

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council Statement of Decisions made at a meeting of the Executive on Wednesday, 6 December 2023

Published:

The following decisions were made by the Executive at its meeting on **Wednesday, 6 December 2023**. These decisions will come into force on **Friday 15 December 2023** after call-in expires. A decision by the Executive may be called-in (in accordance with Part 4 – Scrutiny Procedure Rules of the Council’s Constitution) by **Thursday 14 December**. Should you have any queries about any decision that has been made, contact should be made in the first instance to Democratic Services at democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk. Any declaration of interest made by any member of the Executive is shown below.

	Item	Reason for Decision:	Alternative options:	Lead officer:
5	<p>Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Sandwell</p> <p>(1) That approval be given to:</p> <p>a) the adoption of the Black Country Local Nature Recovery Map and Strategy (Appendix 1) for planning purposes, including strategic delivery of biodiversity net gain in Sandwell;</p> <p>b) the establishment of six areas of Council-owned land to act as biodiversity net gain habitat banks, as set out in the draft Sandwell Local</p>	<p>It was a requirement of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 that all public bodies have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their duties and functions. The Nature Recovery Network (NRN) was a major commitment in the Government’s 25-Year Environment Plan (2018) designed to help wildlife recover by providing more habitat, in better condition and across larger areas that were more closely connected, as set out in Making Space for Nature (2010).</p> <p>The Environment Act 2021 (the Act) introduced mandatory Local Nature</p>	<p>The following alternative options had been considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option one would be to make no preparations for the introduction of statutory biodiversity net gain. This would result in missed opportunities to direct biodiversity net gain to locations of strategic value for nature recovery and which would benefit residents, and an inability to progress the Sandwell Local 	

	Item	Reason for Decision:	Alternative options:	Lead officer:
	<p>Plan and in time for the start of the mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain on development sites (Appendix 2);</p> <p>c) Authorise the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Growth, to:</p> <p>i. authorise completion of Conservation Covenants between the Council and an appropriate responsible body for the delivery of these sites as detailed in this report; and</p> <p>ii. secure the addition of these sites to the national Biodiversity Gain Site Register;</p> <p>(2) That future authority for any additional working on the drawing-up and delivery of biodiversity net gain habitat banks and associated projects be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA and the Director responsible for Regeneration and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism and the Director responsible for Leisure and Tourism.</p>	<p>Recovery Strategies (LNRS) to support spatial planning for nature and reverse the national decline in biodiversity. LNRS would be prepared for 48 areas that would effectively cover the whole of England and which are intended to help deliver the NRN.</p> <p>Responsible authorities, chosen by the Government to prepare LNRSs, were required to work with stakeholders across the public, private and voluntary sectors to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • map the most valuable existing areas for nature; • agree nature recovery priorities; • agree what actions should be taken to recover nature and where. 	<p>Plan, which was needed to support the regeneration of the Borough.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option two would be to implement the recommendations of this report. This would allow statutory biodiversity net gain to be directed towards locations of strategic value for nature recovery and which would benefit residents, and preparation of the Sandwell Local Plan, which was needed to progress the regeneration of the Borough. <p>Option two had been selected, to maximise the delivery of statutory biodiversity net gain in strategic locations for nature recovery and for the benefit of residents and to support significant objectives of the emerging Sandwell Local Plan and its approach to delivering sustainable development.</p>	

	Item	Reason for Decision:	Alternative options:	Lead officer:
6	<p>Review of Council Tenant Rents and Housing Related Property Charges</p> <p>That Full Council be recommended to authorise the Interim Director of Housing to adjust council rents and housing related charges with effect from 1 April 2024 as follows:</p> <p>(1) That the housing rental charges is increased by 7.7% which is the consumer price index 6.7% (September 2023) plus 1%, which is equivalent to a 7.7% increase.</p> <p>(2) That the housing service charges increase by the consumer price index (CPI)+ 1%, equivalent to a 7.7% increase.</p> <p>(3) That housing service charge is implemented on properties not currently being charged but are receiving the service in line with similar properties receiving the service provision, including heating, water and laundry facility following consultation with residents.</p> <p>(4) That subject to consultation with the residents of the site, to increase rent at the traveller's pitch in Hills View, Tipton by 7.7%.</p> <p>(5) That rental charges for garage sites be increased by 7.7% in line with other</p>	<p>In line with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, the Council had reduced housing rents by 1% per year for four years, between 2016/2017 and 2019/20.</p> <p>In 2019, the Government set a rent policy for social housing that would permit rents to increase by up to CPI+1% per annum and made clear its intention to leave this policy in place until 2025.</p> <p>From 2020 the Council had control over its own rent setting in line with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Rents Standard, and Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing.</p> <p>In 2023, CPI had been 10.1%, which would have permitted social landlords to increase rents by 11.1% (CPI+1%). However, the Government amended the rent policy for 2023/2024 and imposed a rent cap of 7% for social housing. The Council had made the decision to set rent at 5% to help support residents during the exceptional time of inflationary pressures and cost of living. Due to the rising supplier costs, other stock owned local authorities and social landlords took the decision to increase rents by the maximum 7%.</p> <p>There was a recognition that the Council needed to maintain the existing housing stock to a good standard and cover operational costs and to achieve the right balance between protecting tenants,</p>	<p>It had been recommended from April 2024 to increase rents by 7.7% for tenants within the Riverside managed PFI estate of Wednesbury. The Council had the discretion to set PFI rent. It would be unfair and inconsistent for customers in Council properties if PFI tenants had not receive the same increase.</p> <p>Increased rents below the rate of inflation creates financial pressures for the Council to deliver key services. The provision of good quality Housing and Neighbourhoods are key to improving lives and life chances for residents. Reducing the level of income to the HRA would seriously impact the Councils 30-year business plans and less funding for maintenance of Council stock and funding for new homes.</p> <p>An alternative would have been to increase rents by a lower percentage. The budgetary pressures from this would have had significantly impacted the Councils ability to deliver key services and may have resulted in reduced services where costs could not be met through operational budgets. The challenges presented through the Consumer Regulation Act and the Building Safety Act put financial</p>	

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	<p>council fees and charges agreed by Cabinet and Council.</p> <p>(6) That properties managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement receive a 7.7% rental increase and a 7.7% increase in service charges to match the council's rent and service charge increase.</p> <p>(7) That properties that sit outside the Housing Revenue Account (including service tenants for Parks, Sandwell Valley and Caretaking) receive a 7.7% increase in rental charges and service charges equivalent to CPI plus 1%.</p> <p>(8) That the leaseholder annual management fee be increased by 7.7%, CPI + 1% in 2024/25 from £115.66 to £124.57.</p> <p>(9) That the Director of Housing be authorised to implement adjustments to council rents and housing related charges as set out in this report with effect from 1 April 2024; and</p> <p>(10) That the Director of Housing be authorised to introduce associated service charges in respect of Building Safety Regulation requirements for Leasehold properties.</p>	<p>protecting tax payers and ensuring the Council could deliver on its commitments to build new social homes.</p> <p>For 2024/25, the Government had not announced a rent cap, therefore the Council were permitted to increase rents by CPI+1% in line with the Rent Standard and Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing issued annually in April.</p>	<p>pressures on the HRA to reshape the Councils services to meet the requirements.</p>	

	Item	Reason for Decision:	Alternative options:	Lead officer:
7	<p>10 Year Business Rates Retention Agreement</p> <p>Cabinet recommends to Full Council that:</p> <p>(1) Approval be granted for the Council to enter into a 10-year business rates retention arrangement with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC), the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the six other West Midlands metropolitan local authorities.</p> <p>(2) That the Director of Finance in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, be authorised to complete any necessary agreements for the retention arrangement referred to in 1.1 above.</p> <p>(3) That the Director of Finance be authorised to make an annual payment to the West Midlands Combined Authority of £1.264m in 2023/24, which constitutes the Council’s proportion of the “WMCA Share” of regional business rates income collected in the current year under the existing 100% business rates retention pilot arrangements.</p> <p>(4) That subject to approval of recommendation 1.1, the Director of Finance be authorised to make an</p>	<p>In 2017, the seven constituent Local Authorities of the WMCA entered into a pilot agreement with DLUHC allowing them to benefit from retaining 100% of the business rates generated within their respective local authority areas, compared with 50% nationally, in exchange for forgoing Revenue Support Grant ('RSG').</p> <p>Whilst initially expected to be a short-term pilot in advance of national rollout of 100% business rates retention, the arrangement had been rolled forward under the same terms and conditions annually and remained in effect during 2023/24.</p> <p>As part of the West Midlands Deeper Devolution Trailblazer Deal, DLUHC had offered to local authorities forming both West Midlands and Greater Manchester Combined Authorities only, the opportunity to extend the arrangement on a more permanent basis; for 10 years commencing in April 2024.</p> <p>The proposed agreement was similar in many respects to the existing pilot arrangements and was therefore not expected to have any impact on projected business rates income in the short term. The Government may at some point in the future contemplate a reset of the business rates base nationally; however, that was a separate issue from the scheme and it was not expected that such a policy would emerge for consultation in the short or near</p>	<p>The Council could choose to opt out of the proposed 100% business rates retention “Devolution Deal” offer proposed by DLUHC and would return to 50% business rates retention, in line with the arrangements of the majority of local authorities across England.</p> <p>If the WMCA and West Midlands authorities do not agree to enter into a new ten-year business rates retention arrangement in time for 2024/25 or 2025/26, then it was assumed that the pilot would come to an end and the member authorities would revert to the national 50% scheme. This would mean that that the Council was again liable to pay a levy on business rates growth above the baseline and would lose the enhanced safety net protection offered under the pilot. In the absence of the additional regional share of business rates growth from which to fund the WMCA contribution, the WMCA would need to either seek financial contributions from the West Midlands authorities outside of the business rates scheme or seek government support to ensure its ongoing sustainability.</p>	

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	<p>annual payment to the West Midlands Combined Authority in each year throughout the 10-year period commencing on 1st April 2024, comprising of the Council's proportion of the "WMCA Share" of regional business rates income collected in that year.</p>	<p>medium term.</p> <p>The new 10-year arrangement offered greater certainty for the West Midlands Local Authorities, which would improve medium term financial planning, and the arrangement was expected to be financially more advantageous than reverting to the national scheme of 50% retention. Broadly, the Council would expect to be financially better off under the new 100% retention deal than it would be in the national 50% scheme by the value of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of any forecast growth above the baseline, less the WMCA's share, and • the levy on any growth that the authority would be liable to pay to government under the 50% scheme. 		
8	<p>A461 Bus, Cycle & Walking Corridor - Initial scheme approval</p> <p>That Cabinet be recommended to:</p> <p>(1) Approve in principle the proposed sustainable transport and highway improvements that make up the A461 Bus, Cycle & Walking Corridor as shown on Drawing at Appendix A.</p> <p>(2) Authorise the Director of Regeneration & Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA, to carry out public consultation on the proposed</p>	<p>The A461 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor – Sandwell was a scheme that aimed to support all users along the A461 between the A41 Great Bridge and Dudley. This was a Council scheme, however, its scope extended partially into the Borough of Dudley, to Castle Gate Island, to ensure continuity of development along this whole stretch of the corridor. The scheme was being developed in collaboration with Dudley officers. The scheme was designed to meet the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased safety, convenience and attraction of active travel trips along the corridor and to key trip generators, increasing active travel 	<p>One alternative option was to not continue with the scheme and reallocate the funding back to the WMCA for spending on a different scheme. This was not recommended, as it would leave the WBHE without essential connections to nearby communities and amenities. There was no guarantee that the Council would be able to retain the funding for a different scheme, and therefore Sandwell residents may be disadvantaged against other areas in the region.</p> <p>Another alternative was to make</p>	

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	<p>sustainable transport and highway improvements that make up the A461 Bus, Cycle & Walking Corridor.</p> <p>(3) In connection with (2) above, the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA, be authorised to consider and determine any objections received at a future Decision Making Session.</p> <p>(4) Authorise the Director Regeneration & Growth to approve the submission an Outline Business Case to the West Midlands Combined Authority.</p> <p>(5) Authorise the Assistant Director - Legal & Assurance in conjunction with Assistant Director - Highways to enter into an agreement with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council under section 8 of the Highways Act 1980 in connection with (1).</p> <p>(6) That the Scheme of Delegation to Officers (Executive side) be amended to include authority to the Assistant Director - Legal & Assurance in conjunction with Assistant Director - Highways to enter into agreements under section 8 of the Highways Act 1980 for future schemes as required.</p>	<p>mode share on the corridor to up to 5% by 2030;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced bus journey time variability, increasing bus passenger mode share on the corridor to up to 3% by 2030; • Improved accessibility for those without access to a private vehicle, particularly those with visual/mobility impairments; • Support economic growth through improved sustainable accessibility to future development sites; • Improve highway network conditions at key locations along the corridor, for example Great Bridge. <p>The scheme had been designed to include a uni-directional cycle route on each side of the A461 between Great Bridge Market Place and Burnt Tree junction. The cycle track from Burnt Tree continued as a bi-directional track along the northern kerbline to Castle Gate Island in Dudley. The scheme also looked at continuing cycling along Market Place via shared use surface, and then utilise Brickhouse Lane South, which would be converted to a quiet way by removing access from the retail park entrance to facilitate cycling to the existing crossings over the A41 over to George Henry Road and the nearby residential area.</p> <p>Alongside the cycle track, there were proposed lengths of bus lane measuring 820m, made up of 460m bus lane towards</p>	<p>significant changes to the scheme as it was drawn currently. This was not recommended as it would make it difficult to deliver by 2027 and would risk the funding being reclaimed.</p>	

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		<p>Dudley between Anchor Drive and Bradley Street, and 360m between Peake Drive and Sedgley Road towards Dudley. This direction had been identified as exhibiting more congested conditions and therefore having a bus lane in this direction would generate the most reliability for bus passengers. To fit in the bus lane, the Council had to remove sections of central hatching and right-turn waiting pockets for general traffic.</p> <p>For bus lanes travelling towards Great Bridge, the Council had planned for a right-turn bus gate for buses to turn into Market Place, avoiding Great Bridge roundabout where they suffer the most delays. This would not remove any current available driving areas for drivers.</p> <p>Great Bridge island itself was proposed for improvement by adding an extra exit lane from the roundabout onto New Road which should ease blocking back onto the roundabout which had been causing delays for vehicles entering from other arms.</p> <p>The project was likely to include works within highways for which Dudley Council was the Local Highway Authority (LHA) as well as those within Sandwell's jurisdiction. An agreement under section 8 of the Highways Act 1980 would enable these works to be carried out by one LHA on behalf of the other. The precise details of these works, and which LHA would carry them out, was</p>		

	Item	Reason for Decision:	Alternative options:	Lead officer:
		dependent on the detailed design.		
9	<p>Sandwell Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030</p> <p>(1) That approval be given to the Sandwell Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030 to inform and prioritise the delivery of road safety projects, initiatives and campaigns within the Borough until 2030.</p> <p>(2) That approval be given to the continued use of the Safe System approach to improving road safety and reducing road casualties, and adoption of the Vision Zero principle.</p> <p>(3) That the new road casualty reduction targets included within the new Road Safety Plan for the Borough be endorsed.</p> <p>(4) That approval be given to the publication of the Sandwell Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030 on the Council website.</p>	<p>Every Highway Authority in England and Wales had a Statutory Duty under ‘Section 39 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to carry out studies into road casualties arising from the use of vehicles on their road network and in light of those studies put together and adopt a programme of works and initiatives to help prevent such incidents in the future. The adoption of the new Strategic Road Safety Strategy 2024-2030 helped the Council discharge this Statutory duty.</p> <p>Mobility was integral to nearly every aspect of daily lives. People step from their homes into a road network that takes them to work, school, shopping, and recreation or to family, health and social needs. Therefore, ensuring the safety of roads and enabling sustainable mobility plays an important role in providing for basic humans needs as well as helping mitigate the impact of climate change.</p> <p>A Safe System approach was built on the principle of Vision Zero whereby the belief was that no one should be killed or seriously injured whilst using the road network. It also recognised that human bodies are fragile, and minds are prone to making mistakes. Consequently, a Safe System considered road safety to be a responsibility shared by all those that use the road, those that design, manage, construct and maintain the network, those that enforce highway laws and those who provide post-crash care.</p>	<p>Alternatively the Council could have no strategic vision and long-term plan to reduce identified road casualty problems in the Borough. Basing decisions on community concern and perceived problematic areas only would have a detrimental effect on the success in reducing road casualties in Sandwell since 2000, with the risk of road traffic injuries increasing significantly over the next few years.</p>	

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		<p>A Safe System approach considers five elements must work together as one to minimise risk; Safe Road Use, Safe Speeds, Safe Vehicles, Safe Roads and Roadsides, Post-Crash Response</p> <p>Sandwell had traditionally had a good record of reducing road casualties in the Borough. Over the past 22 years, total road casualties in Sandwell had halved, including those resulting in fatalities or serious injuries. More encouragingly child casualties in Sandwell had been reduced by two thirds.</p> <p>The new Sandwell Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030 would continue to utilise and build on the previously successful Sandwell Safe System approach to support and compliment the refreshed West Midlands Regional Road Safety Strategy at a local level.</p> <p>It was proposed that Sandwell's new Strategic Road Safety Plan would stretch its casualty reduction target for killed and seriously injured casualties to compliment the regional aspiration, as well as embracing Vision Zero. It was unrealistic to expect Vision Zero can be achieved within the timeframe of this new strategy, but it was vital that the right building blocks were put in place for the future to ensure that in time people would be able to use Sandwell's road network without the risk of death and serious injury.</p>		

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10	<p>Q2 Budget Monitoring 2023/24</p> <p>That Cabinet:</p> <p>(1) Note the financial monitoring position as at 30 September 2023 (Quarter 2) and refers the report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment.</p> <p>(2) Approve the following budget virements above £1m in line with the revised delegated limits for Cabinet Members and Directors: -</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="174 746 667 1407"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Virements above £1m for approval by Cabinet</th> <th>£'000</th> <th>£'000</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Contingency</td> <td>Transfer of budget for asset rationalisation savings, achieved in year within Regeneration and Growth</td> <td>1,660</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Regeneration and Growth</td> <td>Transfer of budget for asset rationalisation savings, achieved in year within Regeneration and Growth</td> <td></td> <td>1,660</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contingency</td> <td>Transfer of one-off property budgets held within Regeneration and Growth - no longer required</td> <td>1,658</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Regeneration and Growth</td> <td>Transfer of one-off property budgets held</td> <td></td> <td>1,658</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Virements above £1m for approval by Cabinet		£'000	£'000	Contingency	Transfer of budget for asset rationalisation savings, achieved in year within Regeneration and Growth	1,660		Regeneration and Growth	Transfer of budget for asset rationalisation savings, achieved in year within Regeneration and Growth		1,660	Contingency	Transfer of one-off property budgets held within Regeneration and Growth - no longer required	1,658		Regeneration and Growth	Transfer of one-off property budgets held		1,658	<p>Section 151 of the 1972 Local Government Act required the Chief Financial Officer to ensure the proper administration of the council's financial affairs. Budgetary control, which included the regular monitoring and reporting of budgets was an essential element in discharging this statutory responsibility.</p>	<p>Leadership Team agreed that the vacancy controls that were in place for 2022/23 would be reinstated at their meeting on 8 August 2023 in order to reduce the projected overspend. As the forecast overspend had reduced since Quarter 1, no further management action was proposed at this stage, however other spending controls that may be needed to avoid reliance on use of reserves may be considered later in the year if necessary.</p>	
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	<table border="1" data-bbox="174 204 667 379"> <tr> <td data-bbox="174 204 313 288"></td> <td data-bbox="313 204 492 288">within Regeneration and Growth - no longer required</td> <td data-bbox="492 204 577 288"></td> <td data-bbox="577 204 667 288"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="174 288 313 331">TOTAL</td> <td data-bbox="313 288 492 331"></td> <td data-bbox="492 288 577 331">3,318</td> <td data-bbox="577 288 667 331">3,318</td> </tr> </table>		within Regeneration and Growth - no longer required			TOTAL		3,318	3,318			
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11	<p>Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension (Sustainable Access Measures) - Initial scheme approval</p> <p>That Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Approve in principle the proposed package of improvements that make up the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension (Sustainable Access Measures) as shown on the drawings contained at Appendix A. (2) Delegate authority to carry out public consultation to the Director Regeneration & Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways. (3) Delegate authority for consideration and determination of objections to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways at a future Decision Making Session. (4) Delegate authority to the Director Regeneration & Growth to submit an 	<p>The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension (Sustainable Access Measures) project formed part of the West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Programme approved by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board on 14 January 2022. The Sandwell elements of this programme were approved by Cabinet in July 2022.</p> <p>The WBHE Sustainable Access Measures scheme was aimed at ensuring the soon to be delivered Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension was linked up effectively with the surrounding community, ensuring that users can access the metro from their homes and nearby amenities via sustainable modes. The scheme aimed to achieve the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the walk and cycle routes to/from the new tram stops on the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill metro extension; • Improve wayfinding to assist in the use of walk and cycle access to metro; • Improve the opportunities for bus/metro interchange; • Reduce the likelihood of increased on- 	<p>One alternative option was to not continue with the scheme and reallocate the funding back to the WMCA for spending on a different scheme. This was not recommended, as it would leave the WBHE without essential connections to nearby communities and amenities. There was no guarantee that the Council would be able to retain the funding for a different scheme, and therefore Sandwell residents may be disadvantaged against other areas in the region.</p> <p>Another alternative was to make significant changes to the scheme as it was drawn currently. This was not recommended as it would make it difficult to deliver by 2027 and would risk the funding being reclaimed.</p>									

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	Outline Business Case to the West Midlands Combined Authority.	<p>street parking around metro stops.</p> <p>Together, and linked to the A461, this would create an entire network of areas where people can travel in sustainable ways, reducing the need for them to use their private car for short journeys, and maximising their ability to use the upcoming metro extension without creating the opportunity for unmanageable unofficial parking around the metro stops.</p>		
12	<p>Council's Use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016</p> <p>(1) That the information regarding the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and Investigation of Powers Act 2016 from July 2017 to October 2023 be received and noted.</p> <p>(2) That the following policies be approved:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">i) Corporate Policy: Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">ii) Corporate Policy: Acquisitions of Communications Data</p> <p>(3) That the Director of Law and Governance be authorised to make administrative amendments to</p>	<p>The Investigatory Powers Commissioners Office ("IPCO") had responsibility for reviewing the use of investigatory powers by public authorities, such as intelligence agencies, police and local authorities. They undertake regular reviews of the Council's compliance with Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016.</p> <p>The IPCO had conducted a desktop review this year. The Council had complied with the recommendations and IPCO was satisfied with the Council's compliance with RIPA 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. As such, the Council would not require further inspection this year.</p> <p>Whilst the Council had always had internal guidance available to officers via its intranet page, it was good practice to have a Policy document available to the public.</p>	<p>None as compliance with the legislation was a legal requirement.</p> <p>The Council could decide not to have a public policy, but this would not be transparent and would not meet with good practice expectations.</p>	

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	policies referred in (2) above as required.			
13	<p>Forge Mill Farm Animal Welfare Policy</p> <p>(1) That the Cabinet notes and approves the Forge Mill Farm Animal Welfare Policy.</p> <p>(2) That the Assistant Director of Borough Economy be authorised to implement and review the policy in line with legislation, best practice guidance and advice from industry experts/ veterinary professionals.</p>	<p>Forge Mill Farm’s ambition was to become a centre of excellence in animal welfare food and farming education. The policy set the framework for how this would be achieved and monitored.</p> <p>The policy ensured that as Forge Mill Farm’s public facing operations expand, animal welfare continued to be at the centre of that growth.</p> <p>The endorsement of the policy would ensure high standards of animal welfare persists through any future changes in leadership, management or comically direction.</p> <p>The policy included the provision of regular inspection, accreditation and certification from external organisations including a nominated vet practice.</p> <p>The policy was written for all animals within the management control of Forge Mill Farm across Sandwell Valley Country Park, Sandwell Valley Visitor Centre and Forge Mill Farm and any other location animals within Sandwell Council’s management control are located. This included a variety of rare breed animals including sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, alpacas, horses, ponies, donkeys, chickens, ducks and rabbits.</p>	<p>The Cabinet could have chosen not to endorse the policy presented and the farm could have continued to base decisions on legal minimum requirements and best practice recommendations outside of Council policy. However, having a clear policy sets standards and expectations, against which performance can be measured.</p>	

	Item	Reason for Decision:	Alternative options:	Lead officer:
14	<p>Improvement Plan Progress to 1 November 2023 and Letter to Secretary of State December 2023</p> <p>(1) That progress against the Improvement Plan up to 1 November 2023 be received.</p> <p>(2) That Cabinet receive the Improvement Plan Risk Register.</p> <p>(3) That Cabinet receive changes to the Improvement Plan.</p> <p>(4) 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.</p> <p>(5) That Cabinet recommend to Council that this report along with the October progress 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.</p>	<p>The report provided a quarterly update on progress against the Improvement Plan 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 then Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.</p> <p>The Improvement Plan was intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. Changes to the Improvement Plan were tracked through the established change control process to form a refresh of the Improvement Plan. These changes were formally reported through to Cabinet on a quarterly basis for transparency.</p> <p>The report was the sixth update to Cabinet on progress of the Improvement Plan.</p>	<p>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 had a legal obligation to respond appropriately.</p> <p>The Directions issued by the Secretary of State are a statutory requirement and the Council had a legal obligation to respond appropriately. Failure to do so would likely result in further intervention measures.</p> <p>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 remains fit for purpose and provides Leadership Team with the oversight they required.</p>	
15	<p>Regeneration Programme Performance</p> <p>(1) That Cabinet note the Performance of</p>	<p>On the 23 March 2022, Cabinet approved the Regeneration Strategy, Regeneration Project Pipeline, and the Inclusive Recovery</p>	<p>The report was a bi-annual update requested by Cabinet on 23 March 2022. In accordance with the</p>	

	Item	Reason for Decision:	Alternative options:	Lead officer:
	<p>the Regeneration Programme.</p> <p>(2) That the Director of Regeneration & Growth be authorised to make the recommended amendments to the Regeneration Pipeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add Long-Term Plan for Towns programme to the project pipeline. • Add Millennium Centre expansion project to the project pipeline. • Add Levelling Up Fund Round 3 - Grove Lane, Smethwick to the project pipeline. 	<p>Action Plan for Business. Taken together, they set out the corporate regeneration priorities for the period 2022 to 2027. The pipeline was a live document, and Cabinet resolved for it to be monitored via a report submitted to Cabinet every 6 months. The last report was submitted in July 2023.</p> <p>The Regeneration Project Pipeline set out the major investment projects that the Council, its partners, and the private sector intend to deliver. It identified the infrastructure priorities for the council and establishes where resources would be focused. The pipeline now comprised of 67 live projects, in addition to the 11 projects that were now complete, bringing the estimated total investment value to £2.9b by 2027.</p>	<p>Cabinet Decision, Cabinet are to consider additions to the project pipeline. There was no alternative option.</p>	