had changed and were dependent on the balance between in-house and contract provision, the best practice use of new technology, the adoption of new enforcement powers, confirmation of the approval of revised parking charges and the post pandemic stabilisation of parking demand. These factors were unforeseen at the outset.

The recommendations set out the approvals necessary to provide sufficient time to commission external subject matter expertise and capacity to develop the options and carry out potential procurement activity if required.

Alternative options considered

No suitable frameworks had been available and there had not been a positive response to the ITT for Consultancy Services that were sent out December 2021 to January 2022.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director of Borough Economy be authorised to extend the contract to APCOA for a period until 30 June 2023 at a value of £994,510 to deliver Parking Enforcement Services representing an increase of £34,561 (3.6%) on the value for 2021/22 of £959,949;
- (2) that the Director of Borough Economy be authorised to extend the contract to APCOA for a period from 1 July 2023 until 29th February 2024 at a value of £704,613 to deliver Parking Enforcement Services, equivalent to an increase of £6.3% on the value for the equivalent period in 2022/23;

- (3) that the Director of Borough Economy, in consultation with the Director of Finance, be authorised to extend, in the event of process delays, the contract to APCOA for a period from 1st March 2024 until 30th June 2024 at a value of £349,644 to deliver Parking Enforcement Services;
- (4) that approval be given to the procurement of a new four-year parking enforcement contract with provision for two, one-year extensions to include transferring the following staff from APCOA to the Council for the future in-house delivery of these services, at an annual value of approximately £200,000 and would reduce the scope of the new contract accordingly;

Service	Staff Transfer Numbers
First Line Notice Processing Officers	2
Notice Processing Supervisor	1
Bus Lane Enforcement officer (3 days per wk)	1
TRO Officer, Surveyor	1
Representation and Appeals Officer	1
Operations Supervisor	1

- (5) that any necessary exemptions be made under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, the exception that we will use is a VEAT Notice to mitigate any risk to enable the course of action referred to in Resolutions (1), (2) and (3) above to proceed;
- (6) that any necessary exemptions be made to Council Policy or approved processes to enable the course of action referred to in Resolution (4);
- (7) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to take any necessary actions to bring the proposals referred to in Resolutions (1) – (6) into effect.

Organisational Culture, Values and Behaviours

Approval was sought to adopt a new set of values and behaviours for Sandwell Council following the work that had taken place as part of the culture workstream within the Single Improvement Plan.

The Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board, on behalf of the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, requested further information on when, if ever, recorded meetings would be taking place between staff and their managers on a regular basis. Questions were also raised on how the Cabinet Member would ensure that the new organisation Culture, Values and Behaviours would be incorporated into the staff/manager meetings as well as the annual appraisal process.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources confirmed that with the introduction of Oracle Fusion in April 2024, systems would be available to record meetings between employees and managers. This functionality would be explored as part of the development project work. However, consideration would need to be given as to whether it would be appropriate to record these types of meetings. The Culture, Values and Behaviours would be embedded into people management approaches including performance and development review processes.

Reasons for recommendations

The Council's organisational values and behaviours were central to customer experience and would both drive and be embedded through work on customer journey and around equality, diversity and inclusion.

Alternative options considered

There was no alternative option as this recommendation had been agreed as part of the Single Improvement Plan

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to adopt the following set of values and behaviours for Sandwell Council following the work that has taken place as part of the culture workstream within the Single Improvement Plan:-
 - We are one team - united and working together with the shared purpose of achieving great results.

- We are customer focused– caring about providing the best possible public service.
- We are inclusive – treating each other with respect and knowing our diversity is our strength.
- We are ambitious – striving for excellence, always looking to get better and making sure everyone can take pride in our borough.
- We are accountable – delivering what we say we will.

44/23

Cape Primary School and Uplands Manor Primary School – Making significant changes (prescribed alternations)

Approval was sought to proposals to reduce the pupil admission number (PAN) of both Cape Primary School and Uplands Manor Primary School, Smethwick.

The Vice Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board, on behalf of the Chair of Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board, asked if there were any plans to use the places/premises within the borough that were seeking to reduce their PANS to help with the growing number of places needed for children with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs).

The Cabinet Member for Children and Education confirmed that plans had been made through the Special Schools Place Planning Strategy to do so. As part of the initial discussion with each school that approached the Council seek a reduction in PAN, re-purposing of space for SEND was included as part of that dialogue.

Although not as a direct result of a falling roll, the Council had a recent example at Grace Mary Primary School, where focus provision had been extended through the re-use of surplus space. Uplands Manor Primary School had already expanded its focus provision to re-use surplus areas.

The Council would continue to support schools with additional resources who had the knowledge, expertise and skills to train staff, to enable an extension to, or form a new Focus Provision Unit/ Resource Base at their school.

ASD was the only one area of SEND that required additional specialist school place capacity. Officers were also looking to meet demand for extra support for children with a multitude of specialist needs.

Reasons for recommendations

The reduction in the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) would lessen the impact on the schools' budgets where the existing PAN was not being filled as the projected demand was considerably less than the PAN.

Alternative options considered

Do nothing and keep the PAN at their existing numbers – the Reception classes were not forecast to fill to their maximum, meaning the schools would not receive the maximum funding to enable the required classes per year group. There would be an expectation from the Local Authority that the schools could still take up to the maximum number of pupils throughout the whole intake year. This may have resulted in a high number of in-year allocations that could potentially require changes to class organisation during the school year which was detrimental to the pupils and the school.

Resolved that in connection with the proposed prescribed alterations to reduce the pupil admission number (PAN) of Cape Primary School, Cape Hill, Durban Road, Smethwick, B66 4SH and Uplands Manor Primary School, Addenbrooke Road, Smethwick, B67 6HT by a form of entry with effect from 1 September 2023 approval be given to:

- (1) publish the appropriate statutory proposals for each school;
- (2) delegate the decision for the prescribed alternations to the Director of Children's Services and Education, following completion of the statutory consultation period, and to request the School Adjudicator to make a final decision on the proposals to reduce the PAN's by a form of entry as the Authority has already determined its admission arrangements for those maintained schools for 2023/24 academic year.

45/23

Appointment of a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust

Approval was sought to agree the appointment of Jane Bleach as non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust for a three year period from 1 March 2023.

Reasons for recommendations

The appointment of the previous non-executive director ended in February 2023. To ensure that the requirement for independent non-executive directors as set out in Article 13.1.4 of the Articles of Association for Sandwell Children's Trust (the Trust) was met, a recruitment exercise was undertaken.

Alternative options considered

The alternative option would be to reject the recommendation. However, in line with the Governance Side Agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) (which superseded the Memorandum of Understanding) and the Trust's Articles of Association, there would be a vacancy on the board that would still need to be filled. A new recruitment process would need to be undertaken which would leave a gap in the governance arrangements of the Trust for a period of time.

Resolved:-

- (1) that Cabinet, on behalf of the Council as the sole owner of Sandwell Children's Trust:
 - a) notes the completed sequence of events that are contractually required to appoint a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust;
 - b) notes and takes into account in its decision-making, the response from the Secretary of State for Education; and
 - c) agrees the appointment Jane Bleach as a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust for the period of 3 years from 1 March 2023.

46/23

Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023 – 2028

Approval was sought to the adoption of the Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023-2028.

Reasons for recommendations

The Tree Strategy refreshed the Council's approach to the protection, enhancement, and management of tree stock in Sandwell and aligned with practice in other authorities and national guidance.

Alternative options considered

There were no alternative options.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to adopt the Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023 – 2028 as set out in Appendix A, including:
 - a) the Council's policy and approach to protecting, enhancing, and managing our tree stock in Sandwell;
 - b) the Council's policy and approach towards trees on private land;
 - c) the Council's policy and approach towards tree planting;
- (2) that the Assistant Director of Borough Economy be authorised to:
 - a) prepare a detailed action plan for the implementation of the Tree Strategy;
 - b) work with Climate Change colleagues and internal / external stakeholders to develop and implement a tree planting programme for the 2023 / 2024 planting season;
 - c) complete a baseline inspection of all trees on Council land within the red risk areas in the next 18 months, to comply with the inspection framework set out within the strategy;
 - d) work with finance colleagues to identify funds for the baseline inspection and subsequent red risk remedial works arising from this;

- e) prepare projections for the medium-term financial plan in relation to trees, following the baseline inspections, to meet the commitments set out within this strategy;
- f) submit a further report to Cabinet to consider on recommendations addressing Ash Dieback.

47/23

Improvement Plan Progress & Phase 2 Refresh

An update was received in relation to progress against the Improvement Plan up to 2 February 2023.

In response to questions from Scrutiny Chairs, it was highlighted that in contrast to previous unsuccessful attempts at recruiting to the children's to adults services project manager post, the most recent listing had gained interest. Work had progressed with additional resource from within the business. An outline business case had been refined with the Children's Trust and key external partners, and a governance structure had been agreed.

In relation to questions raised around the review into the SERCO contract, members were notified that officers would welcome the opportunity to present the report findings to the next available meeting of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board.

Reasons for recommendations

A quarterly update on progress against the Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022. The Improvement Plan incorporated all recommendations from the original Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and the CIPFA Financial Management Review, as well as the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Alternative options considered

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

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

Reviewing progress against the Improvement Plan enabled senior officers and members to have oversight of delivery, and take corrective action, as necessary. Alternative methods of monitoring progress could be adopted. The current monitoring method was regularly reviewed to ensure it remained fit for purpose and provided Leadership Team with the oversight they require.

Resolved:-

- (1) that progress against the Improvement Plan up to 2 February 2023 be received;
- (2) that the CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report be received;
- (3) that the responses to the recommendations and improvement points made in the Grant Thornton reissued Value for Money Governance Review Report, Grant Thornton Follow Up Review Report and the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review be received;
- (4) that the Improvement Plan Risk Register as now submitted be received;
- (5) that details of changes to the Improvement Plan as a result of the follow-up external reviews and change to the Improvement Plan monitoring method be received;
- (6) that any recommendations or comments made by Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in relation to the Improvement Plan will be reported to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

Performance Management Framework – Q3 Monitoring

Approval of the Q3 monitoring reports was sought. An update was also provided in relation to the development of the Corporate Management Framework.

Reasons for recommendations

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

The corporate PMF had been further refined and built into business processes. The report on Q3 sought to build on the intelligence gathered for Q1 and Q2 and offered the opportunity to assess in year progress.

Alternative options considered

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

The council had various options on what type of performance management framework to establish. The Council's approach had been developed through understanding the needs of the organisation and drawing on best practice from other local authorities.

Resolved that that the progress on the further development of the Corporate Performance Management Framework be received and approval be given to the Q3 monitoring reports.

Exclusion of the Public and Press

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

Refurbishment of Alfred Gunn House

Approval was sought to increase the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Investment Programme Budget for completion of the major project at Alfred Gunn House.

Reasons for recommendations

As the projected total cost of the project has risen, compared to the original contract value, Cabinet approval was required in order to authorise the additional £9.997m to £11.254m spend from the HRA Capital Investment Programme.

Alternative options considered

The option to terminate the current contract and re-tender for the outstanding work had been considered by officers but had been ruled out on the basis that additional costs had already been incurred and there had been no significant breach of contract by the contractor that would entitle the council to terminate.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to increase the Housing Revenue Account Capital Investment Programme budget by an amount in the range £9.997m to £11.254m for completion of the major project at Alfred Gunn House, which includes the refurbishment of the block, new build flats within the block and new build homes in the vicinity of the block;
- (2) that the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Director of Finance, be authorised to remodel the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Investment Programme in order to accommodate the increased costs set out at Resolution (1);
- (3) that the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, be authorised to identify and implement the appropriate process for approving contract variations, in accordance with legal, financial and procurement procedures and advice;

- (4) that negotiations with the contractor, Seddon, be finalised in order to confirm the full and final costs of the Alfred Gunn House project, which shall not exceed £11.254m, and the completion date for the project;
- (5) that a review of contract performance and management on the Alfred Gunn House project be undertaken in order to learn the lessons and put more robust project and contract management in place for ongoing and future major complex projects of this type, and the review be reported to the Cabinet Member for Housing

Meeting ended at 4.45pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Wednesday, 29 March 2023 at 6.00 pm
In the Council Chamber at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair);
Councillors Dunn, Fenton and Hinchliff.

In attendance: Simone Hines (Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer), Sue Moore (Group Head for Education Support Services), Fiona McGlaughlin (Procurement Manager), Michael Jarrett (Director of Children and Education), Rebecca Jenkins (Senior Lead - Service Improvement), Sarah Sprung (Senior Lead Officer), Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead - Service Improvement), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager, Statutory Scrutiny Officer) and Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer).

26/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Chidley, E M Giles and Trumpeter.

27/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.



28/23 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

29/23 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business.

30/23 **SEND Transport Performance Update**

An update on the SEND Transport Performance was provided to the Board. It was a statutory duty of the Council to provide travel assistance for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The baseline SEND transport budget was £7.52m however, based on projections, the expected final outturn cost for the financial year of 2022-23 was £11.2m. The difference of £3.7m was highlighted as a budget pressure and was inclusive of all travel assistance provided. This scenario was not unique to Sandwell and the stated 51% increase of individuals with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) since 2019 reflected the immense pressure on the local authority. Details were also provided on the 25% increase of pupils in receipt of travel assistance since January 2021. Many authorities, including Sandwell, had confirmed that the position was unsustainable, and requests were made for a change in legislation. Further increases of children with an EHCP were expected which would inevitably impact the costs and demand for travel assistance going forward.

Discussions continued regarding the new procurement exercise which sought to address recommendations received from the Grant Thornton review that had taken place in December 2021. Recommendations from the Council's own internal review, and the Childrens Services and Education Scrutiny Board, were also taken into account. The new framework was developed to ensure the delivery of several key components including effective communications with between parents, carers and operators.

The template produced for the SEND transport project was expected to be applied to other major projects within the Council due to the vigorous testing and scrutiny that the framework had received. Potential tweaks had been identified to continuously improve the service going forward. Members were minded that the process for the next SEND Transport plan would take place sooner to enable adequate time. This would allow needs to be aligned with other policies across the Council as well as the use of robust contract management arrangements and pre-procurement consultation to parents and key stakeholders.

In response to questions from members, it was confirmed that benchmarking with other authorities enabled officers to cherry-pick and cost the best ideas to help form Sandwell's plan. The introduction of the Fusion software would enable key performance indicators to be tracked more efficiently with tools available to view live spend and monitoring.

31/23 **Improvement Plan Progress, Phase 2 Refresh and External Follow-up Reviews**

A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022 to address recommendations from the Value for Money Review into the council's governance arrangements, a CIPFA financial management review, an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, and Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The single Improvement Plan replaced the Governance Review Improvement Plan which was approved in January 2022.

A follow-up review had been received which recognised the significant progress that had been made. Four new key recommendations had been highlighted alongside some additional 29 improvement recommendations which had all been embedded into the refresh of the improvement plan. Out of the 17 key lines of enquiry, 4, including SEND transport, had been closed with no evidence of significant weakness.

Feedback was also received from the LGA and CIPFA follow-up reviews which both highlighted substantial improvement including an increase from a 2* to a 3* rating.

Significant progress had continued to be made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan. This included the completion of the Phase 1 Governance Review with changes to the Constitution agreed, preparations for the new Chief Executive taking up post on 6 February, approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the completion of the reviews of the Serco and Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) contracts. Phase 2 of the governance review would embed these changes.

Positive feedback on the Council's scrutiny processes was recognised, especially in relation to the Council's culture and professional behaviour within key committees.

The following areas of slippage were identified:

- Slippage was highlighted in delivery of the workforce strategy and delivery of effective decision making training.
- Slippage had been experienced in the establishment of the customer journey programme board (which had met since the report had been completed) as well as the review of KPIs and project management system.
- Some delays and issues relating to the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda had been witnessed as well as slippage relating to commercial business cases.
- The Council were still relying on external bodies to conduct some of their necessary procurement exercises.
- Slippage was still being experienced with the transition from children's to adult's services. Work was underway despite not having a manager in place after 2 unsuccessful recruitment attempts.

Next steps were discussed which included ensuring a stable medium term financial position, improving customer experience and embedding organisational values into "business as usual".

In response to questions, members were minded that the Lion Farm issue was still ongoing. The other party had submitted additional information as part of their response. The expert determinator had given the Council time to respond to the evidence. It was expected that a final determination would be made towards the middle of May 2023.

It was agreed that a summary of events detailing the Council's current situation with Lion Farm be prepared and circulated to the Board.

Agreed that:-

- 1) a summary and chronology of events explaining where the Council is currently with regards to the proposed development on Lion Farm, and how it reached the expert determination process, be circulated to the Board;
- 2) a copy of the recent internal review in relation to SERCO be provide to the Board;
- 3) with consultation with members of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, a report be submitted to the Board in relation to issues around the recruitment to the Childrens to Adults service project manager post.

32/23

Performance Management Framework – Q3 Monitoring

An update was provided on the Performance Management Framework for Quarter 3. In total, the amount of “Actions on Track” had increased from 258 to 273. Medium issues now totalled 101, up from 90 in the Quarter 2. The amount of significant risks had decreased from 9 to 3 and the amount of risks with no available update reduced to 33 from 53.

Details in relation to the three red risks were highlighted to the Board:-

- “Bringing together governance arrangements and budgets to ensure voluntary community sector (VCS) grants were aligned to corporate objectives”. The team was operating at less than full capacity due to sickness.
- “Development of a corporate strategy” – Resources continued to be dedicated to deliver the improvement plan; the Corporate Performance Manager would lead development when in post.
- “Review of Council’s payment process” – This would be part of the business process review.

Key contracts were also discussed with points being made as follows:-

- Improvement in performance against the KPIs by the Childrens Trust with 13 out of 15 KPIs now green. A reduction in the total number of children in care had also taken place.
- Serco had attended all governance and contract meetings during quarter 3. The Street cleaning improvement plan was live and service resilience had improved following the summer disruptions
- SLT memberships had reduced in the quarter which, although an increase on December 2021 levels, was still below those seen pre-pandemic. Going forward, benchmarking against other comparators would take place to monitor post-covid trading levels. The transition to LATC would also be supported.
- Places Leisure had a total of 90,752 visits in Q3.

Organisational Health

Sickness absence had increased during Q3 with a total of 8.28 working days per employee being lost; this was in comparison to the target of 6.21. 1/3 of the sickness was short term with the largest cause of sickness being stress, depression and mental health followed by infection and muscular-skeletal problems. A detailed review was underway to analyse trends and to review sickness absence management processes.

Customer Experience

The Council's contact centres were improving and closer to target although turnover and sickness had caused a slight increase in wait times. Impact of the recruitment drives would be seen in Q4's performance. Information requests were still below target although significant improvement had been made in complying with requests through FOI request routes.

Members sought clarification on why recycling provisions for high-rise blocks was taking so long to proceed with, members also expressed concerns raised by residents regarding the standard and cleanliness of some SLT sites. Answers would be provided to members once investigated further.

Officers confirmed that there had been no issues regarding the availability of contacting tax specialists within the Council although further queries would be made to ensure that this was the case. The Revenues and Benefits contact centre had experienced

difficulties with call volume due to energy rebate calls. Call waiting times had significantly reduced since due to the drop in demand for energy rebates. Despite recruitment difficulties, officers assured members that performance was improving. A new web chat function with live officer responses was also now available to assist with enquiries.

Following further discussions in relation to sickness and absence of Council staff, officers offered to provide further information at a future meeting to highlight reasons for sickness and any correlations discovered in the process.

33/23 **Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations**

Members requested that all actions be included in the tracking and monitoring document at its next meeting.

Meeting ended at 7.49pm.

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

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Minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

16 March 2023 at 6.00pm
In the Council Chamber at Sandwell Council House

Present: Councillor Preece (Chair);
Councillors Anandou, Choudhry, L Giles, Hinchliff, Khatun
and Lewis.
Mr Ager (Independent Member).

Officers: Peter Farrow (Audit Services Manager); Narinder Phagura
(Business Partner - Audit Services); Guy Grafton (Grant
Thornton); Zoe Thomas (Grant Thornton); Rebecca Maher
(Head of Finance); Sanjay Desor (Head of Technical
Finance, Capital and Strategy); Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead
– Service Improvement); Rebecca Jenkins (Senior Lead -
Service Improvement); Alexander Goddard (Democratic
Services Officer) and Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services
Officer).

10/23 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies received.

11/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.



12/23 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 January 2023 is confirmed as a correct record.

13/23 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business for discussion.

14/23 **Improvement Plan Progress and Phase 2 Refresh**

An update was provided to the Committee on progress made against the improvement plan.

Significant progress had continued to be made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan. This included the completion of the Phase 1 Governance Review with changes to the Constitution agreed, preparations for the new Chief Executive taking up post on 6 February, approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the completion of the reviews of the Serco and Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) contracts.

A summary of the current risks and slippages were delivered to the Committee. The Workforce Strategy had experienced slippage from the original delivery date of March 2023; the new target date was May 2023. It was expected that the “One Team Framework” would be approved in March 2023.

Regarding Corporate Oversight progress, issues had been identified in relation to establishing a customer journey programme board. A lack of resources meant that the original timescales would not be met, however, board members were in the process of being confirmed and future board dates would be planned in due course.

Slippage had been seen against the Performance Management Framework. The main delays to the original timescales were due to the required alignment with the workforce strategy and customer journey programme.



A lack of resources and recruitment difficulties had also resulted in slippage against the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work, the transition from Children's to Adult's Services, as well as the Customer Journey Strategy. A revised approach to decision making training meant that slippage had been experienced against the estimated dates of completion.

Following further evidence submitted by the third party in relation to the Expert Determination of Lion Farm, the resolution date would now take place later than expected; it was confirmed that a decision would be made by the end of March 2023.

Members were also provided an update on the risk register. In total, there were five green risks, six amber risks and one red risk. The single red risk was a new risk in relation to embedding the constitutional changes. Several risks had been reduced including the performance management framework and data quality and the agreement of constitutional changes risk had been closed completely.

In response to questions from members, officers would provide more specific clarification in relation to difficulties around the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workstream had a later date.

15/23

Strategic Risk Register Update

Officers provided the Committee with an update on the key strategic risks faced by the Council since the risks were last reported on in September 2022.

Members were minded that the Strategic Risk Register did not include all of the risks faced by the Council. Other risks were captured within directorate, programme and project risk registers in line with the Council's risk management framework.

Five risks rated red had reduced to amber, six risks had been escalated from individual directorate risk registers to the strategic risk register and two risks had been closed from the strategic risk register.



The following risks had been escalated from their individual directorate risk registers:-

- Risk 57b – Customer Journey. Escalated given the priority within the corporate plan
- Risk 66 – Borough Archives.
- Risk 67 – Elections Act. Escalated due to the extensive work required to manage the voter ID process for the May 2023 Elections.
- Risk 68 – Sandwell Local Plan. Escalated as a result of the cancellation of the Black Country Plan.
- Risk 69 – Adult Social Care Market Sustainability – Escalated due to the fair cost of care exercise.
- Risk 70 – Organisational Culture

The following risks had seen a reduction in their risk rating or been removed from the risk register:-

- Risks 27 and 27a – MTGS and Future Government Policies and Funding Sources had been reduced from red to amber as a result of the local government settlement which confirmed that business rates reset, and fair funding would not happen in this Parliament. This allowed the Council more time to prepare.
- Risk 53 - Oracle E Business Suite had been reduced from red to amber as a result of the review and reset of the programme
- Risk 54 – SEND had been removed as a result of the procurement of the contracts in 2022.
- Risk 57 – New Operating Model which had focussed on embedding the hybrid and flexible working model had been removed as it had been rated as green for some time
- Risk 61 – Partner Organisations Contract Services Delivery had reduced from red to amber as a result of the work completed in respect of the contract with the SCT, SLT and Serco contracts.

In response to questions, Officers assured Members that the goals set were realistic. Information regarding voter ID and swimming bath memberships would be provided to members as requested. Assurance was also provided on the hopes of a smooth



implementation of Oracle Fusion. A support partner was assisting the process which planned for the system to go live in April 2024. Issues faced by other authorities using the same system had been investigated and a “lessons learned” document had been created.

16/23 **Internal Audit Plan**

Approval was sought of the internal audit plan for 2023/2024 which contained a list of audits that was intended to be made over the year. Members were minded that it was important that the resources available were focussed on areas that provide the most benefit to the Council. An assurance exercise was undertaken to see what areas would be a priority. Discussions had been underway with Leadership Team to ensure that the issues addressed were the most beneficial.

Agreed that the Internal Audit Plan 2023/24 is approved.

17/23 **Internal Audit Progress Report**

The Committee received an update in relation to the Internal Audit Progress Report which detailed progress made against the delivery of the 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan.

In particular, information was provided regarding the limited assurance assigned to the “Boscobel TMO Repairs/Voids” auditable area.

A Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) was a means by which Council tenants and leaseholders could collectively take on responsibility for managing the homes that they lived in. TMO’s were an independent legal body and usually elected a tenant led management committee to run the organisation. Boscobel TMO had 115 properties. A review had been undertaken to assess the adequacy of the system for the control and inspection of work and maintenance and flow of progress information. A number of issues where improvement could be made were identified by the Audit and an outstanding issue from a previous report still remained outstanding/



The contract did not contain any GDPR requirements which was a risk of infringement of statutory regulations for both the Council and the TMO. Quotes were not being requested for work undertaken and completed works were not being signed off. It was evident that the TMO had also not undertaken any checks on the electrical contractor's credentials or their ability to undertake electrical work.

Officers reassured the committee that issues with Boscobel TMO were being addressed and that Audit and the Director of Housing had met with the TMO on several occasions to support them. Further updates would be provided when officers were in a position to do so.

18/23 **Audit and Risk Assurance Committee - Terms of Reference Annual Review**

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's Terms of Reference had been static for several years. CIPFA had updated their model of terms and reference and therefore, the Audit Terms of Reference had been edited to reflect the subtle changes. The role of Audit had not changed in any fundamental or significant manner and the role of internal and external audit was now clearer.

Agreed that the terms of reference for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is approved.

19/23 **Statement of Accounts 2020/21**

The draft accounts for 2021 were presented to the Committee for approval in line with International Financial Reporting Standards. Delays in preparing older accounts had resulted in the Statement of Accounts being delayed for approval due to knock-on effects. Limited resources meant that slippage had occurred against original deadlines.

Members were minded of a particular recommendation set out in the report that sought authorisation for the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), to agree any changes which may



be necessary in order to ensure the finalisation of the external audit being concluded by the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton, to ensure completion of the Statement of Accounts for financial year 2020/21.

Additional resources had been obtained to help assist however, the lack of an asset management system had caused issues and further delays. Officers were hopeful that an asset management system would be in place towards the end of 2023.

Members were reminded that all of the Council's primary statements were needed to obtain a full picture of the Council's financial position. The movement in reserves statements reconciled income and expenditure to what the actual tax pay and costs position was. This adjustment reconciled the actual outturn position to a surplus of £11m.

Auditors from Grant Thornton addressed the Committee with the following highlights:-

- Concerns were had around falling too far behind due to the complexity of the accounts;
- Significant errors were present within the financial statements which had caused a back-log in work;
- The Council's usable reserves increased once audit changes were taken into account
- The Audit was substantially complete with just a little more work around the PSI scheme with Serco.
- Several issues appeared when reviewing creditors and accruals. Several budget holders had been accruing to the budget rather than actual expenditure; issues around prepayments were also noted.
- A weakness was present in property records and changes had been made to the way that property had been valued although auditors were confident that this was accounted for in the 2021 financial statements.
- Total corrections resulted in reduction in overdraft and Grant Thornton were now happy with the overall accounts for 2020-2021.



In response to questions, officers confirmed that, in relation to the Serco contract, a PFI model was used instead of PPP. This was due to legacy decisions that were originally decided in 2010 to which the Council was contractually bound.

A new structure was in place and existing staff members were being upskilled. Interim resources had been sourced to help with the backlog however, good technical accountants were hard to recruit. Officers and Grant Thornton were thanked for the hard work in preparing the statement of accounts given the difficult legacy issues faced in the process.

Agreed that that the Director of Finance b authorised, in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), to agree any changes which may be necessary in order to ensure the finalisation of the external audit currently being concluded by the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton, to ensure completion of the Statement of Accounts for financial year 2020/21.

Meeting ended at 7.42p.m.

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk



Report to Council

13 June 2023

Subject:	Motions – Responses and Updates
Director:	Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer - Surjit Tour
Contact Officer:	Trisha Newton Trisha_Newton@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations


That Council receive and consider the Motions , as set out on the agenda.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

Any member of the Council may give notice of not more than one motion for consideration at any ordinary meeting of the Council. Such a motion may be considered at the request of that member without prior reference to a committee, the Cabinet or a cabinet member.

The Leader of the Council may give notice of more than one motion for consideration at any ordinary meeting of the Council.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Councillors submitting motions are demonstrating their local leadership role, acting as a voice for their local community and expressing local concerns.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Council regularly considers notices of motion submitted by members under Standing Order No 7.
- 4.2 Details of the Council resolutions in response to motions, action taken and responses received can be found on [Modern.gov](https://www.modern.gov.uk)
- 4.3 Responses received to motions will be reported back to the next available meeting of Full Council.
- 4.4 Further to Minute No. 54/23(b) - DBS Legislation Review – a copy of the letter that has been sent to Sarah Dines MP is attached.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 There are no alternative options.

6 Implications

Resources:	There are no strategic resources arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	Standing Order No 7 provides that any member of the Council may give notice of not more than one motion for consideration at any ordinary meeting of the Council and sets out the process for dealing with the motion. The motion can only be accepted if it relates to matters for which the Council has powers, duties and responsibility, or which affect the Borough or a part of it, or some or all of its citizens.
Risk:	There are no risk implications arising from this report.
Equality:	There are no implications for equality arising from this report.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities arising from this report.
Social Value	There are no implications for social value arising from this report.





Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Council Leader – Cllr Kerrie Carmichael

Sarah Dines MP
Under Secretary of State
For Safeguarding
Via Email:
Sarah.dines.mp@parliament.uk

My Ref: KC/JLP

Please ask for: Kerrie Carmichael
Telephone Number: 07342059670
Date: 17th May 2023

Dear Miss Dines

Disclosure and Barring Service Checks for Councillors

I write with reference to the above matter.

Sandwell Council has recently introduced a protocol in relation to DBS checks for all Councillors. In developing the protocol, various aspects of the DBS process and requirements have been debated at various Full Council meetings. During the course of the debates, two key issues arose, namely: -

1. Individuals convicted of sexual offences who change their name; and
2. Criteria for Enhanced DBS checks should include all Councillors.

The clear position of Sandwell councillors, irrespective of political persuasion, was that ALL councillors should be subject to Enhanced DBS checks.

I note that both of the above issues were scrutinised through the Independent Review of the Disclosure and Barring Regime, the final report of which was published in February 2023. I am pleased that recommendations have been made in relation to both these issues and I

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

CLLR KERRIE CARMICHAEL
COUNCIL LEADER

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would urge that you continue to drive forward and implement the recommendations proposed by the Independent Review at the very least.

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record Sandwell Council's position in relation to these two issues.

Individuals convicted of sexual offences who change their name

There is a clear risk that the DBS identity validation process (IDV) process may be circumvented where a convicted sex offender changes their name lawfully via enrolled or unenrolled deed poll. The individual may then go on to obtain other identification documents in their new name, such as a passport or driving licence in their new name, and using those documents, apply for a DBS check.

It is recognised that there are other measures in place to safeguard against that, for example the notification requirements under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which states that individuals convicted of a relevant sexual offence must notify the Police within 3 days of using a new name, of that name change. Failure to do so is a criminal offence and a person found guilty of such as offence is liable:

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years.

However, this does not, in our view, go far enough. It places the onus upon the individual to report any name change, which is clearly insufficient to ensure the safety of our children and vulnerable adults. This, in isolation, does not prevent individuals who are intent on avoiding the DBS IDV system and continuing to have unfettered access to children and vulnerable adults from doing so and there is a clear risk that system may be exploited by convicted sex offenders.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

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Recommendation 8 of the Independent Review states:

The Home Office and the DBS continue the work of assessing what, if any, further steps can be taken to mitigate the risk of individuals circumventing the DBS identification validation process, including the consideration of mandating the provision of a birth certificate as one of the documents establishing identity.

Sandwell Council supports this recommendation and I would urge you to take all appropriate steps to mitigate this risk at the earliest opportunity.

Criteria for Enhanced DBS checks should include Councillors sitting on committees relating to children and/or vulnerable adults.

During the development of Sandwell Council's DBS check protocol, it quickly became apparent that the criteria for an Enhanced DBS check was somewhat vague in respect to the duties undertaken by councillors. The reality is councillors cannot, with sufficient certainty and clarity, determine the extent of exposure they may have to vulnerable persons when carrying out their duties. That ambiguity is very unhelpful. Sandwell councillors have made it very clear that they would prefer to have annual Enhanced DBS checks as a means of providing assurance to residents.

We note the outcome of the Independent Review and particular, Recommendation 5 which states:

An enhanced criminal record check is made mandatory for all councillors in Unitary and Single Tier Authorities who are being considered for appointment to any committee involved in decisions on the provisions of children's services or services for vulnerable adults. I accept that this would require legislation and therefore some inevitable delay, so I further recommend that these authorities are encouraged to adopt this procedure as best practice pending legislation.

We welcome the recommendation as it does offer clarity on the roles that require Enhanced DBS checks; however, we would ask that all councillors be subjected to annual Enhanced DBS checks.

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In the interim, I confirm that we will be implementing the recommendation pending any recommended legislative change.

I look forward to hearing from you in respect of this matter in due course.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
Council Leader

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16(a) Anti Social Behaviour Plan

Proposer: Councillor William Gill

Seconder: Councillor Dunn

Amended Motion

Proposer: Cllr Syeda Khatun

Seconder: Cllr Jalal Uddin

This Council recognises the impacts that anti-social behaviour has on our residents, businesses and communities.

This council welcomes the action taken by Government to announce the anti-social action plan and to make the West Midlands an area for hotspot policing. **This council further welcomes the allocation of £110,000 (one hundred and ten thousand pounds) over a two-year period with £55,000 (fifty-five thousand pounds) being allocated towards staff costs for one hot spot area in Sandwell.**

This Council resolves to invite the leader to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner, **Simon Foster, to thank him for his partnership working that secured £110,000 pounds for the two-year pilot and to highlight the importance of this regular funding for our town centres and high streets and to work co-operatively with the Council's partners to deliver this the action plan in the coming weeks and months for local residents in the pilot area.**

As policing and enforcement is extremely important to the people of Sandwell, this council further resolves, in the Leaders communication to ask that Simon Foster PCC is invited to respond to the council to outline how funding is allocated to the West Midlands as a combined authority and how this is apportioned to Sandwell.

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