

Agenda

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

**Thursday 22 February 2024 at 6.00 pm
in the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

1 Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence (if any).

2 Declarations of Interest

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

3 Minutes

7 - 12

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 as a correct record.

4 Additional Items of Business

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

5 Grant Thornton Follow-up Report and Improvement Plan Update

13 - 154

To consider and comment upon Grant Thornton's follow-up review report.



6	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Terms of Reference Annual Review	155 - 160
	To review and agree the terms of reference for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.	
7	Annual Governance Statement 2021-22	161 - 194
	To review the Annual Governance Statement for 2021-22.	
8	Internal Audit Plan 2024/25	195 - 212
	To review and approve the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25.	
9	Internal Audit Progress Report	213 - 224
	To review and comment upon the Internal Audit Progress Report.	
10	Cabinet Forward Plan	225 - 250
	Standing item to consider the Cabinet Forward Plan.	
11	Exclusion of the Public and Press	
	That the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting. This is 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 an action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.	
12.	Cyber Security Update	251 - 254
	To review and comment upon the latest cyber security update.	

Shokat Lal
Chief Executive
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution

Councillor Preece (Chair)
Councillors Ager, H Bhullar, Dhariwal, L Giles, V Smith, Tipper, Hussain and
W Gill

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

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Minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

**18 January 2024 at 6.00pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Preece (Chair);
Councillors Giles, Smith and Tipper.

In attendance: Brendon Arnold – Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Peter Farrow – Audit Services and Risk Management Manager, Mark Stocks – Grant Thornton, Anthony Lloyd – Democratic Services Officer and Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer.

1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Bhullar and Mr Ager (Independent Member).

2/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3/24 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2023 are confirmed as a correct record.



4/24 **Urgent Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business.

5/24 **Strategic Risk Register Update Report**

The Committee received an update on the profile of the key strategic risks faced by the Council since the last report in November 2023 (Minute no. 52/23 refers).

The strategic risk register was a live document that reflected the Council's risk profile. Risks were regularly reviewed to ensure that they remained appropriate in order to aid informed decision making and resource allocation. Each risk was assigned either a red, amber or green (RAG) rating depending on the severity of the risk.

In total, there were five red risks on the register as of December 2023:-

Compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulations GDPR and Freedom of Information Act 2000 was one of the five risks that were presented to the report. Members highlighted that this risk had been consistently categorised as a red risk for a substantial period of time and requested reassurance that improvements would be made. Audit Services and Risk Management Manager minded members that the rating was largely driven by the Council's performance in response to Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Request (SAR) requests. Members were assured that officers were confident in reducing the risk to amber in the near future.

Cyber Security was the second red risk that was highlighted to the Committee. Members were minded that this risk was in-line with many other similar organisations due to the need of ensuring that a strong cyber security was in place. A further report would be provided to the Committee at a future meeting.



The Customer Journey risk remained red as a precaution until the proposed activities were underway and outcomes had been measured.

Both the Strategic Workforce Development for Adult Social Care Recruitment, Retention and Sickness Absence and Climate Change risks remained red, however, action plans were in place to address the concerns.

The remainder of the risks were classified as amber which was deemed a fair reflection on the Council's current position. Some of these risks included Voter ID and Elections, Organisational Culture, Budget Setting and Monitoring and Risks around Oracle Fusion.

Following questions from members, the following points were made:-

- further actions were required to reduce the climate change risk and a stepped approach would be considered to better monitor its progress;
- the Council were considering a range of mitigations to address staff retention such as pay levels, Values and Behaviours, incentives, development plans and training opportunities;
- the ambition of the Council was to complete the production of the 2021/2022 accounts before moving onto the 2022/23 accounts for completion in May 2024;
- Audit opinions on both the 21/22 and 22/23 accounts were hopefully to be completed by September 2024;
- a target date of July 2024 was set for the implementation of Oracle Fusion.

Officers were thanked for presenting the report.



Local Audit Arrangements Update

Representatives from the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton, were present and provided an update on the Local Audit Arrangements to the Committee.

It was highlighted to members that Grant Thornton had taken steps to ensure that resources would be available during the 2024 summer period to work on the 2022/2023 accounts as soon as they were presented. Due to recent circumstances involving a national lack of resources and the impacts from COVID, many Councils still held large backlogs of outstanding accounts awaiting audit opinions.

As a result, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities had planned to implement a backstop in September 2024. The backstop would act as a deadline for any outstanding audit opinions to be completed; if the deadline was missed, outstanding works would no longer be required to be concluded. Despite this, Grant Thornton expressed their optimism in completing the audit opinions before the backstop came into effect.

Further discussion ensued, and Members sought clarification on a number of concerns. The following responses were provided:-

- Sandwell Council had struggled to attract relevant and experienced staff to produce high quality accounts;
- a particular difficulty with the Council's accounts was the complexities around property valuations;
- the Council was not in the same position as some neighbouring authorities and healthy reserves were available;
- if the audit comments had not been completed before the backstop came into effect, no negative impact would be made on the Council's financial abilities.



7/23

External Audit Plan 2021 - 2022

Representatives from the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton, presented the external Audit Plan 2021-22 to the Committee.

The audit of the 2021 – 2022 accounts was underway. The plan set out the intended work in order to form an opinion on whether or not the Council's accounts were fairly stated. The planned audit approached areas of significant risk such as the risk of management override of control; this was the ability of management to alter how the accounts are presented. The final two risks consisted of property valuations and pension fund valuations. These two estimates were significant to the auditors due to their large valuations and therefore, a lot of work would take place to ensure that both valuations were accurate. Pensions pre-payments, grants and cash and bank reconciliation risks were also highlighted to the Committee.

Materiality was the approach used to determine what error would not be acceptable to the Council or a user of the accounts. This was presented to members as £13m.

Another priority of the auditors was to ensure that Sandwell Children's Trust was correctly consolidated and that the defunct Sandwell Land and Property was treated appropriately within the accounts.

8/24

Work Programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year

The Committee reviewed the work programme for the current municipal year.

9/24

Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee noted the items contained in the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Meeting ended at 6.33pm

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Report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Subject:	Grant Thornton Follow-up Report and Improvement Plan Update
Director:	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
Contact Officer:	Strategic Lead – Service Improvement Kate Ashley Kate1_ashley@sandwell.gov.uk Lead Officer – Service Improvement Dawn Webster dawn_webster@sandwell.gov.uk

1. Recommendations


- 1.1. That Audit and Risk Assurance Committee considers Grant Thornton's reissued Value for Money Governance Review Report and the Follow Up Review Report.
- 1.2. That Audit and Risk Assurance Committee considers and comments upon the progress of the Improvement Plan and the Risk Register up to 31 January 2024.
- 1.3. That any recommendations or comments in relation to 1.2 above are reported to Cabinet.
- 1.4. That the Committee considers any additional areas of focus for its work plan.



2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 As part of the governance and assurance arrangements for the council's Improvement Plan, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board review progress of the Improvement Plan on a quarterly basis and utilise the plan for work programming purposes.
- 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.
- 2.3 Grant Thornton conducted a further follow-up review in Autumn 2023, the findings of which are reported to this Committee to provide assurance of the council's progress on its improvement journey and to inform the future work programme of the Committee.

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 can 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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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 management mechanisms.
- 4.1.3 In July 2022, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee requested that quarterly progress reports be presented as part of the programme assurance arrangements and to inform the work programme of the Committee. This report is the seventh quarterly update to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on progress of the Improvement Plan.



4.2 Value for Money Governance Review – Follow Up Review 2023

4.2.1 In Autumn 2023, Grant Thornton conducted a second follow-up review to consider progress against the three statutory recommendations made in 2021 and the 33 key and improvement recommendations made in their first follow-up review in 2022. The scope of Grant Thornton’s 2023 review included 13 of the 18 original key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) – five KLOEs had been considered concluded in 2022 and therefore were not reported in the follow-up review of Autumn 2023.

4.2.2 From their follow-up review in Autumn 2023 (Appendix 1), Grant Thornton have determined that they are “*satisfied that the Council has made appropriate progress against the three statutory recommendations, and these can now be lifted*”.

4.2.3 With regards to the 13 KLOEs reviewed at this point, Grant Thornton found “*no evidence of any significant weaknesses for ensuring that the Council makes informed decisions and properly manages risk*”.

4.2.4 In their December 2023 report, Grant Thornton have made four key recommendations. Context for these recommendations are included in Grant Thornton’s report, and are set out here for ease of reference:

1. The Council must ensure that the changes in train relating to transformation are concluded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural and behavioural changes become successfully embedded and result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required, so that the Council remains financially sustainable in the medium-term. This includes ensuring that the Property Transformation Programme leads to decisions being taken on asset disposals that ensure associated savings targets in the MTFP are realised.
2. The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer experience, and this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics, and having appropriate data available to measure all customer related KPIs.



3. The Council should retain corporate focus and attention on key service and operational risks, in particular the implementation of Oracle Fusion, place based working with SCT and the effective management of SCT's operational and financial challenges, industrial action in the waste service, putting a clear plan in place for the subsidy to SLT being eliminated, financial statement production and reducing reliance on the level of interim appointments in the finance team.
4. The Council will need to manage the risks associated with the Senior Management restructure, including organisational change fatigued and resistance, the loss of corporate memory and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of the new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.

4.2.5 Grant Thornton's findings and the lifting of the Statutory Recommendations represents a significant milestone in the council's improvement journey towards ending government intervention and is further evidence that the council continues to improve over time.

4.2.6 The key recommendations and the further 26 improvement recommendations made by Grant Thornton in their 2023 report will be incorporated into the refresh of the Improvement Plan and will provide further direction for the next stage of the council's improvement journey.

4.3 Improvement Plan Progress

4.3.1 Over the three months to 31 January 2024, we have continued to deliver at pace and further embed changes made throughout our improvement journey. As set out above, this progress has been recognised by the council's external auditors.



4.3.2 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 2.

4.3.3 Progress against each theme of Improvement Plan is contained within Appendix 3. This includes a description of workstream progress including progress against milestones and achievements, and any progress issues. A summary by theme is provided below.

4.4 Organisational Culture Theme

4.4.1 Achievements this quarter:

- Annual refresher of Corporate Governance Training delivered to members
- Mechanisms identified for ongoing insight and assurance around the Officer and Member relationships

4.4.2 Organisational Culture Progress Issues:

- **Workforce Strategy approved**
 - Decision to obtain Cabinet approval Scheduled 13 March 2024 pushing back due date.
 - On Forward plan and with Directors for Final consultation/ comments.
- **Compile insight into the Member-Officer Relationship in preparation for Autumn sessions with LGA (Local Government Association) around the Member-Officer Relationship.**
 - Member dynamics- all member survey and focus group (to understand case working and working relationships) this is intended to provide an evidence base for LGBCE boundary review but is also being used to provide a snapshot of members interactions with the council and its officer base and to identify areas of focus for improvement.
 - Pre-council workshops showcasing a range of service areas - will complement this work by raising awareness for both members and



officers and supporting the development of positive relationships. Survey will take place end of January and beginning February.

- Out turn report will go to full council and will support a wider range of work e.g.: customer. Will also look to align with member development programme and proposed member induction

- **Formal Employee Recognition Scheme - approach and resources identified**

- Values & behaviours Task & Finish Group on employee recognition gave positive feedback on proposed formal recognition scheme, based on celebrating examples of the council's Values & Behaviours in action.
- Next step is to take proposal to Leadership team for approval/adoption.
- Anticipated launch date is March 2024.

- **Governance Training and Development**

- Assistant Director Legal and Assurance and Assistant Chief Executive are working on a programme of training materials and supporting road show workshops for Officers on decision making requirements with a focus on improvement to report quality and content to support improvement to decision making. Materials have been prepped and scope for the exercise has been extended for the executive and scrutiny function.

4.5 Corporate Oversight Theme

4.5.1 Achievements this quarter

- Appraisal process agreed and ready for launch from April 2024
- Ward Co-ordinator roles have been instrumental in supporting Members to tackle local Ward based issues and initial anecdotal feedback is that these roles are making a real difference.

4.5.2 Corporate Oversight Progress Issues:

- **Develop a Continuous Improvement Framework**
 - Draft Continuous Improvement Framework developed based on best practice and aligned with transformation approach.



- Next step is to align with Leadership & Management development programme and develop proposal for 'good ideas' process for capturing staff ideas
- **Programme of end-to-end process reviews**
 - This exercise remains paused pending review of the report and update to leadership. Meeting required with ACE and Director of Finance.
- **Develop Business case for Transactional Finance Unit**
 - This exercise remains paused pending review of the report and update to leadership. This action can be close from IP and managed under Customer Journey Programme.

4.6 Strategic Direction Theme

4.6.1 Achievements this quarter

- Communications and Corporate Affairs Strategy delivered as part of Business as Usual.

4.6.2 Strategic Direction Progress Issues

- **Complete Full Business Cases for identified Business Steams in line with Commercial Project Plan approved by Leadership Team**
 - **Health and Safety** – Skills gap analysis is complete. Next steps to be agreed at a workshop in early February.
 - **Neutral Vendor** Phased approach agreed, reflective of new timeline and capacity in HR.
 - **Educational Services** – Resource pressures easing with a new School Improvement Advisor post agreed. Further discussion required regarding 'status' of project i.e. transformational or service improvement. Meeting to be arranged in Feb to be discussed.
 - **Social Letting** - Due to the announcement made by the Chancellor in the Autumn budget – an increase in LHA (local Housing Allowance) rate to the 2024 rates from April the project team must review the financial offer, margins and understand how



this may influence landlords' decision making in respect of the proposed model.

- **Cashless** – Activities agreed to inform next steps - recommendations provided by consultants were not sufficient so have not been implemented. New proposals have been requested and should be received in the next few weeks.
- **Educational Psychology** – Finance partners updated and provided good insight. Next step to de-segregate statutory from opportunity but also consider the dependencies on the wider school's piece.
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Assessment**
 - Work is currently underway to develop the Equality Framework for Local Government Audit Action plan, which will be presented to Leadership Team during March 2024.
 - The team have also developed the second Public Sector Equality Duty Service User Report for 2023-24 which will be published by March 2024 and ensure that the council is compliant and meeting its legal duties.
 - Further work is being undertaken to support the 4 interim Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Objectives and it is proposed that updates will be presented to LT during Q1 (2024/25).
 - The development of the EDI Strategy has slipped due to resources within the team.

4.7 Decision Making Theme

4.7.1 Achievements this quarter

- All deliverables have been achieved in this theme and assurance actions continue to be monitored

4.7.2 Decision Making Progress Issues

- No issues in this theme

4.8 Procurement and Commercial Theme

4.8.1 Achievements this quarter

- New Fleet vehicles have arrived as part of Serco Fleet replacement and are into service



4.8.2 Procurement and Commercial Progress Issues:

- **Performance Management System: Options Appraisal**
 - Engagement with service areas complete.
 - Following discussion with Director Finance and AD ICT further work required to further explore Oracle Fusion as a potential solution.
 - Cross-council stakeholder group to be established for the project to ensure needs of the organisation are understood and explored.
 - Initial meeting with Procurement has taken place and the project is in the procurement pipeline for commencement at a future date if required.

4.9 Partnerships and Relationships Theme

4.9.1 Achievements this quarter

- SCT Key Performance Indicators have been approved by DfE, SMBC and SCT, and will be reported through the Performance Management Framework effective Q1 2024/25

4.9.2 Partnerships and Relationships Progress Issues

- **Consultation on Voluntary and Community Sector Draft Strategy- On hold**
 - Further work in progress to develop approach for wider VCS engagement and funding.

4.10 Statutory Recommendations

4.11 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.

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

4.13 As set out in Section 4.2 above, in their follow up review of 2023, Grant Thornton determined that they are “*satisfied that the Council has made*



appropriate progress against the three statutory recommendations, and these can now be lifted”.

4.14 To provide a final overview of progress against these three specific recommendations, Appendix 4 extracts the key actions that respond to each of the recommendations, and they are summarised below.

4.15 **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 (Sandwell Children s Trust), 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 – agreement reached to extend SLT’s operation of leisure centres to March 2027.
- Handover of Sandwell Aquatic Centre to SLT
- 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 (Performance Management Framework) 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.
- Regeneration Strategy and Pipeline to underpin significant regeneration in Sandwell approved by Cabinet 23 March 2022. Monitoring provided to Cabinet in November 2022 and July 2023.

4.16 **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 the Constitution 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 rolled out during 2023-2024.
- Commercial Strategy approved in March 2023.
- Corporate Asset Management Strategy approved by Cabinet in November.
- SEND Transport lessons learnt completed and shared with Wider Leadership Team

4.17 **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. Member Handbook created for Municipal Year 2023-24.
- 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. Values and behaviours launched.
- Meeting structures to facilitate Cabinet Member and Leadership Team cross-working in place and meeting needs.

4.18 **Specific Recommendations from External Reviews relating to Audit Committee**

4.19 In their original Value for Money Governance Review in 2021, Grant Thornton made four recommendations relating to the effective functioning of Scrutiny and Audit Committees. In their follow-up review in



Autumn 2022, Grant Thornton commented on the positive progress to improve the culture and professionalism of key Council committees and commenting that the Audit Committee has continued to operate throughout the year in a manner focussing on significant governance matters.

4.20 With regards to Audit Committee, in their 2023 review Grant Thornton confirmed that appropriate arrangements remain in place and have not made any further improvement recommendations.

4.21 **Changes to the Improvement Plan**

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

4.23 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.

4.24 The list of all changes is provided in Appendix 6. Where new actions have been added to the Improvement Plan, these are displayed within the monitoring tool with red font colour.

4.25 The changes made are summarised below.

- 14 changes made to action delivery timescales (with 9 being more than three months)
- 1 assurance action has been added
- 2 sub-actions have been added (marked in red within IP).
- 2 main actions are to be closed
- 2 Assurance actions are to close
- 2 changes to delivery lead
- 2 changes to action description

4.26 **Risk Management**

4.27 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.

4.28 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 corporate programme management office. The financial resources required have been identified and were approved by Council in June. To provide additional capacity across improvement activities, the Improvement Reserve is being used to fund graduate placements from the National Graduate Development Programme which commenced in October 2023.
- **Communication** – to ensure everyone is aware of their respective roles and responsibilities in delivering the Improvement Plan and/or are aware of the improvements made. Communication is taking place through a range of methods including briefings, live events, and regular messages.
- **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

4.29 Since the last report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, two risk has reduced.

- IP4 - **Project and risk governance assurance arrangements:** likelihood of risk happening due to mitigations in place reduced from 2 to 1. Reducing overall risk score from 6 to 3.
- IP12 **Risk approach and progress monitoring (optimism bias)** likelihood of risk happening due to mitigations in place reduced from 2 to 1. Reducing overall risk score from 6 to 3.



- 4.30 Since the last quarterly report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, 1 risk has been closed.
- CP10- **Performance Management Framework and Data Quality**- closed as programme risk, moved to Service Improvement Risk Register to be managed within business-as-usual arrangements.

4.31 Reporting Framework and Governance

- 4.32 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 8 sets out the governance framework.
- 4.33 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. Reports have been submitted in December 2022, June 2023 and December 2023.
- 4.34 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.
- 4.35 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.
- 4.36 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee receive quarterly updates on the Improvement Plan and the Improvement Plan Risk Register.
- 4.37 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.



4.38 Any recommendations or comments from Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board will be reported to Cabinet.

5 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>
Risk:	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



	<p>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, 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>
Social Value	<p>Within the Improvement Plan, the council is committed to developing the Social Value Policy in conjunction with the refresh of the Procurement &</p>



	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.

6 Appendices

1. Grant Thornton Value for Money Follow-up-Review 2023-24
2. Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool January 2024
3. Improvement Plan Theme Summary January 2024
4. Statutory Recommendations Reporting January 2024
5. Scrutiny and Audit Recommendations Reporting January 2024
6. Changes to the Improvement Plan January 2024
7. Improvement Plan Risk Register January 2024
8. Improvement Plan Governance Diagram

7 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:
 - June 2022 Reports
 - [Sandwell Council Report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities](#), June 2022
 - December 2022 Reports:
 - [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 \(March 2023\)](#)
 - June 2023
 - [Sandwell Council Commissioners: third report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, June 2023 \(published July 2023\)](#)
 - [Ministerial response to third letter \(July 2023\)](#)
- Improvement Plan Progress Reports:
 - To Council:
 - [12 December 2023](#)
 - [13 June 2023](#)
 - [13 December 2022](#)
 - To Cabinet:
 - [February 2024](#)
 - [December 2023](#)
 - [September 2023](#)
 - [June 2023](#)
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [December 2022](#) including LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report Nov 2022
 - [September 2022](#)
 - To Audit and Risk Assurance Committee



- [November 2023](#)
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 - [June 2023](#)
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 - [January 2023 \(External Review Reports\)](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
 - [June 2022](#)
- To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
 - [November 2023](#)
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 - [September 2022](#)
- External Review Reports
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up-Report 2023](#)
 - [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](#)





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Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council: Value for Money Governance Review – follow up

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15 December 2023



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The contents of this report relate only to those matters which came to our attention during the conduct of our normal audit procedures which are designed for the purpose of completing our work under the NAO Code and related guidance. Our audit is not designed to test all arrangements in respect of value for money. However, where, as part of our testing, we identify significant weaknesses, we will report these to you. In consequence, our work cannot be relied upon to disclose all irregularities, or to include all possible improvements in arrangements that a more extensive special examination might identify. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

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Introduction

Context, background and scope of the review (Cont'd)

Our approach

Our work in relation to this review was undertaken between September and November 2023.

Stage 1 – Review of key documents

We submitted an information request for key documents and then undertook a desk top review to reach an initial conclusion on the nature of further work required.

Stage 2 – Further Analysis and Clarifications

We then undertook interviews with key stakeholders in relation to each recommendation to clarify issues identified during stage one and to undertake more detailed analysis. A total of 27 stakeholders have been met during this follow up review.

Our approach is designed to assess:

- Governance arrangements in place in relation to our scope;
- Council performance against these arrangements; and
- Identify any significant weaknesses and risks.

Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to record our appreciation for the assistance provided by council officers, council members, and external stakeholders with whom we have engaged during the course of our review.

Additional VfM Code Work

We have identified governance arrangements as an audit risk. This requires additional work to inform our auditor's judgement on VfM.

The work has been undertaken in line with the requirements of the Code and associated auditor guidance. This review helps us discharge our responsibilities under the Code and will include the reporting of any significant weaknesses in arrangements and other points for improvement identified during the review.

Any fee variation is subject to approval from Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) which is responsible for appointing auditors and setting audit fees for relevant authorities that have chosen to opt into its national scheme of auditor appointments.



Key findings

Context, background and scope of the review

Context to our VfM approach

Sections 20 and 21 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act) require auditors to be satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. This is known as the Value for Money (VfM) conclusion.

Our VfM work is carried out in line with the Code of Audit Practice (the Code) which is prepared by the National Audit Office (NAO) under the Act, and its supporting statutory guidance: Auditor Guidance Note 3 (AGN 03).

A revised Code came into force on 1 April 2020, after being approved by Parliament. The Code requires auditors to structure their VfM commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services;
- Governance: how the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Financial sustainability: how the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services.

Background to this review

On the 3 December 2021 we published our report setting out the findings of our review of the Council's governance arrangements, which formed part of our 2020/21 VfM audit.

Our report set out significant weaknesses in the Council's governance arrangements, and was presented to full Council on 18 January 2022, along with the Council's Improvement Plan which set out the Council's response to our recommendations. The Grant Thornton report and the Improvement Plan were approved by the Council at this meeting. On the same day the then Local Government Minister at the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) announced the government was mindful to intervene in the Council because of the findings set out in our governance report.

The Council commissioned the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to undertake a review of the Council's financial management and governance arrangements using the CIPFA Financial Management Model. CIPFA reported their findings and recommendations in January 2022. In addition, the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge review for the Council, reporting its findings and recommendations in February 2022.

On 22 March 2022 the Secretary of State for DLUHC issued statutory directions under section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999. These directions appointed two Commissioners who will oversee all functions associated with the governance and scrutiny of strategic decision making by the Council. The directions will be in force until March 2024, unless the Secretary of State considers it appropriate to amend or revoke them at an earlier date. These directions are in addition to the ones that led to the creation of Sandwell Children's Trust.

The Council expanded its Improvement Plan developed in response to our December 2021 governance report to incorporate its response to the findings of the CIPFA and LGA reviews. Both the Commissioners and the Council provide updates on progress on delivering the Implementation Plan to the Secretary of State for DLUHC every six months.

On 2 December 2022 we published our follow up report, which related to our 2021/22 VfM audit. This considered the progress made by the Council against the recommendations set out in our 2021 report. The 2022 report noted significant progress being made by the Council in many areas, but also included new key and improvement recommendations.

This 2023 follow up review, which relates to our 2022/23 VfM audit, considers what further progress has been made by the Council on our most recent recommendations. This does not represent a review of the Council's Improvement Plan which, as already noted, draws on a wider set of actions than those relating to the recommendations set out in our reports.

This further review, along with other VfM related activity including a high-level review of Oracle Fusion implementation, has been undertaken in order for us to consider whether there are any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements. Our overall VfM conclusions for 2022/23 will be set out in a separate Auditor's Annual Report.

Overview

Introduction

A range of different recommendations can be raised by a council's auditors as follows:

- **Statutory Recommendations:** written recommendations to the Council under Section 24 (Schedule 7) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. A recommendation under schedule 7 requires the Council to discuss and respond publicly to the report.
- **Key Recommendations:** the NAO Code of Audit Practice requires that where auditors identify significant weaknesses as part of their arrangements to secure value for money they should make recommendations setting out the actions that should be taken by the Council. We have defined these recommendations as 'key recommendations'.
- **Improvement Recommendations:** these recommendations, if implemented should improve the arrangements in place at the Council, but are not a result of identifying significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements.

Further detail on the scope of auditor's work on VfM arrangements can be found at Appendix A.

Our December 2021 report included the following:

- 3 statutory recommendations,
- 5 key recommendations, and
- 37 improvement recommendations.

A further 3 improvement recommendations were added when this report was published in October 2022 incorporating KLOE A8.

Our December 2022 report included:

- 4 key recommendations, and
- 25 improvement recommendations.

This report also retained the three statutory recommendations made in our December 2021 report.

Key Lines of Enquiry

The scope of our original 2021 review covered 17 Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs):

SERVICES & MANAGEMENT	
A1	The Children's Trust
A2	Sandwell Leisure Trust
A3	Providence Place
A4	Special Educational Needs Transport
A5	Sandwell Land and Property Company
A6	MADE festival
A7	Waste service
A8	Governance and legal support re DPH
A9	Lion Farm
A10	Introduction of new ERP system (Oracle)

MEETINGS, COMPLAINTS & RELATIONSHIPS	
B1	Chief Officers
B2	Senior Leadership
B3	Complaints
B4	Officers and members relationships
B5	Standards Committee
B6	Audit Committee
B7	Financial Reporting

As part of the 2022 follow up review we also considered how the Council engaged with residents and community stakeholders (KLOE B8).

Our findings in relation to KLOE A8 were not included in our December 2021 report, instead they were included in an update to this original report published on 17 October 2022. As a result, our follow up review in 2022 did not consider progress against KLOE A8 recommendations, and these have been considered as part of this 2023 follow up review.

In this section we summarise our key findings on the Council's progress. Our detailed findings relating to each Key Line of Enquiry are set out in a separate section. The following KLOEs were judged in our 2022 report to have appropriate arrangements in place with no improvement recommendations, and so are not reported as part of this follow up: KLOEs, A5, A6, A9, B1 and B3.

Key Findings

This section provides a summary update of the Council's progress in relation to the key findings and statutory and key recommendations in our December 2021 and December 2022 reports.

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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.

Key Findings

Our 2022 report noted that the Council had demonstrated a greater corporate grip over improvement, performance and decision making.

This progress has continued over the following twelve months and includes:

- Refreshing the Improvement Plan to reflect further external reviews and align it to the refreshed Corporate Plan.
- The Performance Management Framework has been rationalised to reduce the number of metrics to allow better focus and alignment to strategic priorities.
- Conclusion of the final phase of a widespread review of the Council's governance arrangements and constitution.
- Members have demonstrated their ability to take difficult decisions, such in relation to garden waste and the decision relating to the former Brandhall golf course site.
- Demonstrating agile and decisive decision making to not proceed with the LATC and instead extend the contract with SLT
- Introduction of a Transformation Strategy and Transformation Programme Board, and a Programme Management Office is being created and a programme management framework has been designed to ensure consistency of practice in project management and project governance across the Council.
- Evidence of greater rigour to financial planning and the identification of savings.
- The direction of travel with key partners, such as with Serco and SLT, remains positive.

Corporate grip has continued to improve on some of the service and management issues identified in our original report, including Oracle Fusion, and managing the risk of industrial action in the waste service. There has been less progress in some areas. In particular, there has been slow progress in improving the financial statement process and the finance team continues to rely on interim appointments.

Also, the Council needs to place greater emphasis is required working with SCT on area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership, continue to monitor the social worker vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates, and that SCT realises the planned Invest to Save savings targets which will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget returning the invest to save payments to the Council .

In addition, there needs to be continued focus on transformation activity to support Medium-Term Financial Planning. The scale of the savings required over the medium-term, alongside plans to provide better value services and enhancing the customer journey, means that the Council's new approach to corporate transformation is critical to the financial sustainability of the Council over the medium-term, and its ability to deliver high quality services. The Council must ensure that these recent changes are concluded and become embedded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural changes planned, successfully result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required.

Good progress has been made in relation to customer journey with a particular focus on the Council "front door". The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer journey so that this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics and should ensure that appropriate data is available to measure all customer related KPIs.

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.

Key Findings

The Council now incorporates lessons learnt in its annual business planning process and has been effective in sharing the lessons from the SEND Transport procurement. The contract management of major contracts with Serco, SLT and SCT is now more effective and lessons have been learned in relation to the initial Oracle Fusion decision being made with no full business case.

Key Findings

This section provides a summary update of the Council's progress in relation to the key findings and statutory and key recommendations in our December 2021 and December 2022 reports.

Statutory Recommendation 2 Key Findings (cont'd)

The Council has demonstrated greater awareness and responsiveness to identifying and responding to contract management weaknesses, such as those recently identified in housing services.

The development and implementation of a commercial strategy forms part of the Improvement Plan. The Council acknowledges that it needs to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines, including plans to adopt a Corporate Landlord Model for the management of its property estate, and changes to the way some services are managed such as leisure. Progress on an overarching commercial strategy has not progressed and from our stakeholder meetings there appears to be confusion over what the term commercial means. The Council should consider developing an agreed definition of commercial as a way of revitalising the progress of the commercial strategy. Once the strategy has been adopted it will need to align the Council's transformation strategy and MTFP assumptions. Given the difficulties that other councils have encountered with their commercial strategies, where for some it has led to significant financial distress, the Council should be proportionate in setting its commercial strategy and should not expose the Council to significant risk.

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.

Key Findings

The Cabinet and Leadership Team are continuing to work well both collectively and via their individual Director and Portfolio Lead roles. There continues to be a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees.

The Leadership Team has continued to demonstrate a corporate approach to managing key issues and challenges but on medium-term financial planning there still remains work to do. The Cabinet is increasingly demonstrating its ability to take hard decisions, and will need to continue to do this, given financial and other challenges ahead.

The introduction of the One Team Framework provides clarity on how the Council should deliver its organisational values and behaviours to support its ongoing improvement journey.

The Current Position

The themes set out our December 2021 report illustrated how the Council's then behaviours and legacy issues were impacting on good governance and decision making. This report noted that the Council's leadership had started to make some necessary changes and that "green shoots" were in place to deliver the widespread transformation and changes required.

Our December 2022 report noted the Improvement Plan had been key for creating and maintaining a focus on the required improvements, and the Council had made significant progress on many of the recommendations made in our 2021 report, supported by the creation of additional capacity in some key areas. The Council had put in place the foundations to deliver the sustainable improvements that were needed, and significant improvements were already being made.

Those foundations have been built on over the past twelve months and the Council remains on a positive improvement trajectory. The Council will need to demonstrate bold and charismatic leadership to manage its next phase of improvement, with the planned Senior Management restructure presenting some significant opportunities as well as risks to be managed.

The Council has plans to bring in strategic leadership capacity, reduce the number of Directorates and to delayer the number of Director roles to reduce silos and hierarchies, improve joint working and decision making across service lines. It is hopeful that in making these changes that it will accelerate the pace of the implementation of the Council's improvement plan.

These plans appear reasonable. However, we note that this type of change brings risk. These include the use interim Directors during the transition period to the new structure, possible change fatigue and resistance, the loss of corporate memory, and difficulties in retaining key staff during this period of change.

Key Findings (Cont'd)

This section provides a summary update of the Council's progress in relation to the key findings and statutory and key recommendations in our December 2021 and December 2022 reports.

The Current Position (Cont'd)

The management of these issues and the successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure

The Council's new transformation arrangements will be essential for identifying and realising savings and improving customer value and service quality. The success of the Council's transformation plans are integral to its medium-term financial sustainability. Of equal importance is the embedding of the cultural and behavioural change set out in the One Team Framework.

The Council has made good progress on the customer journey and now needs to expand its focus from first customer contact (the "front door") to measure the full customer experience. The Council should retain corporate focus and attention on key service and operational risks, in particular the implementation of Oracle Fusion, place-based working with SCT, industrial action in the waste service, financial statement production, and reducing reliance on the level of interim appointments in the finance team.

We note that the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still require significant improvement. As at 6 December 2023 we had not been provided with the draft financial statements. The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production. If the 2021/22 accounts are not made available for audit by 31 December 2023 or are of poor quality we will need to consider the further use of our statutory powers.

The Council retains a challenging agenda of delivering business as usual alongside improvement and transformation and it must maintain the pace of change so that progress does not plateau or fall backwards. The external environment remains challenging for all councils, including uncertainty on the level of future government funding, a potential change in national government with a general expected sometime during 2024, alongside the impact of the ongoing cost of living crisis on businesses and communities.

Members and the senior leadership have responded to government intervention in a commendable way, and the Council is now more responsive and has a much better understanding of what good looks like. Intervention may conclude at the end of March 2024, which would require the Commissioners to make this recommendation to government, and the Minister to agree. It is therefore imperative that the arrangements now in place ensure continued improvement should intervention cease, and the Commissioners depart their roles.

With changes planned to senior management during 2024, and potential changes to Cabinet during the year ahead, the Council must provide confidence to the Commissioners and to the government that their improvement plans for the coming twelve to eighteen months will be delivered.

Conclusions and recommendations

We are satisfied that the Council has made appropriate progress against the three statutory recommendations, and these can now be lifted.

We found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in relation to 13 of the 18 KLOES that we have reviewed. There therefore remain some matters that represent significant weakness for ensuring that the Council makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, and we have made four key recommendations, which are set out on the following page. This is followed by our summary findings for each KLOE.

Our detailed findings are set out in the next section of the report. We have identified various improvement recommendations throughout the report, which are summarised at Appendix B.

Key recommendations

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Improvement recommendations are made throughout this report, and these are summarised at Appendix B. Our key recommendations are summarised below.

#	Key Recommendation
1.	The Council must ensure that the changes in train relating to transformation are concluded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural and behavioural changes become successfully embedded and result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required, so that the Council remains financially sustainable in the medium-term. This includes ensuring that the Property Transformation Programme leads to decisions being taken on asset disposals that ensure associated savings targets in the MTFP are realised.
2.	The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer experience, and this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics, and having appropriate data available to measure all customer related KPIs.
3.	The Council should retain corporate focus and attention on key service and operational risks, in particular the implementation of Oracle Fusion, placed based working with SCT and the effective management of SCT's operational and financial challenges, industrial action in the waste service, putting a clear plan in pace for the subsidy to SLT being eliminated, financial statement production, and reducing reliance on the level of interim appointments in the finance team.
4.	The Council will need to manage the risks associated with the Senior Management restructure, including organisational change fatigue and resistance, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.

Management responses to these and the improvement recommendations are included in a separate Council report.

KLOEs: Summary Findings

This section provides a summary of the key findings on each KLOE.

KLOE	Summary Findings
A1: The Children's Trust	The Council is now much more effective in its approach to and relationships with the Trust, including more effective contract management. The recent Ofsted inspection of adoption services demonstrates a continued positive direction of travel. However, there remain some significant challenges in relation to SCT's ability to deliver planned savings and manage its finances within the contract sum, and for both the Council and SCT in wider system and partnership working.
A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust	The Council now has improved governance arrangements in place, and should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is in line with the Council's MTFP assumptions.
A3: Providence Place	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. A recommendation was made in relation to the asset management strategy and system whilst good progress has been made, the Council needs to fully implement to realise the planned benefits.
A4: SEND Transport	Our 2022 report noted that this matter has now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There was one improvement recommendation for the Council to ensure that the lessons learned are shared across other council services so that this learning becomes embedded across the organisation. Our 2023 review has confirmed that appropriate arrangements are now in place, with one improvement recommendation made.
A5: SLaP	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
A6: MADE Festival	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
A7: Waste Service	Our 2023 review found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in arrangements. The relationships between the Council and Serco remain on an upward trajectory, with how they jointly responded to the industrial action a recent positive example. The Council has taken steps to work more effectively with Serco on areas such as collection policies, and Serco has demonstrated a more effective approach to the annual service delivery planning process. The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council, and the Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.
A8: Governance and legal support to DPH	Our 2022 report did not follow up on this KLOE due to it being reported in October 2022. Our 2023 review found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements. The Council should conclude its plans to introduce a policy for working with local MPs and associated guidance.

KLOEs: Summary Findings (Cont'd)

This section provides a summary of the key findings on each KLOE.

KLOE	Summary Findings
A9: Lion Farm	Our 2022 report noted that the Council had taken all possible actions to resolve this matter and has a clear way forward. There were no recommendations to follow up in our 2023 review.
A10: Introduction of new ERP System	The Council has continued to pay careful attention to the Oracle Fusion implementation, undertaking revisions to timescales and resources where required. Specialist external resources have been scaled up during the year to fill identified roles alongside ring-fencing Council staff to assist with implementation tasks. However, there have been further delays and associated increased costs resulting in the decision to phase the go live dates. The risks associated with poor and ineffective implementation remain significant.
B1: Chief Officers	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
B2: Senior Leadership	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks. A new Chief Executive has been appointed and has made a positive impact. The impact of the senior management restructure, including the introduction of interim Directors, is a prelude of the instability and uncertainty resulting from the significant changes planned. The Council will need to manage the risk of change fatigue, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.
B3: Complaints	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
B4: Office and Member Relationships	The Cabinet and Leadership Team are continuing to work well both collectively and via their individual Director and Portfolio Lead roles. There continues to be a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees. The Leadership Team has continued to demonstrate a corporate approach to managing key issues and challenges but on medium-term financial planning there still remains work to do. The Cabinet is increasingly demonstrating its ability to take hard decisions, and will need to continue to do this, given financial and other challenges ahead.

KLOEs: Summary Findings (Cont'd)

This section provides a summary of the key findings on each KLOE.

KLOE	Summary Findings
B5: Standards Committee	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, and made one improvement recommendation. Our 2023 review identified one improvement recommendation confirmed that appropriate arrangements continue to be in place and no improvement recommendations are made.
B6: Audit Committee	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, and made one improvement recommendation. Our 2023 review has confirmed that appropriate arrangements remain in place and no improvement recommendations have been made.
B7: Financial Reporting	The CIPFA follow up Financial Management review identified improvement across various areas of financial management, but significant progress remains for the finance team to become fully effective. In particular, the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still requires significant improvement.
B8: Engagement with Residents and Community Groups	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks. Our 2023 review identified appropriate arrangements remain in place, and the Council should continue to build on the progress that has been made in engaging with residents so that it continues to support greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.

Detailed Findings

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Governance Review

The Council instigated a review of its governance arrangements following issues identified by our 2021 VfM governance review, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review and the CIPFA Financial Management review. Our 2022 report provided an update on the first two phases of this review.

The third and final phase was concluded with a report to full Council on 13 December 2022, with changes agreed to the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, Financial Regulations and Procedure Rules, Remaining Articles, and Responsibility for Functions.

Going forward an annual review of the Constitution will take place.

Phase 3 included an amendment to the key decision threshold which has increased the threshold for delegated decisions, with the virement threshold now £500k for chief officers, between £500k and £1m relevant Cabinet members and over £1m Cabinet. Any delegated decisions still require a report and decision notice. All significant spending decisions, determined as impacting on two or more wards, remains a decision for full Cabinet. We have been advised that this has reduced the number of decisions going to Cabinet, allowing more effective conducting of Cabinet business.

Training on changes to the constitution has been undertaken with officers and members. This has included updates on procurement, contract management and financial regulations.

The Council is also progressing improvements to the workflow of report drafting and approval, using the Modern.Gov system, to ensure that decision making is timely and draft reports receive appropriate reviews.

A change to the approach for electing the Mayor has been agreed. Previously this was decided by the controlling administration, and will now be based on the longest serving councillor, with the deputy mayor being the next longest serving councillor.

The Council has now concluded a comprehensive review of the constitution and governance arrangements with plans in place for an annual review.

Improvement Plan

The Council developed an improvement plan in response to our original VfM Governance review which, as already noted, has been expanded to incorporate the recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review and the CIPFA Financial Management review.

The Improvement Plan was also developed in line with the Secretary of State for DLUHC's Statutory Direction

This single Improvement Plan was agreed by full Council on 7 June 2022 and structured around the following six themes:

- Organisational Culture
- Corporate Oversight
- Strategic Direction
- Decision Making
- Procurement and Commercial
- Partnership and Relationships

Each theme has a clear set of deliverables, milestones and responsibilities which will be used to track our progress against expected timescales.

Grant Thornton, CIPFA and the LGA undertook follow up reviews during Autumn 2022. The Improvement Plan was updated to reflect the findings of these follow up reviews in January 2023 and was reported to Cabinet in 2023 as phase 2 of the Plan, which incorporated the recently concluded work on corporate values and behaviours

An Improvement Plan 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, and these form part of the quarterly reporting approach.

The Improvement Plan is monitored monthly, and updates are provided to the Leadership Team and Cabinet on a quarterly basis. An annual report on progress is produced, most recently in May 2023.

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 mechanism.

The Cabinet approved a revised Corporate Plan and a new Young People's Corporate Plan on 7 June 2023. The Council reviewed and updated the Improvement Plan ensure alignment with the updated Corporate Plan.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

The Improvement Plan (Cont'd)

The first theme of the Improvement Plan is organisational culture and during Autumn 2022 a series of listening sessions were undertaken with staff, with over 500 engaging via attendance at events or the completion of surveys. Feedback was consolidated during November and December 2022, to support the development of the Council's One Team Framework, which sets out the values and behaviours expected. This was approved by Cabinet on 15 March 2023 and the agreed values were:

- 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.

The One Team Framework aims to provide clarity on how the Council should deliver its organisational values and ensure that values and behaviours form an integral part of the Council's People/Workforce Strategy. The Framework sets out the expected behaviours from everyone and from leaders, with an ambition that everyone will behave as leaders.

A network of culture champions has been established to support the launch of the Framework and its ongoing delivery. The Chief Executive met over 400 managers as part of launch across eight staff engagement sessions.

The introducing of clear expectations on values and behaviours is a positive step taken by the Council, and will be critical to support its ongoing improvement journey. Embedding cultural and behavioural change is not straight forward and takes considerable time, focus and effort. [The Council has not yet concluded introducing a "golden thread" that aligns corporate plans to individual's annual performance reviews, and this approach should be progressed to include the behaviours set out in the One Team Framework, so that expected values and behaviours can be monitored and measured \(Improvement Recommendation\).](#)

Medium-Term Financial Planning

The Council has continued the "star chamber" approach to support budget setting, which took place during Summer 2023. This exercise resulted in a basket of savings options being put forward to Cabinet for approval and to consult on further, prior to making formal decisions on the budget in February 2024. These initial savings options amounted to £18m in 2024/25.

For the first time, the Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team held an away day during September 2023 to discuss the MTFP and options for savings and discussed key financial principles, such as council tax levels. We have been advised that members of Cabinet have responded very favourably to the away day and how it has improved their understanding of the financial challenges facing the Council and the options available to manage these challenges. Further budget workshops were taking place at the time of our review.

The Cabinet approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27, and the associated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), at its meeting on 15 November 2023, reflecting an estimate of the Council's financial position as at October 2023, and noting that the figures will change as further updating takes place. The Council has commenced a resident engagement exercise through the summer of 2023 and this, together with the Consultation and Engagement Plan forms the Council's proposed approach to consulting during the 2024/25 budget setting process. This was underway at the time of our review. The MTFS and MTFP will be further updated for the meetings of the Executive, Budget Scrutiny and Full Council in January and February 2024.

A new business planning approach has been introduced for 2024-27 which aims to better align service and financial planning to the Corporate Plan and MTFS, drive consistency and continuous improvement across the Council including incorporating lessons learnt, better integrate performance metrics and resident feedback, and embed One Council Values and Behaviours. Business planning workshops were taking place in November and December 2023 to support the budget setting process.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Medium-Term Financial Planning (cont'd)

The senior leadership team have demonstrated a much greater grip of medium-term financial planning, but there remains further work to do in order to fully understand and agree the principles that underpin the MTFs, for example the approach to reserve levels. **The senior leadership team should make time to agree clear objectives for financial planning, and the financial, organisational and behavioural actions required to achieve these objectives (Improvement Recommendation).**

The position of the MTFP as at October 2023 forecast funding gaps, which represent savings requirements, of 3.8% of the revised net revenue budget in 2024/25 rising to 10.3% of the revised net revenue budget in 2026/27.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£m	£m	£m
Current net budget	317.103	317.103	317.103
Budget pressures and adjustments	28.272	49.723	66.727
Revised net budget	345.375	366.826	383.83
Funding	-332.412	-338.158	-344.476
Net deficit before savings	12.963	28.668	39.354
Savings required as % of net budget	3.8	7.8	10.3

These are significant savings targets to identify and deliver, in the context of existing budgetary pressures, and will inevitably require difficult political decision to be made. The majority of the £13m saving required to balance the 2024/25 budget will need to be recurring in nature.

The importance of the Council's transformation programme, alongside its improvement plan, will be critical to ensuring these medium-term financial challenges are effectively managed. The Council's approach to transformation is discussed in the section that follows.

Corporate Transformation

The Council is developing a transformational approach to delivering savings, and a Transformation Strategy has been produced – called Creating a Council for the Future - with the objective of providing better value services and enhancing the customer journey.

The transformation strategy is a blend of key directorate projects and some critical corporate cross-cutting projects. The corporate projects include Oracle Fusion implementation and a review of business support services, a digital strategy, and a customer journey programme. Key directorate projects include SEND, leisure review, waste review, housing repairs, and asset and estate rationalisation. The Council's new values and behaviours are integral to the transformation strategy.

A corporate PMO framework was agreed by the Senior Leadership Team in August 2023. Local Partnerships supported the Council in the framework's development, including sharing best practice adopted by other councils. The framework has been designed to ensure consistency of practice in project management and project governance across the Council.

A corporate transformation board has been established to oversee all transformation projects and monitor the transformation project pipeline, with the Director of Finance as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO). There are plans to establish sub-programme boards relating to the key transformation themes (corporate, people, assets and place), that will report to the corporate transformation board. Transformation activity will form part of the business planning and performance management workshops that were being undertaken at the time of our review. Quarterly reporting to Cabinet and the Leadership Team is planned.

The Council established a Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO), following slippage to the original timescale, in September 2023. This includes a corporate transformation office to support transformation activity and project assurance across the Council, and new roles have been created which were being recruited to at the time of our review. The Council is further considering how it could augment the skills and capacity of the PMO by the use of external consultants.

The Council has purchased licences to Verto, a project management software system, which at the time of our review had been through user testing and was in the process of being rolled out to those in the Council involved in project management. Verto is expected to support the PMO Framework by providing a standard approach to project management and reporting. The Council's learning and development team are putting in place a training programme for users of Verto, with the go live date for its use planned for April 2024.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Corporate Transformation (cont'd)

The PMO has introduced a project threshold tool, which assesses the value, risk, capacity and complexity of a project to determine the level of PMO support and governance required across four levels (intense, high, medium or low). All projects, regardless of this level, will be reported on Verto.

The Council has made positive steps to introduce a clear structure, resources, governance arrangements, and related processes to manage its transformation activity, which at the time of our review had not fully concluded.

The scale of the savings required over the medium-term, alongside plans to provide better value services and enhancing the customer journey, means that this new approach to corporate transformation is critical to the financial sustainability of the Council and its ability to deliver high quality services. **The Council must ensure that these changes are concluded and become embedded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural changes planned, successfully result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required (Key Recommendation).**

There is currently no over-arching framework on the use and appointment of external consultants, with services independently making such appointments. **As part of the new transformation arrangements the Council should ensure there is corporate oversight of the use of external consultants, including how such commissions align to the Council's transformation strategy (Improvement Recommendation).**

Performance Management Framework

On 12 April 2022 the Council approved a Corporate Performance Management Framework (PMF) to monitor delivery of the Corporate Plan. Our previous report set out the structure of the PMF. On a quarterly basis, the Council gathers and analyses a wide range of data and information to understand how effectively its plans are being implemented and whether the strategic outcomes contained in the Corporate Plan are being achieved.

As already noted, the Cabinet approved a revised Corporate Plan on 7 June 2023, and the PMF was reviewed and updated to align to the new Corporate Plan. There were 244 measures in the corporate performance indicator set, and these were revised to 208. The intention is that by having a smaller, more aligned, and focused number of corporate performance indicators, reporting of the PMF will better highlight performance matters in the key areas of strategic importance and what action is being taken, or needs to be taken, in response.

The new corporate performance indicator set will be reported quarterly to the Leadership Team and Cabinet in a corporate performance report alongside the quarterly Corporate Plan monitoring reports. Each directorate business plan contains a set of Corporate Plan commitments and each directorate business plan has also been realigned to support the revised Corporate Plan.

A new role of corporate performance manager has been created and filled. There is now much greater organisational and leadership focus and understanding of service and financial performance and associated risks. The rationalisation of the corporate performance indicator set should help improved this focus as the PMF continues to embed across the organisation.

Commercial Strategy

The development and implementation of a commercial strategy forms part of the Improvement Plan. The Council acknowledges that it needs to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines, including plans to adopt a Corporate Landlord Model for the management of its property estate, and changes to the way some services are managed such as leisure.

The Council commissioned C.Co to draft a commercial strategy, which has resulted in a narrow focus, covering three specific service areas where commercial income opportunities may exist. Progress on an overarching commercial strategy has not progressed and from our stakeholder meetings there appears to be confusion over what the term commercial means.

Other councils that have developed a commercial strategy have often first worked to agree a generally accepted definition of commercial, recognising the term can have different interpretations. For example, for some commercial means being business-line in relation to all council activity, however mundane, such as the efficient conducting of meetings, whilst for others it has a more specific meaning such as being entrepreneurial with a focus on commercial investments and/or trading activity. It is important that the Council has a shared understanding of what commercial means for Sandwell.

The Council should consider developing an agreed definition of commercial as a way of revitalising the progress of the commercial strategy. Once the strategy has been adopted it will need to align the Council's transformation strategy and MTFP assumptions (Improvement Recommendation).

Given the difficulties that other councils have encountered with their commercial strategies, where for some it has led to significant financial distress, the Council should be proportionate in setting its commercial strategy and should not expose the Council to significant risk.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

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Customer Journey

A customer journey programme board was established in early 2023, supported by the corporate transformation office. The board provides updates to Cabinet on customer performance and progress on customer journey activity, alongside PMF updates on customer focussed metrics which are reported quarterly.

During 2023 the Council refreshed its website to make it more user friendly, including usability on mobile devices and the provision of more up-to-date content. Enhancements to the website include:

- My Sandwell: for residents and businesses to register a My Sandwell account. This account can be used to council tax, benefits, business rates or housing balances, make payments, request services, report problems and track any enquiries made to the Council, together with information on key Council services.
- Citizen Space: a new consultation hub where residents can subscribe to news on Council consultations and other engagement activity, and a section called “we asked, you said, we did” which provides updates on the outcomes of how consultation and engagement activity informed Council decisions.

Members use the My Councillor portal as their case management system to manage queries and complaints from residents. There is target to respond to complaints in 10 days and performance remains variable. The Council’s complaints team have undertaken work on the timeliness and quality of responsiveness and the information governance team are working with services where performance and responsiveness to complaints need to improve.

The Leadership Team and informal Cabinet have developed customer standards reporting on service areas such as call waiting times and responsiveness to complaints, and for those service where there is a high volume of customer engagement such as responsiveness to fly tipping, pot-hole repairs, benefits claims, homeless triage and general repairs. The 2023/24 quarter one report covered 13 KPIs and of these the performance was rated red for seven, amber for three, green for two, and for one (housing applications) there was no data available.

Whilst good progress has been made to improve how the Council engages with its residents and businesses and improves the customer journey and experience, these key customer standards metrics indicate that there is more work required by the Council to improve its performance in relation the customer journey.

The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer journey so that this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics, and should ensure that appropriate data is available to measure all customer related KPIs (Key Recommendation).

The Council is considering further improvements to the customer journey, including introducing a new telephony system and rationalising customer contact centres. We note that customer journey related performance metrics currently focus on the Council’s “front door” - the responsiveness to an initial customer contact - and the Council should consider enhancing these metrics to measure its performance through full customer journeys including the customer experience and satisfaction (Improvement Recommendation).

Asset Management Strategy

The Corporate Asset management strategy (CAMS) was approved by Cabinet in November 2022. The strategy acknowledges that the Council is committed to maintaining an effective and efficient property portfolio which supports the delivery of services to residents, provides value for money, reduces environmental impact and maximises opportunities to generate value.

Workstreams have been established to oversee delivery of the strategy on groupings that include community centres, office rationalisation, commercial estate, climate change, corporate landlord, and regeneration.

The strategy is underpinned by the disposal of surplus assets and the associated savings and, as at October 2023, the £1.6m savings target for 2022/23 is expected to be achieved. This includes the disposal of Providence Place to the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities. There are further savings targets of £2.5m in both 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The Council acknowledges the need to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines, including adopting a Corporate Landlord Model for the management of its property estate. As part of this a Property Transformation programme is being developed to develop further options for asset disposals.

The savings plan relating to assets is dependent on the Council taking decisions on assets identified for disposal, and at the time of our review there was a savings target variance of £1.86m for 2024/25 and £2.05m for 2025/26. The Council should ensure that the Property Transformation Programme leads to decisions being taken to realise the balance of these planned savings and appropriate ambition is taken on asset disposal plans (Key Recommendation).

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Asset Management System

At the time of our review the implementation and roll out of the Council's new corporate asset management information system (Techforge), which will replace the Atrium system, was in final project closedown stage.

Phase 1 is due to go live in December 2023. Phase 2 of the asset management system implementation includes consideration of modules relating to capital accounting, and a fixed asset register, to support accounts production. An initial meeting is due to place in January 2024 to agree workstreams, leads and timescales for this phase.

The new system should provide a single, dedicated database for asset information, system linkage to Oracle Fusion and improved creation and monitoring of capital accounting reporting. The Council plans to identify workstreams, leads and timescales in January 2024. It is unclear if there is a definitive go live for phase 2.

The Council must ensure that the new asset management system is fully implemented and planned benefits are realised and both phases are operational for 1 April 2024. (Improvement Recommendation).



KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider actions undertaken by the Council to secure improvement in children's social care outcomes.

Background

The Service Delivery Contract (SDC) between the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) went live on 1 April 2018. The total contract period was for 10 years with an option to exercise a break after 5 years of operation.

Our December 2022 report recommended the Council:

- Will need to ensure that SCT accelerates its progress on its improvement trajectory so that the position does not plateau, including sharing good practice on case work across various SCT social work teams.
- Will need to continue to closely monitor the implementation of the early help strategy to ensure planned objectives and outcomes are realised.
- Must continue to work with SCT to mitigate and reduce the level of vacancies and use of agency staff, and take steps to ensure the associated KPI does not lead to contract failure.
- Should continue to monitor the progress of SCT against the invest to save activities to ensure that SCT is able to generate the savings and efficiencies required for the contract sum to be reduced.

KEY FINDINGS

Ofsted inspections

Our previous report noted that the July 2022 Ofsted inspection report on children's services rated services as 'require improvement to be good', an improvement on the previous inspection which rated services as inadequate. At that time Ofsted reported that the pace and trajectory of improvement had increased over the year preceding the inspection, and we noted that children's services in Sandwell have been rated inadequate for over a decade, so this inspection reflected a positive direction of travel.

In February 2023 Ofsted published their report on the voluntary adoption agency managed by SCT, with the inspection having taken place in December 2022. The overall rating was 'good', compared to the previous inspection in January 2019, which rated the service 'requires improvement to be good'. We note that the most recent Ofsted inspection on fostering services, from 2021, also provided a rating of 'good', following a 'requires improvement to be good' from the previous inspection in 2019.

In July 2023 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook an area inspection of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which was reported in September 2023..

The Council, SCT and NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Sandwell.

These area inspections do not provide an overall rating, and the report noted a number of areas of positive progress, but the overall conclusion was that the local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and the local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements set out in the report. The areas for improvement identified were:

- strengthening of multi-agency working across the partnership,
- develop co-production so that children and young people play a key role in developing improvement strategies and plans, and
- there should be an increase in the number and range of short break opportunities to support the needs of children and young people with SEND.

Multi-agency early intervention and prevention strategy

The early years strategy, developed by the Council working with SCT and other key stakeholders from the public and third sectors, had been launched in March 2022. It was recognised that it would take up to 18 months to embed across the early help system.

A year on event for all partners in the system was held in March 2023 and it is recognised by the Council and SCT that there is work still to be undertaken across the partnership before all partners fully recognise their responsibilities in relation to the strategy. Our work identified that some tensions have emerged between the Council and the SCT on system leadership responsibility for driving effective system working.

The early intervention and prevention strategy is critical to all key partners including the Council and SCT, including a strong inter-dependency with the early help invest to save savings target of the Trust, which is discussed later in this section.

Considering the outcome of the recent Ofsted and CQC area SEND review and the multi-agency early intervention and prevention strategy challenges, it is clear that there is greater emphasis required by the Council and SCT on progressing area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership.

KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider actions undertaken by the Council to secure improvement in children's social care outcomes.

Workforce challenges

The Strategic Partnership Board (SPB), at its meeting on 22 September 2023 noted that about one of the Trust's 15 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were within contract tolerance, with the exception being the vacancy rate of social workers which in March 2023 was a 42%. Sickness rates had dropped to the lowest they have been since the Trust was established and stood at 7%. The vacancy rate across SCT as a whole was 20-29%.

The recruitment rate was not at a net gain and the Trust continues to find it difficult to stabilise teams, and an ongoing strategy was in place to slow the rate of leavers, but this had not stopped people wanting and choosing to leave. The Trust reported that ongoing workforce pressures are a symptom of a national crisis relating to the recruitment and retention of social workers, with a stated view that this issue can only be solved at a national level.

In February 2023, the government published a new strategy to transform children's social care: Stable Homes, Built on Love. This strategy included the government's response to the MacAlister Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The strategy recognised the national challenges facing social worker recruitment and retention. At the time of this VfM review, the government had not published its response to its consultation on the child and family social worker workforce, which is due to set out plans for national rules on the use of agency social workers, with the intention that these rules will help mitigate children's social care workforce challenges nationally.

Notwithstanding this national context, the Council's Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 12 July 2023 to increase the contract sum to SCT in relation to the Sandwell Deal. The Sandwell Deal is expected to provide an incentive for children's social workers to apply to roles in Sandwell and sets out career pathways and associated support to help manage retention. Incentives include market supplements and retention payments for all case holding social workers. The additional contract sum comprised a maximum of £260k to pay market supplements, the cost of retention payments of a maximum of £310k in 2023/24 rising to £1.1m in 2025/26, and a maximum of £556k to recruit overseas social workers in 2023/24. This was to be funded from the Council's Social Care Earmarked Reserve. This decision followed an options appraisal that included consideration of a regional benchmarking exercise undertaken in March 2023 which identified that without these recruitment and retention policies Sandwell would be in the lowest quartile of the 14 local authorities / children's trusts that were benchmarked.

At the Operational Partnership Board (OPB) meeting on 5 December 2023 it was reported that the social worker vacancy rate had been on a reducing trend during 2023/4 and stood at 23% at October 2023.

The report further noted that for first time in many years, the vacancy rate KPI had been met, however some of the permanent staff were non-qualified social workers.

The Council should continue to monitor the vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates.

Invest to Save

The contract between the Council and SCT allows SCT to make invest to save proposals to increase the contract sum in the short term, to be paid back to the Council via a reduction in a future contract sum. SCT has submitted two invest to save proposals which the Council approved in September 2021.

These related to Early Help and Strategic Commissioning and a total £287.5k investment in 2021/22 and 2022/23 with this amount being returned to the council by SCT in 2023/24 and 2024/25 by a reduction in the contract sum.

These two invest to save areas are monitored via the Operational Partnership Board (OPB) and SPB, with the later chaired by Council's Chief Executive. The Council and SCT finance directors have regular informal discussions including on financial and operational challenges, and monitor the impact of invest to save investments.

The Strategic Commissioning Invest to Save savings target for 2023/24 is £269k. This focuses on strengthening and developing an evidenced based commissioning programme to improve value for money. At the meeting of SPB on 22 September 2023 it was reported £21k savings had been confirmed by the end of July 2023 with plans in place to realise the balance of the savings target.

The Early Help Invest to Save savings target for 2023/24 is £229k. This focuses on fewer referrals into the Trust which in turn will lead to a reduction in children in need and children in care. £20k savings had been confirmed by the end of July 2023, with plans in place for the realisation of the balance of the savings target. The challenges, already noted, in relation to the multi-agency early help and intervention strategy will impact on this invest to save target if the planned system changes do not become effectively embedded.

In summary, progress to date across both Invest to Saves indicates £41k had been delivered by the end of July 2023. Other actions taken are expected to deliver a total of £225k of savings during 2023/24, due to the timing of the savings being implemented not resulting in a full year effect until 2024/25. This leaves a further £273k of savings to be delivered during 2023/24.

Realising these planned savings will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget and the contract sum increases relating to the invest to save can be paid back to the Council.

KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider actions undertaken by the Council to secure improvement in children's social care outcomes.

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Contract sum and financial performance

The contract sum agreed between the Council and SCT for 2022/23 was £70.4m, an increase on the prior year of £2.4m or 4%. The original budget set for the Trust for 2022/23 was £68.527m, so the contract sum agreed was intended to create an in-year surplus of £1.9m. The Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23 incorporated the planned surplus to be off-set against the cumulative over-spend from previous financial years.

The forecast 2022/23 outturn was an overspend of £1.9m compared to the annual budget for the Trust and breakeven position when compared to the contract sum received. The cumulative deficit including prior year deficits was forecast to be £7.3m as at 31 March 2023. This was against a MTFP forecast position of £5.3m, because the forecast surplus during 2022/23 was not realised. The Trusts latest MTFP indicates that the deficit will be fully repaid by 2027/28.

The budget for 2022/23 incorporated the impact of the Trust's Cost Savings Action Plan which required the Trust to achieve savings of £2.3m in year. The Trust had fully identified and commenced actions that were expected to deliver £1.8k of savings. The remaining £538k related primarily to the stepping down of high-cost placements and the increase in internal foster carers. The Trust had developed a further cost saving plan which has identified specific actions designed to deliver fully against the shortfall in the delivery of the original plan by the end of the year.

The contract sum agreed for 2023/24 totalled £74.5m and the SCT revenue budget assumed a year end surplus of £742k. The contract sum is an increase of £2.5m of 3.5% and reflected the ongoing impact of inflation. As at September 2023 the forecast outturn was an overspend of £797k, resulting in a £1.539m variance to budget. The reasons given for this variance include:

- Continued pressure within the placement market due to a high demand for places and the impact of inflation.
- Higher than anticipated increase to Regional Fostering Framework prices for 2023/24.
- Continued pressures within the social worker labour market and the consequent over reliance on high costs agency staff.
- Complexity and co-ordination associated with delivering the savings programme and associated transformation of services.

SCT has implemented a Budget Accountability Framework with accountability to the Trust's Finance and Infrastructure Committee where there is scrutiny and challenge on a quarterly basis. The Trust Board provides direction and oversight with regard to the overall financial position of the Trust.

At the time of our review the Council and SCT had commenced discussions on the 2024/25 contract sum, but these discussions had not been concluded. The Council has also begun considering the options for investing capital expenditure in the construction or acquisition of assets to be used as a residential children's home, in discussion with SCT, as part of broader plans to reduce placement costs.

The KPIs used to monitor the performance of SCT were being reviewed at the time of our audit, but had not been approved. It is anticipated new KPIs will be in place from January 2024.

Conclusions and recommendations

Following the 2022 Ofsted inspection Sandwell entered a period of 'transition from intervention', but the current statutory direction will remain in place until DfE is assured of the long-term trajectory of sustainable improvement.

Senior stakeholders from the Council and SCT are generally positive about working relationships and the governance arrangements in place, and the Council is now much more effective in its approach to and relationships with the Trust, including more effective contract management. The recent Ofsted inspection of adoption services demonstrates a continued positive direction of travel.

However, there remain some significant challenges in relation to SCT's ability to deliver planned savings and manage its finances within the contract sum, and for both the Council and SCT in wider system and partnership working.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- Greater emphasis is required by the Council and SCT on progressing area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership.
- The Council should continue to monitor the vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates.
- Realising the planned Invest to Save savings will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget and the invest to save payments can be repaid to the Council.

KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the contract with SLT and to understand the impact of recent industrial action.

Background

Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) was formed by the Council in 2004 due to underperformance of the in-house leisure service. SLT was contracted via a Management and Funding Agreement (MFA) for a 30-year period: 2004 to 2034. SLT operate all council leisure facilities, other than West Bromwich Leisure Centre, which is operated by Places Leisure under a separate agreement.

At the time of our 2022 review the Council was progressing the establishment of a local authority trading company (LATC) to take over responsibility for leisure provision delivered by SLT.

Our December 2022 report recommended that the Council will need to:

- ensure a business case is produced for the new leisure LATC so that there is a clear financial case for the commercial viability of the new arms' length company.
- be clear how it effectively discharges its role whilst allowing the company the freedoms and flexibilities to operate and to deliver the planned financial and service benefits
- effectively manage the transition of the Aquatics Centre so that it is operational to the planned timescale and that there is a clear business case which sets out how the centre will be managed to become commercially viable and provide financial returns to the Council as part of the leisure LATC arrangements.

KEY FINDINGS

Local Authority Trading Company

At their meeting 9 February 2022, Cabinet resolved to not approve SLT's business plan and to serve notice of termination; this notice was served for SLT's operation of the leisure centres to cease on 1 May 2023. At their meeting 22 June 2022, Cabinet resolved to progress the establishment of a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) to operate the Council's leisure facilities.

The Chief Operating Officer of the proposed LATC started in role in January 2023, and LiveWell Leisure Limited, the LATC, was incorporated on 6 February 2023 as a company limited by guarantee, with the Council as the sole member. At that time the new LATC was due to commence operations on 1 May 2023.

Business planning was undertaken in relation to the LATC, with the Council engaging Continuum and Prominent Leisure Services to support this work. This included costing the transfer of the Aquatics centre to the LATC and the impact of the closure of the Langley and Smethwick leisure centres.

The Council also progressed due diligence and planning for the overall transfer of service delivery from SLT to the new LATC, including the TUPE of staff from SLT to the LATCO, and contract novation.

Recognising that leisure centres are large consumers of energy, and in the context of UK wide increases in utility costs, the Council decided to pause their plans to better understand the impact of these increased costs. It was established that in 2021 – pre-energy cost increases – that SLT had entered longer-term energy supply contracts, which insulated them from the increases in energy tariffs: gas to September 2026 and electricity to March 2027.

A legal options appraisal was undertaken that identified that the SLT energy tariffs could not be novated to the LATC without significant risk. The cost pressure of losing the fixed tariffs for the nine centres in the SLT portfolio (reducing to seven centres during 2023) was estimated in January 2023 as £3.42m over the next two years. It was also recognised that utility tariff stability is beneficial over the coming three years, given market instability and the scale of Sandwell's leisure estate.

Based on the cost pressure identified, and an improved relationship with SLT, the termination notice with SLT was extended for the period covered by SLT's fixed tariffs; an extension of 3 years and 11 months from 1 May 2023 to the end of March 2027.

A Deed of Variation (DoV) to the MFA with SLT has been agreed to formalise the change in governance arrangements. A key change in the DoV is that any operating surplus achieved by SLT will be retained by the Council rather than SLT. The Council obtained counsel opinion in relation to the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (the replacement to EU State Aid regulations) and, based on this advice, Council officers determined that no subsidy or economic advantage would accrue from the extension to their contract with SLT.

Regular briefings took place with informal Cabinet prior to Cabinet taking the decision to extend arrangements with SLT. Progress continues to be reported, most recently at to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities (SNAC) Scrutiny Board on 12 Sept 2023 and to Cabinet on 13 October 2023.

SLT amended its Articles of Association that coincided with the DoV. This has resulted in a change to the requirements of the composition of the SLT Board. Previously there was a requirement for a member of the Council to be a board member which has been removed.

KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the contract with SLT and to understand the impact of recent industrial action.

Relationships with SLT

Our 2021 report noted that relationships between the Council and SLT had broken down. Since our 2022 review there have been changes to some key roles at both SLT and the Council. This includes the departure of the SLT Chief Executive, some changes to the SLT Trustees including a new acting Chair, and the Chief Operating Officer appointed for the LATC has been seconded to the role of Chief Executive at SLT from 1 May 2023 for the duration of the extended contract period. The Council's lead officer responsible for leisure services has also seen a change in personnel.

Senior representatives of the Council and SLT have had their first joint strategy day, which took place in August 2023, and are demonstrating much more effective collaborative working and mutual understanding, for example SLT's understanding of Council funding pressures, and the Council's understanding of SLT's charitable regulations and challenges with their leisure estate.

The Council and SLT are promoting a culture of open dialogue, no surprises, and honest conversations, which if successfully embedded will be a step change from previous relationships.

A shared goal of service transformation has been agreed, which has provided an opportunity to reset the relationship. Stakeholders from the Council and SLT have advised that the culture of the relationship is now one of partnership with more informal contact beyond the formal governance related meetings, with much more effective engagement and, from SLT's perspective, greater clarity on Council lines of responsibility and it will be important that there is now continuity in these Council roles.

SLT Finances

The management funding agreement for SLT has been agreed for 2023/24 of £3.4m. This was based on financial modelling undertaken as part of the annual business planning process and the planning for the new LATC. This included benchmarking, which identified that Sandwell spends more on leisure per capita than neighbouring councils, which is considered to relate to the number of leisure facilities in operation in Sandwell, compared to other councils.

The agreed 2023/24 management fee, whilst lower than the original sum proposed by SLT, is an increase compared to 2022/23 and reflects additional costs relating to the launch of Sandwell Aquatics Centre. The Council's business planning modelled a number of scenarios based on risk and ambition. The £3.4m agreed represented the low-risk scenario, with the medium-risk scenario modelling costs of £2.5m.

We have been advised that SLT is operating marginally under forecast budget in 2023/24, and at the time of this review SLT were agreeing restructure proposals to improve the organisation's commercial experience, alongside ongoing technology and system enhancements, and operational changes, including a review of the leisure estate. To support plans for meeting user number and income targets and improving cash flow.

The Council should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is line with the Council's MTFP assumptions. Furthermore, the Council should ensure that SLT builds on its more commercial approach and sets out a plan for the timeframe when the Trust's financial position requires no subsidy from the Council.

Governance arrangements

There are monthly contract meetings, quarterly finance meetings, and quarterly operational performance meetings between the Council and SLT. The governance framework has been updated:

- Quarterly Leisure Contract Review Board the strategy forum for the services which will agree the strategic development of the service, based on requirements of Cabinet and SLT Board.
- The Quarterly Finance Reconciliation to review the SLT accounts and commentary from the previous quarter, identify any substantial variances to budget and – in partnership with the Monthly Contract Management Meeting – propose corrective action.
- The Quarterly Property / Estates Update to review property and estates issues including compliance works, planned preventative maintenance, significant defects and energy consumption.
- The Monthly Contract Management the principal forum to support the effective and efficient operation of the service.

The Council has continued to improve its contract management of SLT and the interim CEO of SLT has introduced greater rigour in relation to performance management alongside a greater commercial focus.

KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the contract with SLT and to understand the impact of recent industrial action.

Sandwell Aquatics Centre

Following the hosting of the Commonwealth Games during the Summer of 2022, the Council became responsible for adapting the Aquatics Centre before it was due to be transferred to the new LATC when it would become open to public use. This formed part of the Commonwealth Games legacy arrangements

Following the hosting of the Commonwealth Games during the Summer of 2022, the Council became responsible for adapting the Aquatics Centre before it was due to be transferred to the new LATC when it would become open to public use. This formed part of the Commonwealth Games legacy arrangements.

Due to the decision to not proceed with the LATC, the aquatics centre was transferred to SLT. The centre opened to the public on 23 July 2023, a week after the centres in Langley and Smethwick closed, providing users of these centres the opportunity to use the new aquatics centre. The Council are considering plans for the disposal or alternative use of the two former leisure centres.

The aquatics centre, at the time of conducting this review, had 4,600 gym members, more 2,000 learn to swim programme members, and 15,500 weekly attendances, which has exceeded forecast KPIs.

The launch outcome demonstrates effective arrangements being in place for project and transition management and pre-sales and marketing activity.

Whilst the aquatics centre is a community resource, its facilities mean that it can be used for national events, for example it is due to host the British Diving Championships in 2024.

Notwithstanding membership and activity following the launch, the current business plan for the aquatics centre forecasts operational losses for its first ten years of operation, of approximately £1m per annum, with some forecast fluctuations over each of these ten years. **The Council must ensure that SLT sets out a clear and deliverable plan to eliminate this deficit.**

Conclusion and recommendations

The Council has demonstrated that it was able to pause and review a key decision in light of changed circumstances. It demonstrated agility in changing its decision to introduce the LATC by extending its contact with SLT, with value for money being a key driver.

Relationships between the Council and SLT have significantly improved, leading to much greater mutual understanding and respect. These relationships, and the new leadership of SLT provide optimism that leisure services in Sandwell are now on an improved footing, which was reflected in the successful opening of the aquatics centre.

The Council must ensure that the more commercial approach of SLT is further developed and there is a clear plan in place so that SLT requires no subsidy, and that the aquatics centre trading losses are eliminated.

. We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is line with the Council's MTFP assumptions.
- The Council should ensure that SLT builds on its more commercial approach and sets out a plan for the timeframe when the Trust's financial position requires no subsidy from the Council, including a clear and deliverable plan for eliminating operational losses at the aquatics centre.

KLOE A3: Providence Place

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the potential loss to the Council arising from the proposed sale of Providence Place.

Background

The original review considered issues arising from the proposed sale of Providence Place.

In our December 2022 report we concluded that this matter has now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place.

This report identified the following improvement recommendation:

- The Council will need to conclude the finalisation of its asset management strategy and asset management database to better manage its asset portfolio including asset disposals.

KEY FINDINGS

Providence Place has now been disposed of to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities.

The asset management strategy and asset management system are discussed in the Key Recommendations section of this report

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.



KLOE A4: SEND Transport

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the circumstances relating to the recent procurement of SEND Transport and the Council's current approach to concluding the procurement.

Background

The Council's Special Education Needs and Disabilities Passenger Transport (SEND Transport) contract expired at the end of August 2021 and the decision on the new contract award was deferred by the Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 16 June 2021. The contract was retendered, going live on 1 September 2022.

Our December 2022 report concluded that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place, and made the following recommendation:

- The Council must ensure that the lessons learned from the SEND Transport procurement are shared across other council services so that this learning becomes embedded across the organisation.

KEY FINDINGS

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned sessions have been held with Directors and Assistant Directors on the original SEND Transport procurement. These sessions involved key staff from project management, finance, procurement, travel assistance, legal and internal audit teams involved in the initial 2021 and re-run procurement in 2022. In addition lessons learned have been shared with all officers involved in procurement activity, including frequently asked questions.

At the time of our review the Council was preparing for the next SEND Transport procurement, using the governance arrangements put in place for the 2022 procurement and adopting the lessons learned from the 2021 procurement, such as adopting realistic procurement timescales, and has a procurement business partner allocated from the outset, along with a project manager.

Procurement and Contract Management

At the time of our review the Council was reviewing the structures relating to central procurement and contract management resource, as part of the introduction of the Programme Management Office, to replace procurement business partners with category managers, creating a single procurement function to support directorates and a corporate procurement board. A compliance manager is being proposed to monitor procurement activity below £100k which is the responsibility of Directorates. The next SEND Transport procurement has been identified as a pilot for the approach to high value procurements.

Training has been provided to over 170 officers involved in contract management, following the review and updates to the Council's constitution, and contract management procedures and templates are available on the Council's intranet. At the time of our review a new procurement strategy had been drafted by an external consultant pending review by officers, and a review of procurement and commissioning functions was planned as part of the Council's transformation strategy.

Oracle Fusion provides an opportunity for greater standardisation, monitoring, reporting and approval of procurement activity when the procurement module goes live in April 2024. The procurement pipeline is currently maintained on a spreadsheet, and at the time of this review services had been asked to provide details of all planned procurements over the next three years, with the pipeline to be transferred to Oracle Fusion. The pipeline should support the Council's resource prioritisation decisions, to be considered by a new procurement board which is due to be introduced in January 2024.

SEND Transport finances

The SEND Transport budget overpent by £3.836m during 2022/23 and is forecast to overspend by c £2m in 2023/24. This has been explained as a result of demand pressures and complexity of need. [The next SEND Transport procurement should consider how services can be commissioned to manage significant and ongoing budgetary pressures.](#)

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We have made one improvement recommendation:

- The next SEND Transport procurement should consider how services can be commissioned to manage ongoing significant and ongoing budgetary pressures.

KLOE A7: Waste service

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the performance of the waste service, the Council's management of the contract with Serco, and understand the impact of recent industrial relations issues.

Background

The waste and street cleansing contract was awarded to Serco in November 2010 for a period of 25 years.

Our December 2022 report recommended:

- The Council must work with Serco to urgently finalise all associated plans and schedules which remain outstanding.
- The Council should confirm with Serco if there will be changes to the waste and recycling or garden waste collection policies.
- The Council should resolve the delays and formally agree replacement timescales for the waste fleet and the financing of replacement costs and supplier lead in times with SERCO. Clarity should be sought over the use of previous capital payments in relation to the Council's accounts.
- The Council should take steps to demonstrate to Serco how the fleet maintenance service provides value for money.

KEY FINDINGS

Finalising plans

Serco's Service Delivery Plan (SDP) for 2023/24 was approved by the Waste Partnership Board in June 2023. The Council have advised that the quality of the plan was much improved on the prior year and the process was more straightforward, with the approval taking place to timescale. Serco have advised that planning for the 2024/25 SDP has already commenced.

Changes to collection policies

In November 2022 Cabinet agreed to introduce a subscription-based service for garden waste collection. A contract change notice was issued to Serco and the new approach was implemented within 4 months of the decision being made. Approximately 40,000 residents have subscribed, with a cost to each household of £35, which is below the national median for councils charging for this service nationally, generating additional income to the Council of £1.4m. The Council will review increases to this charge as part of each year's budget setting approach and is reviewing payment options for residents.

The Council is working with Serco to change the recycling methodology from co-mingled to dual stream recycling, which reduced processing costs. At the same time the Council has established a working group to consider alternate weekly collections (AWC). Should this decision be taken savings have been forecast to be between £4m and £5.4m.

Vehicle replacement

Serco have managed the fleet replacement in three phases, based on the ages of vehicles. The second phase has been progressed, with 19 new vehicles due to arrive for service by January 2024.

Serco, with the Council's agreement, have paused the third phase of vehicle replacement pending the outcome of the AWC and dual waste decision, which could have an impact on the specification and number of vehicles required.

Approximately 40 of the Serco fleet will be electric vehicles following phase 2 and the Council, using climate change related funding, is installing electric vehicle charging infrastructure into the depot used by Serco.

Serco will be required to return the fleet to the Council following the conclusion of the 25-year contract. The Council's financial modelling for the repayment of the cost of the waste fleet includes assumptions on fleet renewal. The model had not been updated to reflect changes to the timing of the fleet renewal, impacting on the associated accounting treatment. The Council's assumptions have now been updated to reflect the current Serco fleet replacement plans and the accounting issue has been resolved.

Waterfall Lane Workshop

The Council has commissioned a review of its fleet which will include maintenance work undertaken at the Waterfall Lane Workshop, which maintains the Council and Serco vehicles. This was delayed by industrial action, and part of its purpose is to confirm to Serco the value for money of the Council's maintenance of the Serco fleet. The Fleet Vehicle Steering Group with Serco will consider the reviews findings in early 2024. Maintenance charges are impacted by the age of vehicles, and charges should reflect the ongoing cycle of Serco fleet replacement. **The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council.**

KLOE A7: Waste service (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the performance of the waste service, the Council's management of the contract with Serco, and understand the impact of recent industrial relations issues.

Industrial Relations

The Serco workforce are members of three trade unions, and those who were members the GMB union undertook strike action between 5 and 30 June 2023, before Serco reached a pay settlement with their workforce. GMB members represent 46% of the Serco workforce in Sandwell. The impact of the industrial action was as follows:

- From 5 June to 20 June Serco were able to maintain refuse and garden waste collections effectively. Residents experienced delays, with refuse typically running a day behind, but collections were not missed.
- From 20 June Serco were unable to issue vehicles from the Shidas Lane Depot due to a picket blockade, which left at around 1pm each day, leaving most of the crews with only 1-2 hours of their shifts remaining. From 20 June to 28 June only garden waste and targeted clearance of high-rise accumulations were undertaken, and street cleansing was also impacted for the first time.
- Following the police clearance of the blockade on 28 June, collections increased 29 June to 1 July with continued collection of garden waste and communal bins, plus some collection of household refuse.
- Will the full workforce returned, refuse, food and garden waste collections were undertaken 3 July to 7 July including the clearance of the refuse backlog. Recycling and bulky waste collections remained stood-down to allow crews to focus on clearance of the backlog of refuse. The backlog of refuse was largely cleared by 9 July.
- From Monday 10 July a full normal service resumed with all commodities being collected.

Both the Council and Serco have commented on the effectiveness of their joint response to this strike, including emergency response bronze group daily meetings, communications to residents, and liaising with the police so that the picket line was legally compliant. This included working to prioritise high risk areas for collection, such as high-rise flats. Garden waste collection continued through the period of the industrial action.

For most of the strike Serco vehicles were able to access the depot and other sites, but for a ten days the depot was blockaded by union activity. This was deemed aggravated trespass and, whilst challenging for the Council and Serco, was resolved by the police who created a silver tactical command group and applied resources to secure access after the Council had confirmed legal title to the entrance.

The Council, Serco and police undertook a debrief following the conclusion of the strike, to share any lessons learned. **The Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.**

Other Findings

The governance and contract management arrangements reported as part of our 2022 review remain in place, other a decision taken that the Enforcement Liaison Group is no longer required to meet.

The Serco contract for 2022/23 was valued at £31.79m, and this increased by £2.98m for 2023/24 due to inflationary pressures. This increase reduced to £1.09m due to performance penalties imposed on Serco, with the balance of the increase being mitigated by earmarked reserves corporately and at service level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The relationships between the Council and Serco remain on an upward trajectory, with how they jointly responded to the industrial action a recent positive example. The Council has taken steps to work more effectively with Serco on areas such as collection policies, and Serco has demonstrated a more effective approach to the annual service delivery planning process.

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council.
- The Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.

KLOE A8: Governance and Legal Support to the DPH

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's governance and decision-making arrangements relating to the alleged harassment of the Director of Public Health (DPH) by an external blogger, and the governance arrangements relating to the introduction of a local contact tracing service and changes to shielding arrangement during Summer 2020.

Introduction

Our findings relating to this KLOE were uncoupled from our 2021 report and were reported separately in October 2022. This meant KLOE A8 did not form part of our 2022 follow up review.

Unlike the other KLOEs, KLOE A8 had a particular focus on the governance arrangements relating to one director of the Council.

Our improvement recommendations in relation to this KLOE were:

- Should the Council find itself in a similar scenario in the future, it would be prudent to obtain external legal advice on the specific circumstances under consideration, before any final decision on an indemnity is made.
- The Council should make various changes to its management arrangements relating to its social media policy and the arrangements for monitoring and managing social media activity, introduce a policy for working with local MPs, and confirm arrangements relating to media interviews.
- To review the Emergency Plan to ensure that change following the demise of PHE are reflects and ensure all relevant COVID-19 communications from local MPs and DHSC should be promptly forwarded to the DPH should it be evident that the DPH has not received them directly.
- Ensure decisions made to introduce new services, or materially changing existing services, are properly reflected in the minutes of the body responsible for making such decisions.
- Any future lessons learned reviews undertaken by the Council should be undertaken in a collaborative and transparent way with the key stakeholders concerned.
- The Council should review its processes and decision-making arrangements following a change in government guidance or policy to ensure that local updates are made in a timely manner.

KEY FINDINGS

The officer in the role of DPH at the time of our original review left the Council in December 2022. However, our recommendations related to the organisation and did not relate to this specific individual. We set out our findings below on progress made by the Council on these recommendations.

Social Media, Media and Local MPs

The Council's social media policy was reviewed, updated and re-published in August 2023. The policy is now jointly managed by the Council's Communications and HR teams. The revised policy:

- Provides greater clarity and guidance on social media for personal and professional use, including recommend Council employees keep their personal and professional use of social media separate. The policy also advises Council employees not to use their personal social media accounts to share professional advice or opinions.
- Now contains content on cyberbullying, what actions people need to take if they experience this, the support the Council will provide in such circumstances, and signposts to additional external guidance.
- Provides clear expectations for Council employees and councillors on appropriate social media use, in particular in relation to leaking information to outside persons for the purpose of criticising, abusing or professionally undermining officers on social media platforms.
- Is clear that failure to observe the standards of conduct set out in the policy may result in disciplinary action.

The revised policy was communicated to all staff and is available on the Council's intranet. We have been advised there has been one breach of the new policy and that arrangements were in place to identify and manage the incident.

Members use of social media continues to form part of the Members Code of Conduct. The social media policy for members was revised and updated by the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee on 22 March 2022 with minor changes. Social media training has been provided, with 25 members attending training in December 2022.

KLOE A8: Governance and Legal Support to the DPH

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Social Media, Media and Local MPs (Cont'd)

Social Media, Media and Local MPs (Cont'd)

Arrangements in relation to media interviews have been strengthened, with the role of the Council's communications team re-emphasised, which has brought greater control to the Council's management of requests from media for interviews, and the communications team being made aware of all interview requests.

A policy for working with local MPs forms part of the Council's improvement plan, but **has not yet been introduced** and we have been advised forms part of the plans to refresh the Council's overall communications strategy. Council Directors offer briefings to local MPs and interactions with MPs are discussed by the Council's leadership team. Overall, relationships with local MPs are managed by the Council's Chief Executive who has quarterly meetings with MPs. [A protocol for working with MPs was an improvement recommendation in our previous report and the Council should conclude its plans to introduce this protocol, and associated guidance.](#)

Emergency Plan and COVID-19 Communications

The schedule of contacts used by the Local Resilience Forum has been updated to include those relating to the UK Health Security Agency following the demise of Public Health England. The Council's Emergency Plan is due to be updated in 2024 as part of its regular review cycle, and this will include updating the names of government agencies and departments in the Plan.

The DPH role is currently held on an interim basis and the Council is recruiting to a permanent role. The job description for the new permanent DPH has been reviewed and updated to make clear that, whilst the DPH will have a key role within the Council's corporate resilience, emergency planning and business continuity arrangements, and will perform duties allocated to the post in Emergency Plan and Business Continuity Plan or allocated to by the Chief Executive. The expectation of the Chief Executive is the DPH will not have autonomy in their external communications including with local MPs.

Approach to providing legal support to officers

The Council recognises that it has a duty of care for its staff, including where they may be subject to harassment via social media or cyberbullying. The Council has advised that they have considered potential cases since our last review and, whilst the officers concerned did not request legal support, the Monitoring Officer judged that the threshold for defamation was not met. The Monitoring Officer will continue this role, where other incidents occur.

Governance relating to new or changed services

The Council has advised us that the scenario identified in our previous report has not occurred again. At the time of our review business planning workshops were taking place and we have been advised that these will consider responsibilities for ensuring that decisions relating to new or materially changed services are properly reflected in the minutes of the body responsible for making such decisions.

Lessons learned reviews

The Council has advised us that no lessons learned reviews have been undertaken that are of a similar nature to the one considered in our previous report, but should this be the case the Chief Executive will ensure that it will be undertaken in a collaborative and transparent way with the key stakeholders concerned.

More generally, the Council has introduced a lessons learnt template as part of its service and business planning process. This has been designed as a tool that can help to document the knowledge obtained from a piece of work or project. The template includes guidance on when lessons learnt reviews should be undertaken, and how lessons can be learnt and shared.

Changes in government policy

The Council has advised us that the scrutiny of decision making, and the decision-making thresholds in place, should ensure that any future changes in government policy or government guidance in the context of emergency or major incident response, will ensure that local updates are made in a timely manner. The Council has also confirmed that appropriate processes are in place in relation to business continuity planning, emergency planning, and working with the Local Resilience Forum.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should conclude its plans to introduce a policy for working with local MPs and associated guidance.

KLOE A10: Introduction of new ERP System

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the introduction of Oracle Fusion and understanding implementation delays and their impact.

Background

The Council is replacing its main Enterprise and Resource Planning (ERP) system. The current ERP is Oracle E-Business Suite (EBS) which is being replaced by Oracle Fusion. There have been significant delays to the implementation and go live date for the introduction of the new system.

Our December 2022 report recommended:

- The Council must ensure that all expected benefits are defined, and that governance arrangements, including assigning accountabilities, are in place to ensure benefits are realised.
- The Council must ensure that the central transformation team is appropriately resourced and integrates all transformation and change activity being undertaken across the Council.
- The Council must ensure that the ERP System implementation programme becomes aligned to other improvement and change initiatives being undertaken or planned by the Council, so that synergies and economies in delivery can be identified and duplication removed.

KEY FINDINGS

System Implementation

We have undertaken a separate high-level review of Oracle Fusion implementation as part of our 2022/23 VfM work. This scope of this review included data migration, go live planning, security, training, system and user acceptance testing, business readiness and governance structures budgets and resource plans. The findings from this work will be reported separately, and are summarised here.

The Council has continued to pay careful attention to the Oracle Fusion implementation, undertaking revisions to timescales and resources where required. Specialist external resources have been scaled up during the year to fill identified roles alongside ring fencing Council staff to assist with implementation tasks.

Due to delays in finalising the design specifications of HR and payroll the Oracle Fusion Steering Committee has taken the decision to split the programme into two phases in order to ensure there is sufficient time to perform the build and system testing stages:

The two phases comprise:

- Phase 1 includes finance, procurement and core HR functionality to support finance processes. This is due to go live from April 2024.
- Phase 2 includes payroll, HR, expenses, absence, time and labour modules. This is due to go live by the end of June 2024.

The phased approach will lead to increased costs due to the additional resources required to deliver phase 2 and these need to be accurately reflected in the project budget and monitored. However, the phased approach increases the likelihood of the Council successfully implementing phase 1 by April 2024 and priority should be focussed on delivering this phase to avoid further delays.

The Council has introduced a more robust and appropriate governance arrangements which has provided improved connections between the Programme Board, process workstreams and cross-cutting groups such as data migration. The Steering Board receives fortnightly reports on workstream progress, risks and issues to actively challenge the Council's implementation partner, project management and workstream leads.

This separate review has made a number of recommendations:

- The Council needs to extend the licences and associated support for both Oracle EBS and Fusion as they are due to expire in April 2024 and October 2024 respectively. The timing of extensions needs to be based on accurate user forecasts. Future cost savings could be made if a rebalancing clause is introduced into the Oracle contract.
- The Council currently has no capability to manage user roles and identify segregation of duty breaches. The Council should acquire a risk and compliance tool to monitor the appropriateness of security privileges rather than the current use of spreadsheets. A review to identify segregation of duty conflicts should be factored into the overall project timescale. Oracle Risk Cloud or a similar monitoring tool should be implemented before the go live date
- The Steering Committee should challenge any change that affects the overall cost, resources and timelines for phase 1 go live.
- The Steering Committee should continue to evaluate the progress of designing and testing custom reports across each functional areas to ensure progress remains on track.

KLOE A10: Introduction of new ERP System (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the introduction of Oracle Fusion and understanding implementation delays and their impact.

System Implementation support (Cont'd)

- The Council should review the mix of training sessions to be delivered to ensure that key user and professional user training is not over reliant on the user performing their own learning through on-line modules and self-study. The timing of the training should be brought forward to allow sufficient time before go live.
- While efforts are being made to meet the phased go live dates, the programme needs to outline the contingency plans in the event further slippage occurs. It is critical that the Steering Committee monitors missed milestones and challenge the likelihood of recovery time.

Given high the high-profile issues experienced by other councils, such as Birmingham City Council, in relation to their Oracle Fusion implementation, the Council must ensure that it responds effectively to these recommendations set out in our separate Oracle implementation report.

Oracle Fusion Benefits

Strategic objectives have been agreed and initial work has been undertaken to define high level benefit targets, which have been reported to the Programme Board. Benefits were reviewed and updated at the end of the design stage to ensure they were measurable. Change and learning and development leads continue to work with working group leads and service users to finalise the planned non-financial benefits.

Financial benefits are being defined separately via a Heads of Service working group. At the time of our review initial assumptions had been made on the key changes that will trigger financial benefits. Whilst the Council's base budget assumes £250k of savings resulting from the implementation of Oracle Fusion, further work is required to fully define financial benefits and incorporate them in the Council's MTFP. The Council plans to conclude this for phase 1 by the end of January 2024, and for phase 2 by the end of March 2024.

The Council's investment in Oracle Fusion provides a significant opportunity to transform organisational design, streamline business processes, remove duplication, improve productivity and generate efficiencies and savings. Oracle implementation must be used to realise clearly financial and non-financial benefits and it remains critical for the Council to conclude its work in defining these, and that those selected are measurable and can be effectively tracked.

Alignment with Corporate Transformation

Key officers on the Oracle Programme Board also sit on the Council's Transformation Board, with both boards considering interdependencies between their respective areas of responsibility. As already discussed, the Council is introducing a new project management system which plans to take account of the changes that will take place as a result of implementing Oracle Fusion.

At the time of our review the Council was considering new governance arrangements to ensure that all ICT investments have more effective corporate oversight, with the introduction of an ICT approval panel. This should also ensure a better alignment between ICT investments and the Council's transformation activity.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Council has continued to pay careful attention to the Oracle Fusion implementation, undertaking revisions to timescales and resources where required. Specialist external resources have been scaled up during the year to fill identified roles alongside ring-fencing Council staff to assist with implementation tasks.

However, there have been further delays and associated increased costs resulting in the decision to phase the go live dates.

The risks associated with poor and ineffective implementation remain significant. The Council must ensure that:

- It responds effectively to the recommendations set out in our separate Oracle Fusion implementation report before the go live date.
- Work on defining financial and non-financial benefits, and that benefits identified and agreed are measurable, and can be effectively tracked and the transformational opportunities of the new system are fully realised.

KLOE B2: Senior leadership

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Background

Our original review considered the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Our December 2022 report concluded that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

This report further noted that the success of the appointment of the new permanent Chief Executive remains critical for the Council if it is to successfully continue on its improvement journey.

KEY FINDINGS

Senior Management Restructure

The new Chief Executive started in role in January 2023, and following a review of the Council's senior leadership, which was supported by West Midlands Employers, proposed a restructuring of senior management, which was approved by the Chief Officers Terms and Conditions Committee on 11 October 2023, and approved unanimously by full Council on 24 October 2023. The proposals will:

- Reduce the number of Director posts from eight to three with the creation of three new Executive Director posts: for People, Place, and Finance and Transformation.
- Designate the post of Assistant Director (Law and Governance) as the Council's Monitoring Officer and Deputy Electoral Registration Officer (both currently held by the post of Director of Law and Governance) with this new role reporting to the new post of Executive Director of Finance and Transformation.
- Designate the new post of Executive Director of Finance and Transformation as the Section 151 Officer, and Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO).

The posts of Director of Public Health, Director of Children and Education and Director of Adult Social Care will retain their statutory designation.

The five Director roles to be deleted are Finance, Housing, Law and Governance, Borough Economy, and Regeneration and Growth.

The rationale for the restructure is positive, which includes bringing in strategic leadership capacity, reducing the number of Directorates and delayering the number of Director roles to reduce silos and hierarchies, improve joint working and decision making across service lines to accelerate the pace of the implementation of the Council's improvement plan.

At the time of our review the consultation process with officers affected by the restructure had concluded, and the Council was advertising the new Executive Director roles. Appointments of the new Executive Directors are expected to be made in early February 2024. There are expectations that, following the embedding of the planned senior leadership changes, the new Executive Directors will review the management layers in their directorates.

Two of the five Directors (Finance and Housing) impacted by the change had already left the Council with interims currently in these roles, with the other three either being made redundant or having an opportunity to apply for an alternate role. The changes now in train will undoubtedly lead to a period of uncertainty and instability for the Council, and could impact over the short-term on the pace of change.

We have been advised that the officer taking over the Council's Monitoring Officer role will be invited to attend meetings of the Senior Management Team and fortnightly statutory officer meetings will be introduced, comprising the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer, along with the Assistant Chief Executive. **The Chief Executive should ensure that the Monitoring Officer continues to be a standing member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a permanent basis.**

KLOE B2: Senior leadership

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Senior Management Restructure (cont'd)

The table below summarises the senior management arrangements in place at the time of our previous review, compared to the time of our current review, and in advance of the conclusion of the senior management restructure. Whilst the Council now has a permanent Chief Executive in role, and has a new Assistant Chief Executive, the table highlights changes that have taken place during 2023 to wider senior management roles, resulting in an increase in interim roles during the period the restructure is taking place.

Role	As at Nov 2022		As at Nov 2023		Comments
	Permanent / Interim	Leaving Date	Start Date	Permanent / Interim	
Managing Director / Chief Executive	Interim	Still Lead Commissioner	06/02/2023	Permanent	
Assistant Chief Executive	n/a	n/a	25/09/2023	Permanent	New role created in April 2023
Director - Adult Social Care	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	
Director - Public Health	Permanent	28/02/2023	01/03/2023	Interim	
Director - Law & Governance / Monitoring Officer	Permanent	31/12/2023	n/a	n/a	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Finance	Permanent	31/08/2023	11/09/2023	Interim	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Deputy Director of Finance	Permanent	15/09/2023	18/09/2023	Interim	Officer acting up and additional support from interim.
Director - Business Strategy and Change	Permanent	24/01/2023	n/a	n/a	Assistant CEX role created to take on some of the responsibilities of this director post; Transformation and ICT remain with Director - Finance
Director - Housing	Permanent	06/09/2023	07/09/2023	Interim	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Borough Economy	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Regeneration & Growth	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Children's Services	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	
Assistant Director - Legal & Assurance, Deputy Monitoring Officer	Permanent	n/a	25/09/2023	Permanent	Acting Up as Monitoring Officer

KLOE B2: Senior leadership

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Senior Management Restructure (cont'd)

The introduction of new senior officers not previously in roles at the Council, including those in interim roles, can be helpful by introducing new perspectives. Senior stakeholders commented during our review on the positive impacts of the new appointments, in particular the new Chief Executive, and the improvements introduced by those new to role. This has included identifying and introducing improvements to procurement arrangements in housing services, and a more effective engagement of members in the financial planning process.

Nonetheless, the changes to senior management, including the introduction of interim Directors, is a prelude of the instability and uncertainty resulting from the significant changes planned by the senior management restructure. The Council will need to manage the risk of change fatigue and resistance, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

The success of the appointment of the new Executive Directors and the Council's ability to manage this period of change and uncertainty will be critical for the Council if it is to successfully continue on its improvement journey.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council will need to manage the risk of change fatigue, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure (key recommendation).
- The Chief Executive should ensure that the Monitoring Officer continues to be a standing member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a permanent basis. (Improvement recommendation)



KLOE B4a: Officer and member relationships

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider whether relationships between senior officers and senior members are appropriate in supporting good governance.

Page 7

Background

Our original review considered the relationships between senior officers and senior members and whether they were appropriate in supporting good governance.

Our December 2022 report made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should consider creating a “golden thread” throughout the organisation, linking the Corporate Plan and other Plan objectives, through to the objectives set for each individual member of staff, as part of the Council’s annual performance appraisal process.
- The Council’s Leadership Team must agree medium-term financial objectives and principles to provide a framework for financial planning discussions and ensure that there is a whole organization view of the scale of the financial challenges facing the Council in the medium term and how these are going to be addressed.
- The Council should ensure that capacity is in place to resolve KPI data gaps.
- The Council needs to build on the progress being made on member development and conclude the 2022/23 programme including the review of member PDPs and take further steps to finalise arrangements on succession planning for members in SRA roles.
- It remains important for the Council to utilise financial benchmarking tools and data to support the service and financial planning process, in particular to help identify opportunities for efficiencies, savings and service improvements.

KEY FINDINGS

Due to the nature of the recommendations arising from our 2022 review we have structured the key findings from our follow up review as follows:

- KLOE 4a: Member and officer relationships
- KLOE Bb: Performance management and other matters

Member and officer relationships

The LGA’s corporate peer challenge progress review, undertaken in October 2022, and reported to Cabinet on 7 December 2022 found:

- Much greater stability can now be seen in the council, both politically and managerially.

- The Leader received glowing endorsements during LGA discussions with stakeholders both internally and externally. People particularly highlighted her inclusive and supportive approach. She is seen to be a Leader for Sandwell who is engaged in all the right places – internally, locally, sub-regionally and nationally.
- Cabinet and Leadership Team are working increasingly well at both a bilateral and collective level. At the heart of this sits a ‘no surprises’ principle. Cabinet members outlined to us that they now feel much better appraised of emerging issues and senior officers indicated a greater confidence in drawing elected members’ attention to challenging issues.
- Cabinet is forming well and demonstrated a strong sense of ‘team’, appropriately balancing the respecting of individuals’ areas of responsibility with ensuring collective understanding, responsibility and decision-making.
- The managerial Leadership Team has settled following its’ completion but now has to become central to a ‘One Council, One Team’ approach and driving key organisational-wide agendas. These include improving customer service and establishing the desired organisational culture.
- External partners within the sub-region are seeing the council now being much better engaged.

During our review senior stakeholders echoed these LGA findings, including advising that they experience a much greater level of stability in relationships, with a focus of political discussions on the present and future rather than on past issues.

The Council continues to proactively engage in regional bodies, such as the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) including being a member of the WMCA Race and Equalities Task Force and the Council Leader is the WMCA lead for community cohesion.

The new Chief Executive has invested significant time in developing relationships with the Cabinet and wider members, and has a mantra for the organisation that the Council is member-led, officer-driven and customer-focussed. The weekly joint leadership meeting between the Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team is considered to be working effectively. Senior members have gained experience in their roles, have a clear sense of their priorities, have gained confidence in how to appropriately challenge officers, and a healthy respect is emerging between senior officers and members, with officers respecting manifesto priorities. These improvements will need to be sustained.

KLOE B4a: Officer and member relationships (cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider whether relationships between senior officers and senior members are appropriate in supporting good governance.

Member and officer relationships (cont'd)

The Cabinet has demonstrated its ability to take tough decisions, such as the introduction of charging for garden waste (see KLOE A7) and on the Brandhall site decision (which is discussed below).

There had been a low response rate to the member-officer relationship survey launched in April 2023. A wide range of channels was used to communicate survey to members, however, the low response has explained as being due to the timing of the survey, which was during the pre-May election period.

There continues to be a mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees. *This maturity of relationships will need to continue, with further difficult decisions inevitably being required, and this approach must be sustained following future changes to those in senior officer or senior member roles.*

Brandhall Scrutiny Call In

The Cabinet at their meeting on 20th July 2022 approved plans for the building of a primary school, 190 homes and a public park on the site of the former Brandhall Golf Course. This decision was subject to a call-in notification, in line with the Local Government Act 2000, which was considered by the Budget and Corporate Management Scrutiny Board on 8 August 2022. Cabinet considered the Scrutiny Board's recommendation at its meeting on 17 August 2022, which resulted in officers being requested to update their report which led to the original decision. A further report and associated options were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 November 2022. Cabinet was required to consider amending the original decision, or not, before adopting a final decision. Cabinet agreed to implement their decision as determined on 20 July 2022. Call-in powers provide a mechanism for councillors to intervene when they feel that a decision being made by the executive needs to be revisited (or possibly changed). It provides a key check and balance in the leader and cabinet system of governance. Whilst this power should not be one used as part of the day-to-day approach to scrutiny, the Council had not had an effective track record of using scrutiny call in powers at the time of our original 2021 review.

The Brandall golf course site provides a recent example of the Council effectively managing this key scrutiny mechanism. This also provides an example of Cabinet being able to take difficult decisions. More generally, we have been advised that the Council's scrutiny function now has a greater involvement in pre-decision scrutiny.

Member development and behaviour

Following the May 2023 local elections, approximately a third (21) of members were new to the Council, and all have been offered participation in the induction programme. The member development programme has continued during 2023 and is regarded as being far more comprehensive and effective than prior member training programmes, which is reflected in the results of a member survey, with 98% of respondents stating the effectiveness of the training had been good or very good. Training has been provided on the code of conduct, decision making and Council procedure rules, public speaking skills and overview and scrutiny. The programme included a showcase day with senior officers, providing training on the code of conduct, scrutiny, licencing, planning, finance and equalities and diversity.

There is no evidence of factional infighting within political groups, and those who were not re-elected in May 2023 have not subsequently made their presence felt on the affairs of the Council. Key stakeholders described the Council as having moved to a more "normal" state of politics that would be expected in local government. Member behaviours continue on a positive trajectory, and there is evidence of zero tolerance of bad behaviours being effectively enforced.

Consideration is now being given to succession planning for members in senior roles, such as the introduction of a second (non-statutory) deputy leader, and ensuring they have had appropriate training, including shadowing opportunities. The Leader is exploring a skills audit to inform those with Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) roles. A shadow Cabinet, comprising members of the opposition, is being introduced that will shadow the portfolios of the Cabinet, and provide an additional level of scrutiny and challenge, with a protocol developed to set out clear expectations on how this arrangement will work. Cabinet has introduced a fortnightly drop-in session for other members to attend. These are all positive steps being taken and demonstrate an increasing maturity of the Council's political leadership. *Whilst pathways are being put in place for succession planning, further work is required to conclude these plans, including the provision of appropriate training and development so that these changes become fully embedded.*

KLOE B4b: Performance management and other matters

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider whether relationships between senior officers and senior members are appropriate in supporting good governance.

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Member Development and Behaviour (Cont'd)

Personal Development Plans (PDPs) were due to be created for all members to ensure their development is bespoke to their individual needs. Some progress has been made, but take up has been lower than anticipated (at c 30%) with member capacity considered the primary reason for this. **The Council should conclude the member PDP roll out, and in particular ensure these are in place for members who are in positions of special responsibility or are aspiring to hold such roles**

Financial benchmarking

Financial benchmarking has been used to support the 2024/25 budget setting process, including the use of LGA Inform as part of the Cabinet and Leadership Team away days, and there is evidence of an increased appetite from Cabinet, services and directorates to access and use financial benchmarking to better inform decision making, alongside recognition of the learning opportunities from other councils.

This is a positive direction of travel, and the Council should continue to champion, invest in and utilise financial benchmarking in its service and business planning.

Performance Management and KPIs

The Performance Management Framework has been discussed in the Key Recommendations section of this report, which set out progress being made.

The Council is considering investment in a performance management system, to move away from the current spreadsheet-based approach, and improve recording and reporting of performance. **The Council should develop a business case for a performance management system, to appropriately consider this investment.**

Medium term financial planning

This has been discussed in the Key Recommendations section of the report.

KLOE 4 Overall conclusions and recommendations

The Cabinet and Leadership Team are continuing to work well both collectively and via their individual Director and Portfolio Lead roles. There continues to be a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees.

The Leadership Team has continued to demonstrate a corporate approach to managing key issues and challenges but on medium-term financial planning and transformation there still remains work to do. The Cabinet is increasingly demonstrating its ability to take hard decisions, and will need to continue to do this, given financial and other challenges ahead.

Whilst positive progress continues to be made, the Council remains on an improvement journey, and we have identified the following improvement recommendations:

- This maturity of senior officer and member relationships will need to continue, with further difficult decisions inevitably being required, and this approach to must be sustained following future changes to those in senior officer or senior member roles
- Whilst pathways are being put in place for succession planning, further work is required to conclude these plans, including the provision of appropriate training and development so that these changes become fully embedded.
- The Council should conclude the member PDP roll out, and in particular ensure these are in place for members who are in positions of special responsibility or are aspiring to hold such roles.
- The Council should develop a business case for a performance management system, to appropriately consider this investment.

KLOE B5: Standards Committee

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the appropriateness of the work undertaken by the Standards Committee.

Background

Our original review considered the appropriateness of the work undertaken by the Ethical Standards and Development Committee. Our December 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We recommended that the Council must ensure that the new arrangements now in place are used effectively to monitor and take prompt action whenever inappropriate behaviour is identified.

KEY FINDINGS

Complaints

At the Standards Committee meeting on 24 October 2023 eight complaints were reported. Seven were complaints from members of the public and one was anonymous. Of these, six were determined as no breach of the Code of Conduct or the complaint did not relate to the Code, one was withdrawn and one was still being reviewed. One of the eight related to a breach of the Code that related to not declaring an interest, which was resolved locally and resulted in training for the relevant councillor.

The Standards Committee has not had to convene its sub-committee to consider standards of member behaviour, and it is notable that the complaints have not been received from officers or members. This indicates an ongoing improvement in member-to-member and member-to-officer relationships. The current level of complaints does not indicate any underlying issues that need to be resolved.

Other Findings

The Member Code of Conduct is reviewed annually and the next review is due by the end of the 2023/24 municipal year. We have been advised that other councils (Telford and Nottingham) have adopted/adapted the Council's Code, which reflects positively on the Council's approach.

The member development programme continues with a review and lessons learned being incorporated from the previous programme, and the LGA Mentoring Programme for members is ongoing.

The Standards Committee oversees the member development programme, member induction programme and code of conduct issues. It has an established work programme that also includes gifts and hospitality, member DBS checks and member personal safety.

The Chair of the Committee remains committed to a process of continuous improvement and has demonstrated positive commitment to their role and ensuring the effective operation of the workings of the committee.

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

KLOE B6: Audit Committee

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the actions undertaken by the Audit Committee during 2021 in relation to the review into the Wragge report.

Background

Our original review considered the long-standing issues relating to the Wragge and Cox reports.

Our December 2022 report concluded that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks

The report noted that a final decision needs to be made by the Leader before this matter can be considered formally closed.

KEY FINDINGS

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, at its meeting on 5 June 2023 considered a letter from the Leader to the Committee Chair (dated 23 March 2023) setting out a response to the Committee's resolution made at its meeting of 17 March 2022.

The Leader's letter included decisions taken to improve the Council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and associated culture change. This has included establishing an Equality Commission and a new Equalities Team, approval of a new Equality Policy, adoption of the LGA Equality Framework, the implementation of a new EDI Strategy, updated guidance on equality impact assessments and the delivery of various EDI events and initiatives to raise EDI awareness and celebrate the Council's and community's diversity.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has agreed that this matter is now formally closed.

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.



KLOE B7: Financial reporting

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's response to recommendations raised in our 2019/20 audit findings report.

Background

Our original review considered the Council's responses to recommendations raised in our 2019/20 Audit Findings Report (AFR) and further issues identified by our governance review.

Our December 2022 report recommended:

- The Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements require significant improvement. We note that there are a number of legacy issues from prior years that are undermining the quality of the financial statements. We consider that this needs to be an area of priority for the Council. Until these matters are resolved there will remain some uncertainty over the Council's financial position
- The Council must successfully implement the new corporate asset management system, to timescale, ensure all key finance roles have permanent appointments, and prioritise the training and development of the Finance Team so that the role and behaviour changes planned become embedded.

KEY FINDINGS

CIPFA Financial Management Reviews

During 2021 CIPFA undertook a review of the Council's financial management performance, using the CIPFA Five Star FM Model. This model considered various aspects of financial management such as delivering accountability, supporting performance and enabling transformation. These were then rated across a number of management dimensions (leadership, people, process and stakeholders). CIPFA provide an overall star rating between one and five, with five being the highest. The original review, which reported in January 2022, gave an overall rating of 2 for the Council and the Council incorporated CIPFA's recommendations into the Council's Improvement Plan when this was developed later that year.

The Council asked CIPFA to undertake a follow up review, to consider progress against the recommendations made in their initial review. This was reported in December 2022, and CIPFA noted improvement in most areas, with the overall rating increased to 3. Positive progress included that finance is seen as a key function and priority, an improved MTFs and budgetary processes, and greater coherence on a programme for financial reform.

CIPFA also noted areas for improvement including the need for:

- Greater leadership depth in finance
- Strong and robust savings plans.
- Greater stability in finance staff, less reliance on interims, and protection of corporate knowledge
- Improved financial acumen across the wider Council and wider training be provided
- Cross-authority alignment of risk
- Oracle Fusion to drive streamlining of process.
- An improved ability to provide information in a timely and satisfactory manner to external auditors.

The Council has incorporated the recommendations from CIPFA's follow up review into the Improvement Plan. **The Council should ensure that these CIPFA recommendations are fully implemented.**

Financial statements

Our most recent Audit Findings Report, from August 2023, provided an update on the 2020/21 accounts, and the resolution of material errors and other accounting issues that had contributed to the delay in the opinion on these accounts. The 2020/21 accounts were signed off on 31 August 2023.

There remain significant delays in the Council providing appropriate draft accounts for the periods 2021/22 and 2022/23 and there is significant risk that, should the Government confirm 31 March 2024 as the backstop deadline for opinions to be signed for all backlog accounts up to and including 2022/23, that Grant Thornton will need to issue qualified or disclaimed opinions for one or both these years.

Whilst an interim financial accountant is now in role to support the accounts process, we have still not seen evidence of improvement in the overall capacity and capability of the Council's finance team in relation to the production of draft accounts.

KLOE B7: Financial reporting (cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's response to recommendations raised in our 2019/20 audit findings report.

Financial Statements (cont'd)

Whilst we note that further actions have been taken over the past twelve months to address our concerns, and the finance team have most recently been prioritising their focus on the 2024/25 budget, the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still require significant improvement. As at 6 December 2023 we had not been provided with the draft financial statements or working papers for the 2021/22 financial statements. This remains an area of priority for the Council, including managing the recruitment challenges that have been experienced. Until these matters are resolved there will remain some uncertainty over the Council's financial position. The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production. If the 2021/22 accounts are not made available for audit by 31 December 2023, or are of poor quality we will need to consider the further use of our statutory powers.

Financial systems and finance team

The Director of Finance left the Council in September 2023 and has been replaced by an interim whilst the recruitment of a permanent replacement takes place. The Deputy S151 Officer also left the Council in September 2023.

Whilst the former Director of Finance advised us that their restructure of the finance team was concluded, as noted above, we have still not seen an improvement on the Council's production of its financial statements. In general, we note that there still appear to be a large number of interims in the finance team, including the current S151 officer. This reduces the overall effectiveness and corporate memory of the finance team and should be resolved at the earliest opportunity.

The Interim Director of Finance is considering the structure and resourcing of the finance department, and as part of this they should review finance team capacity, capability and training needs to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation, including implementing the recommendations of the CIPFA follow up Financial Management review.

As already discussed in the section of this report on KLOE A3, a new asset management system (Techforge) is being implemented with phase 1 to go live in December 2023 and will be used alongside Oracle Fusion when this is in place.

Phase 2 of the asset management system implementation includes consideration of modules relating to capital accounting, and a fixed asset register, to support accounts production. An initial meeting is due to place in January 2024 to agree workstreams, leads and timescales for this phase.

The Council must ensure a successful implementation of phase 2 of the new asset management system, including effective alignment with Oracle Fusion, so that the benefits planned to support accounts production are realised.

Oracle Fusion provides an opportunity for the Council to improve its arrangements for budget monitoring, rationalising the structure of its chart of accounts to align to the planned new directorate structure, creating a more effective monitoring of planned savings, and having a "single version of the truth" on the Council's financial position.

We have set out improvement recommendations in relation to Oracle Fusion in section KLOE A10 of this report.

Conclusions and recommendations

The CIPFA follow up Financial Management review identified improvement across various areas of financial management, but significant progress remains for the finance team to become fully effective. In particular, the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still requires significant improvement.

We have made the following recommendations:

- The Council should ensure that all recommendations from CIPFA's follow up review are fully implemented.
- The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production.
- The Interim Director of Finance should review finance team capacity, capability and training needs to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation.
- The Council must ensure a successful implementation of phase 2 of the new asset management system, including effective alignment with Oracle Fusion, so that the benefits planned to support accounts production are realised.

KLOE B8: Engagement with residents and community stakeholders

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider how the Council engages with residents and community stakeholders.

Background

Whilst not a key line of enquiry for our original 2021 review we agreed with the Council's management as part of our 2022 review to consider how the Council engages with residents and community groups to supplement our understanding of the Council's improvement journey.

Our December 2022 report concluded that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

The report made the following recommendation:

- The Council needs to ensure that it continues to engage with residents and that this engagement supports greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

Resident engagement

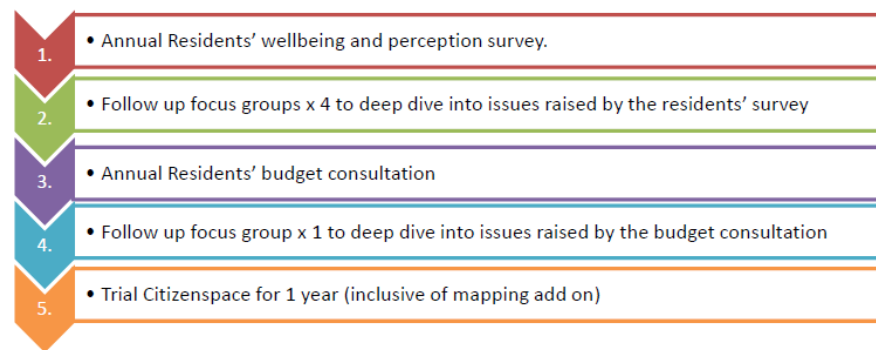
The Council undertook its first residents' survey in 1988 but had only occasionally repeated this exercise, the last time being in 2017 to support development of Vision 2030. Regular consultation on budgetary plans had not been conducted with residents since 2010 although annual consultation is carried out with non-domestic rate payers. Such major surveys are a critical element of an effective performance management framework and when undertaken regularly provide vital trend information.

Recognising the benefits of resident engagement during 2022 the Council commissioned Enventure, a market research agency, to conduct a borough-wide residents' survey to support evidence-based policy, service delivery and performance management, and also a separate budget consultation exercise. The Leadership Team at its meeting of 22 November 2022 considered the findings and felt that the results of the residents survey and budget consultation had a constructive impact on the Council.

The Leadership Team recognised that positive feedback boosted staff morale, and provided learning opportunities and a direction of how the Council could improve. The findings from both exercises provided a foundation of 2023/24 business planning.

The Leadership Team committed to building on this approach and approved proposals for a corporate approach to consultation and engagement.

The Council established a corporate consultation and engagement working group with cross directorate representation to develop a council-wide approach to resident consultation and engagement. This group mapped existing customer research, intelligence and engagement from across the Council and undertook research into best practice from other councils. The following framework was developed and approved by the Leadership Team:



Citizen Space has been introduced to the Council's website, a new consultation hub where residents can subscribe to news on Council consultations and other engagement activity, and a section called "we asked, you said, we did" which provides updates on the outcomes of how consultation and engagement activity informed Council decisions.

Between April and September 2023 2,628 individual survey responses were completed, across 47 surveys relating to nine directorates. The highest responses were from residents on the areas that have universal impact, such as traffic enforcement, litter and safety. The Council is starting to use the Citizen Space to collect feedback on customer satisfaction, and the Council is using the data to consider how services can be improved.

The Council produced a State of the Borough report in August 2023, as part of the wider discussions and consultation to refresh Vision 2030 (which was produced in 2017). This included insights from the most recent budget consultation and children and young people SHAPE survey.

KLOE B8: Engagement with residents and community stakeholders

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider how the Council engages with residents and community stakeholders.

Resident engagement (cont'd)

The Council commissioned MEL Research to undertake a Resident Wellbeing and Perception Survey during Autumn 2023. The key findings were:

- Overall satisfaction with the Council was 65%, with 19% being dissatisfied. The Local Government Association (LGA) benchmark is 60% satisfaction, so the Council was performing above this national benchmark. In 2022, resident satisfaction was 66%, so there has been a slight decline over the last year.
- 67% of respondents to the survey said that they trust the Council. The LGA national benchmark as 56%. There was no change to the 2022 survey which also resulted in the level of trust in the council being 67%.

The Council now recognises the importance of regular resident engagement, has introduced a framework and other arrangements that demonstrates its commitment, and is using the findings to support greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.

Wider community engagement

The Council has held two cost of living summits with key public sector partners, business ambassadors, and representatives from faith and community groups, to discuss how people of Sandwell can be supported. This is an example of the Council now taking a lead locally on national issues affecting their communities and partners.

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

The Council should continue to build on the progress that has been made in engaging with residents so that it continues to support greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.



Appendices

Appendix A: The scope of the auditor's work on value for money arrangements

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Revised approach to value for money work for 2020/21 onwards

- On 1 April 2020, the National Audit Office introduced a new Code of Audit Practice which comes into effect from audit year 2020/21. The Code introduced a revised approach to the audit of value for money.
- There are three main changes arising from the NAO's new approach:
 - A new set of key criteria, covering financial sustainability, governance and improvements in economy, efficiency and effectiveness
 - More extensive reporting, with a requirement on the auditor to produce a commentary on arrangements across all of the key criteria
 - Auditors undertaking sufficient analysis on the local authority's value for money arrangements to arrive at far more sophisticated judgements on performance, as well as key recommendations on any significant weaknesses in arrangements identified during the audit.
- The Code requires auditors to consider whether the body has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under the three specified reporting criteria.



Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Arrangements for improving the way the body delivers its services. This includes arrangements for understanding costs and delivering efficiencies and improving outcomes for service users.



Financial Sustainability

Arrangements for ensuring the body can continue to deliver services. This includes planning resources to ensure adequate finances and maintain sustainable levels of spending over the medium term (3-5 years)



Governance

Arrangements for ensuring that the body makes appropriate decisions in the right way. This includes arrangements for budget setting and management, risk management, and ensuring the body makes decisions based on appropriate information

Potential types of recommendations

A range of different recommendations could be made following the completion of work on the body's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, which are as follows:



Statutory recommendation

Written recommendations to the body under Section 24 (Schedule 7) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. A recommendation under schedule 7 requires the body to discuss and respond publicly to the report.



Key recommendation

The Code of Audit Practice requires that where auditors identify significant weaknesses in arrangements to secure value for money they should make recommendations setting out the actions that should be taken by the body. We have defined these recommendations as 'key recommendations'.



Improvement recommendation

These recommendations, if implemented should improve the arrangements in place at the body, but are not made as a result of identifying significant weaknesses in the body's arrangements

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations

This summarises our improvement recommendations relating to our 2022 key recommendations.

Improvement recommendations		Page #
	Improvement Plan	
1	The Council has not yet concluded introducing a “golden thread” that aligns corporate plans to individual’s annual performance reviews, and this approach should be progressed to include the behaviours set out in the One Team Framework, so that expected values and behaviours can be monitored and measured.	17
	Medium-Term Financial Planning	
2	The senior leadership team should make time to agree clear objectives for financial planning, and the financial, organisational and behavioural actions required to achieve these objectives.	18
	Corporate Transformation	
3	As part of the new transformation arrangements the Council should ensure there is corporate oversight of the use of external consultants, including how such commissions align to the Council’s transformation strategy.	19
	Commercial Strategy	
4	The Council should consider developing an agreed definition of commercial as a way of revitalising the progress of the commercial strategy. Once the strategy has been adopted it will need to align the Council’s transformation strategy and MTFP assumptions.	19
	Customer Journey	
5	The Council should consider enhancing customer journey metrics to measure its performance through full customer journeys including the customer experience and satisfaction.	20
	Asset Management Strategy and Database	
6	Ensure that appropriate decisions are taken on proposed asset disposals to ensure the savings targets are realised.	21

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations (cont'd)

This appendix summarises our improvement recommendations by KLOE.

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	Improvement recommendations	Page #
	KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust	
7	Greater emphasis is required by the Council and SCT on progressing area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership.	24
8	The Council should continue to monitor the vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates.	24
9	Realising the planned Invest to Save savings will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget and the invest to save payments being repaid to the Council.	24
	KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust	
10	The Council should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is in line with the Council's MTFP assumptions.	27
11	The Council should ensure that SLT builds on its more commercial approach and sets out a plan for the timeframe when the Trust's financial position requires no subsidy from the Council, including a clear and deliverable plan for eliminating the forecast losses at the aquatics centre.	27
	KLOE A4: SEND Transport	
12	The next SEND Transport procurement should consider how services can be commissioned to manage ongoing significant and ongoing budgetary pressures,	29
	KLOE A7: Waste Service	
13	The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council.	31
14	The Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.	31

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations (cont'd)

This appendix summarises our improvement recommendations by KLOE.

Page #84

	Improvement recommendations	Page #
	KLOE A8: Governance and Legal Support to DPH	
15	The Council should conclude its plans to introduce a policy for working with local MPs and associated guidance.	33
	KLOE A10: Introduction of new ERP system	
16	The Council should ensure it responds effectively to the recommendations set out in our separate Oracle Fusion implementation report before the go live date.	35
17	The Council should continue its work on defining financial and non-financial benefits, and that benefits identified and agreed are measurable, and can be effectively tracked and the transformational opportunities of the new system are fully realised.	35
	KLOE B2: Senior Leadership	
18	The Chief Executive should ensure that the Monitoring Officer continues to be a standing member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a permanent basis	38
	KLOE B4a: Officer and Member Relationships	
19	This maturity of senior officer and member relationships will need to continue, with further difficult decisions inevitably being required, and this approach to must be sustained following future changes to those in senior officer or senior member roles	41
20	Whilst pathways are being put in place for succession planning, further work is required to conclude these plans, including the provision of appropriate training and development so that these changes become fully embedded	41

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations (cont'd)

This appendix summarises our improvement recommendations by KLOE.

Page #	Improvement recommendations	Page #
	KLOE B4b: Performance management and other matters	
21	The Council should conclude the member PDP roll out, and in particular ensure these are in place for members who are in positions of special responsibility or are aspiring to hold such roles.	41
22	The Council should develop a business case for a performance management system, to appropriately consider this investment.	41
	KLOE B7: Financial reporting	
23	The Council should ensure that all recommendations from CIPFA's follow up review are fully implemented.	45
24	The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production	45
25	The Interim Director of Finance should review finance team capacity, capability and training needs to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation	45
26	The Council must ensure a successful implementation of phase 2 of the new asset management system, including effective alignment with Oracle Fusion, so that the benefits planned to support accounts production are realised.	45



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IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Progress against Plan Status Rating	Definition	Leadership Team Action as a result
On Track	Progress against the action is good and there is i) a low level of issues; and/or ii) progress is in line with the delivery date with no/ minor slippage (e.g. less than 1 months)	Leadership Team note progress and seek assurance that on track
Medium progress	Progress on the action is being made but there is i) a medium level of issues and/or ii) slippage (actual / projected) of 1-2 months	Leadership Team watching brief and review impact on dependencies
Significant issues / slippage	There is a significant level of issues and/or slippage (e.g. more than 2 months)	Leadership Team review and remedy
Not due to start	Work on the action is not due to start	N/a
Complete	Action is complete	N/a
Closed	Action is complete and there is evidence that the measures of success have been fulfilled	Evidence to be provided
N/A	Update not required at this time	N/a
On hold	Action placed on hold due to different approach being considered	

Theme 1 -Organisational Culture

Static data													Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)											
Establishing Organisational Culture	OC.A2.0	Create the right environment for that organisational culture to thrive	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader					Focus 1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A											
Establishing Organisational Culture	OC.A2.1	Workforce Strategy approved	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Head of HR	Dec-22	Mar-24	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Discussions about whether the People Strategy should go to Cabinet. Entered onto Forward plan - possible March date TBC for strategy to become effective in April 2024. (Ds 18.12.23)	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Decision to obtain Cabinet approval.Scheduled 13 March 2024. On Forward plan and with Directors for Final consultation/comments. DS. 11.01.24											
Establishing Organisational Culture	OC.A2.3	Project Plan for launch of One Team Framework and alignment to people management practices - Launch and share events with people managers (June & July 2023) - Alignment of One Team framework values and behaviours in people practices and L&D offer .	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Head of HR	Mar-23	Jul-23	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Update to be provided to IPRM in February 2024.	Complete	Update to IPRM 1 Feb. DS 1.01.24											
Establishing Organisational Culture	OC.A2.4	Employee performance review and objective setting, linked to Corporate Plan and Directorate Plans (Appraisal) a) confirm approach for 2023 b) determine fully refreshed approach for 2024 onwards	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Head of HR	Mar-23	Mar-24	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Paper taken to JCP 18.12.23. TUs agreed to new approach. Supportive learning under development. (18.23.23 DS)	On Track- little or no slippage	Updates processes to be communication later in January/early Feb. DS 11.01.24											
Officer Learning and Development	OC.B2.0	Develop a clear programme of management development	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader	Director- Law & Governance				Focus 2	N/A	N/a	N/A	N/a											
Officer Learning and Development	OC.B2.5	Senior Leadership Development Programme Scope, Content and Budget Agreed	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Head of HR HR Team Manager L&D/OD		TBC	N/A	N/A	Senior Leadership Development remains hold pending restructure of senior levels. The business as usual management development L&D offer continues for existing and new people managers. 18.12.23 D.5	N/A	No change - remains on hold pending restructure of senior levels.											
Officer and Member Relationship	OC.C4.0	Assurance Activity to sustain positive Officer and Member Relationship	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council			Jan-23		Focus 2	N/A		N/A												
Officer and Member Relationship	OC.C4.1	Identify mechanisms for ongoing insight and assurance around the Officer and Member Relationship	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council			Jan-23	Dec-23	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month- feedback from committees that we continue to review. Need to identify a focus group before the end of the year.	Complete	Member dynamics- all member survey and focus group to be carried out (to understand case working and working relationships) this is intended to provide an evidence base for LG BCE boundary review but is also being used to provide a snapshot of members interactions with the council and its officer base and to identify areas of focus for improvement. Brg council workshop											
Officer and Member Relationship	OC.C4.2	Compile insight into the Member-Officer Relationship in preparation for Autumn sessions with LGA around the Member-Officer Relationship	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council			Jul-23	Nov-23	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Looking at alternative engagement methods with members to improve response rate and widen breadth of data collection. To consider facilitated workshops for all members based on thematic areas of council activity to enhance member participation and feedback.	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	see above. Will also look to align with member development programme and proposed member induction											
Officer and Member Relationship	OC.C4.4	New action added: Mechanisms for ongoing insight and assurance around the Officer and Member relationship: 1. Survey Complete 2. Areas of concerns identified 3. Action plan to address identified area of concern.	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council					N/A	New Action Added	N/A	New Action Added	new action added January 24											

January Update Due

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	January Update Due		
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Evidence of status rating	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
											Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
Member Learning and Development	OC.D3.0	Continue forward plan for all Member briefings based on themes of work / areas for development	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council					Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Member Learning and Development	OC.D3.2	Leadership Team Review of All Member Briefings to ensure they are meeting needs	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council			Mar-22	Jun-23	N/A	Complete	complete	Complete	complete
Member Learning and Development	OC.D5.0	Member development programme	Director - Law & Governance						Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Member Learning and Development	OC.D5.3	Review of Member Development Programme	Director - Law & Governance	Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee			Nov-23	Feb-24	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month Discussions have been had with the Committee. New appointment made to lead on this work. MDP for the following year will be completed by feb- including all dates of training. (to allow members time to diarise appointments)	On Track- little or no slippage	Induction arrangement for may 24 currently in development and will be followed by refreshed mdp programme for 24-25. council has recently appointed a new lead officer for member development which will increase capacity and focus.
Member Learning and Development	OC.D5.4	Agreement of revised MDP	Director - Law & Governance	Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee			Jan-24	Feb-24	N/A	Not due to start	due Jan 24	Not due to start	date change required.
Internal Communications	OC.E2.0	Deliver the communications strategy to assist with more effective internal communications	Chief Executive	Leader of the Council			Feb-22	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Internal Communications	OC.E2.4	Formal Employee Recognition Scheme - approach and resources identified	Chief Executive	Leader of the Council		Strategic Lead- Service improvement	Mar-23	Oct-23	N/A	Significant issues / actual/projected slippage- more than 2 months	Staff recognition built into the in-person All Staff Briefings in December 2023. Approach developed for formal recognition scheme, to be further developed/tested with Task & Finish Group from January before bringing proposal to Leadership Team for approval. (Original date for Task & Finish Group rescheduled due to availability of T&F Group members)	Significant issues / actual/projected slippage- more than 2 months	Values & behaviours Task & Finish Group on employee recognition gave positive feedback on proposed formal recognition scheme, based on celebrating examples of the council's Values & Behaviours in action. Next step is to take proposal to Leadership team for approval/adoption. Anticipated launch date is May 2024
Internal Communications	OC.E2.8	Protocol For working with MPs	Chief Executive	Leader of the Council		Comms		May-24	N/A	New Action Added	This action will be wrapped up in the new communications strategy	On Track- little or no slippage	Outline communications strategy has been drafted - work has progressed on component parts, such as the branding guidelines. The MP protocol will be one component part of the new strategy.
Embedding Constitutional Changes	OC.G1.0	Governance review training Phase 2	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council			Jan-23	TBC	Focus 2	N/A		N/A	
Embedding Constitutional Changes	OC.G1.3	Governance Training and Development	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council	Director-Finance		Jan-23	May-24	N/A	Medium Progress	Capacity for delivery of training has been limited by corporate priority work on oracle fusions allied with changes to statutory officer designations in recent months which provide opportunity for refresh of current training materials pending the MOs wider review of Decision Making Framework and the Constitution.	Medium Progress- actual/ projected	AD L&G and ACE are working on a programme of training materials and supporting road show workshops for officer on decision making requirements with a focus on improvement to report quality and content to support improvement to decision making.
Embedding Constitutional Changes	OC.G1.4	Annual Refresher of Corporate Governance Training	Director - Law & Governance	Leader of the Council			June 2023	Dec-23	N/A	On Track	as last month- Scheduled to the end of Dec with CIPFa to carry out the Code of corporate governance training.	Complete	The training session took place on 9 January 2024 and was delivered by CIPFA. This will need to be picked up each year as annual training as part of BAU.

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	January Update Due		
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Evidence of status rating	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
										Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)		Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
Embedding Constitutional Changes	OC.G1.5	Delivery of Directorships and Trusteeships Training	Director - Law & Governance	Deputy Leader			Jan-23	Jul-23	N/A	Complete	complete	Complete	complete

Theme 2- Corporate Oversight

Theme 2- Corporate Oversight														
Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		January Update Due	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)	
ERP	CO.A1.0	Implement Oracle Fusion	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader	Director-Business Strategy & Change Director- Law		Apr-22	Apr-24	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
ERP	CO.A1.9	Completion of the modelling phase	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader		PMO lead	Feb-23	Sep-23	N/A	Complete	complete	Complete	complete	
ERP	CO.A1.10	Go live	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader		PMO Lead	Jul-24	Jul-24	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Due to CoA changes required by Finance and approved by Programme Board, the Programme "Go-Live" for Finance, Procurement and EPM is moved to Jul -24 in line with HCM and Payroll. Hence, planned for a "Big Bang" Go-Live in Jul-24 for all modules	On Track- little or no slippage	On Plan to "Go-Live" July 24	
ERP	CO.A1.11	Programme benefits will be defined during the duration of the programme and agreed with the programme board -a process will be agreed for monitoring and reporting the benefits -benefit realisation will take place post go live.	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader		PMO lead	Feb-23	quarterly May Aug Nov Feb	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Benefit rationalisation taking place across the Programme workstreams following completion of Design Phase. Benefit profiles will be developed and baselined ahead of Go-Live. Working group established with HoS to progress financial benefits.	On Track- little or no slippage	Benefit rationalisation taking place across the Programme workstreams following completion of Design Phase. Benefit profiles will be developed and baselined ahead of Go-Live. Working group established with HoS to progress financial benefits.	
ERP	CO.A1.12	New action: Completion of realisation phase/SIT Stage	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader			Sep-23		N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Status for Dec. - Finance delivered CoA values and mapping on 15/12/23 as planned. CoA impact analysis in progress. Key User Trianing started for some moudes, SIT for Finance/ Proc/ EPM complete, HCM SIT will Complete by end year, DM3 exit critria agreed, DM4 entry criteria to start DM4 on 02/01/24	On Track- little or no slippage	Status for Jan'24. - System configuration due to new CoA extended through Jan. DM3 will complete on 26/01/24. DM4 Cycle started on 2 Jan, SIT for HCM will complete on 19/01/24. Gateway 4 Criteria to Exit Realisation Phase/ SIT Stage and Entry to Realisation Phase/ UAT Stage agreed at 18/01/24. Programme Board.Gateway 4 approval with Programme Board planned for 01/02/24	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B1.0	Single Improvement Plan Phase 1	Leadership Team	Leader of the Council			Mar-22	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B1.4	Ongoing Monitoring of Improvement Plan (Monthly Monitoring by Leadership Team, Quarterly Monitoring by Cabinet, ARAC regular review of IP and IP Risk Register, Scrutiny regular review of IP)	Leadership Team	Leader of the Council		Strategic Lead: Service Improvement	Ongoing	Monthly assurance	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Report taken to Scrutiny 22 Nov, ARAC 23 Nov and due to Cabinet 6 Dec, and Council 12 Dec.	On Track- little or no slippage	Monthly monitoring to IPRM, and Leaders, Quarterly reporting due March 2024 to Cabinet, Scrutiny and ARAC>	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B1.5	6 monthly report to Secretary of State	Leadership Team	Council		Strategic Lead: Service Improvement	Dec-22	June & December each year throughout intervention	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Report to SoS approved by Council 12 December 2023 and subsequently issued.	On Track- little or no slippage	December SoS letter sent, awaiting response.	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B1.6	Employee Engagement Survey Action Plan monitored and reviewed by Leadership Team	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader			Jan-23	Jan July each year	Focus 2	Complete	complete	Complete	complete	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B1.7	Conduct Employee Engagement Survey for 2023 and consider actions required in response to the findings	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		AD - HR Strategic Lead Service Improvement	Jul-23	early 2024	Focus 2	On Track- little or no slippage	Wider Leadership Team have been presented with the results at Organisational level. Directorate level results are being presented to DMTs between late Nov and early January. This will include the call for ADs to include the issues identified via the survey into their Business	On Track- little or no slippage	Service level reports in production. Analysis of results by protected groups has been completed Directorate level results discussed at DMTs - meeting 22/01 to discuss progress and key themes arising from discussions	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B3.0	Continuous Improvement	Chief Executive	Leader of the Council			Autumn 2022	Oct-23	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		January Update Due	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B3.1	Develop a Continuous Improvement framework	Chief Executive	Leader of the Council		Strategic Lead - Service Improvement	Autumn 2022	Oct-23	N/A	Significant issues / actual/projected slippage more than 2 months	Business planning workshops held in November/December - received positive feedback from attendees, and intelligence is being used to inform business planning for 2024/25. Draft Continuous Improvement Framework developed for discussion with Transformation and Learning & Development to align approach across key agendas (meeting scheduled for January 2024)	Significant issues / actual/projected slippage more than 2 months	Draft Continuous Improvement Framework developed based on best practice and aligned with transformation approach. Next step is to align with Leadership & Management development programme and develop 'good ideas' process for capturing staff ideas.	
Improvement Planning, Monitoring and Learning	CO.B3.2	Develop a lessons learnt framework	Chief executive	Leader of the Council		Strategic Lead - Service Improvement	23-Jan	Oct-23	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	complete	With Comms to be uploaded onto Intranet. Will be integrated as part of the Continuous Improvement framework	
Performance Management	CO.C1.0	Performance Management Framework (PMF)	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader			Sep-22	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Performance Management	CO.C1.3	Quarterly Performance Reports made to Cabinet	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Strategic Lead: Service Improvement	Ongoing action	Quarterly monitoring to ensure approach embedded	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	Q2 Report went to Budget and Corporate Scrutiny MB on 4th January, due to go to Cabinet on 17th January. Data for Q3 report is being collated.	
Performance Management	CO.C1.4	Review Corporate KPIs for organisational health to reflect workforce strategy	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Strategic Lead: Service Improvement	January 2023	Mar-24	N/A	Complete	complete	Complete	complete	
Performance Management	CO.C1.8	Corporate performance team in place	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Strategic Lead: Service Improvement	dec 22	Sep-23	N/A	Complete	Senior Lead Officer in place since February. 2 x G Grade officers in place. Additional F Grade post to be recruited to following decision on performance management system.	Complete	Complete	
Performance Management	CO.C1.9	Consider integrating revenue, Capital and Performance reporting	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader		Strategic Lead: Service Improvement	Mar-24	Aug-24	N/a	Not due to start	Not due to start	Not due to start	Not due to start	
Performance Management	CO.C2.0	Budget Monitoring	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Mar-22	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Performance Management	CO.C2.4	Assurance action: Quarterly Budget Monitoring Reports made to Leadership Team, Cabinet and Scrutiny	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader			Ongoing action- March, June, Sep, Dec	Quarterly monitoring to ensure approach embedded	N/A	Assurance Action	due december 23	Assurance Action	reports are being made and are programmed in	
Performance Management	CO.C2.5	Assurance action: Where budget pressures identified, assurance provided that action has/is being taken (monthly summary comment from \$151 Officer / raise issues)	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Ongoing action	Monthly monitoring	N/A	Assurance Action		Assurance Action	VFM Panels have been implemented for all spend over £1000	
Performance Management	CO.C2.6	Embed financial benchmarking in budget planning	Director-Finance	Deputy Leader			Apr-23	Jan-24	N/A					
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D1.0	Restructuring	Leadership Team	Deputy Leader			Dec-20	on hold	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	

January Update Due														
Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D1.1	Directorate Level restructuring	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Head of HR	TBC	TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	Directorate restructuring – final assessment stage is underway. Final panel interviews scheduled w/c 29 January	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D1.2	Review of spans and layers across Council's managerial structures in line with LGA Guidance (likely to be incorporated within Target Operating Model Programme in due course)	Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Head of HR	July 23	TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	*Organisation layers and spans – contribution to outcomes tool completed by C.Co and ready for handover to HR Services. HRBPs will work with Directorates in utilising the tool to inform service redesign	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D2.0	Embedding Finance Business Partner role	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Jan-22	Jul-23	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D2.3	Workforce development plan implemented for financial services section	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader		Finance Improvement Manager		Jul-23	N/A	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D2.5	Assurance Action: Performance against KPIs for financial services section	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader		Finance Improvement Manager	Quarterly	Jun Sep Dec Mar	N/A	Assurance Action		Assurance Action		
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D3.0	Reduction of financial transactional activity	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Jan-22		Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D3.6	Implement recommended processes for a single view of debt	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Jun-23	Mar-24	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	3 month review meeting taking place on 22.2.24	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D3.4	Programme of end to end process reviews	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader		Transformation Programme Manager	May-22	Nov-23	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Remains on pause	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Remains on pause- meeting to held with ACE and Director of Finance	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D3.5	Implementation of Recommendations from CIPFa in relation to internal charges	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Oct-22	Apr-24	N/A	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D3.7	Develop Business case for Transactional Finance Unit	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader		Transformation Programme Manager		TBC	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Remains on pause	Complete	Close on IP to be monitored on Customer Journey Programme	
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D4.0	Resolve issues relating to the completion and sign off of final accounts.	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Jan-22	AA- ongoing	Focus 1	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Organisational Structure and Enabling Corporate Core	CO.D4.5	Assurance Action: Preparation of Draft Accounts for 2021/2022 (assurance that approach to completion and sign-off of final accounts is becoming embedded)	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Monthly monitoring	Monthly monitoring	N/A	Assurance Action	The 2021/22 accounts are drafted. Grant Thornton have allocated resources for the 2021/22 audit which has commenced in November 2023.	Assurance Action	The 2021/22 accounts are drafted. Grant Thornton have allocated resources for the 2021/22 audit which commenced in November 2023.	

Static data							Owners			Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		January Update Due	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)				
Corporate Transformation	CO.E1.0	Corporate Transformation programme	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Dec-21		Focus 1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A				
Corporate Transformation	CO.E1.3	Corporate Transformation PMO established - Local Partnerships Review Concludes - Establishment of PMO	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader		AD- Transformation		Nov-23	N/A	Complete	complete	Complete	complete				
Corporate Transformation	CO.E1.4	Programme and Project Management System Implementation	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader		AD- Transformation		TBC following 08/08/2023 meeting	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	CTO moving to live site mid Jan, R&G live in Feb. Work with comm's is currently underway re soft launch comm's	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	CTO will go live 01.02.24. work is underway with R&G for a live date late Feb				
Customer Journey	CO.F5.0	Customer Journey Programme	Assistant Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Transformation Programme Manager	22-Sep	TBC	Focus 1	N/A		N/A					
Customer Journey	CO.F5.4	Ward and Casework Management - Member Engagement held	Assistant Chief Executive			Strategic Lead - Customer	TBC	TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	Attendance at Town Members Board Meetings are taking place throughout December & January to feedback the work that has been completed on resolving Member portal issues. A further Pre Full Council Member event is planned in January 2024 following the positive feedback received from October's event. Ward Co-ordinators are continuing to work closely with Ward Members to tackle issues at a local level.	Complete	Meetings are continuing to be attended to feedback on the Clr Portal. Further session will take place pre Full Council on the 30 January 2024, whereby Members can come along and discuss any cases/concerns with key service areas. Feedback from this session will be used to inform future sessions.				
Customer Journey	CO.F5.5	Ward and Casework Management - Action plan in place Plan for Responsiveness re: Ward & Casework Management 2023/24.	Assistant Chief Executive			Strategic Lead - Customer	TBC	TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	See above update. LT are also continuing to receive weekly updates on Clr portal enquiries, the Customer Team are emailing Officers with long standing enquiries to ask them to address these as a matter of urgency. Ward Co-ordinators are working on developing good working relationships with Member's, in order to be able to tackle concerns at a local level.	Complete	The introduction of the Ward Co-ordinator roles have been instrumental in supporting Members to tackle local Ward based issues and initial anecdotal feedback is that these roles are making a real difference. Members of the Customer team are continuing to chase for feedback on over due Clr Portal cases.				

Static data				Owners			Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		January Update Due
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
Strategic Planning framework	CO.G1.0	Strategic Planning framework	Chief Executive					2024	Focus 2	N/A	new action	N/A	new action
Strategic Planning framework	CO.G1.1	Refresh of partnership wide vision 2030	Chief Executive			Strategic Lead - Service Improvement		early 2024	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	Consultation and engagement intelligence being gathered into discussion paper for sharing with partners. Options paper on partnership arrangements also in progress again for discussing with partners
Strategic Planning framework	CO.G1.3	Refresh appraisal process	Chief Executive			AD - HR Strategic Lead - Service Improvement		TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	Complete	Process agreed and ready for launch from April 2024
Strategic Planning framework	CO.G1.4	Pilot an approach to service planning	Chief Executive			Strategic Lead - Service Improvement		TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	AD Business Plans in progress - deadline for draft business plans is 3 February 2024. Quality assurance assessment to be undertaken once drafts submitted.

Theme 3 -Strategic Direction

Static data							Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)				
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A3.0	Communications and Corporate Affairs Strategy Development and Delivery	Chief Executive	Leader of the Council		Strategic Lead - Communications	Autumn 2021	Ongoing	Focus 2	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	Complete	Internal comms strategy in place and being delivered as part of Business as usual				
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A4.0	Refresh and embed the Corporate Procurement Strategy	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader		Interim Procurement Strategy Manager	Autumn 2021	Jul-23	Focus 2		update required- new action required- when is procurement strategy to be signed off.						
		New action required	Director- Finance														
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A5.0	Develop and Implement the Commercial Strategy	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Autumn 2021	Ocr 23	Focus 2	N/a		N/a					

January Update Due

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A5.3	Complete Full Business Cases for identified Business Steams in line with Commercial Project Plan approved by Leadership Team	Director- Finance					Oct-23	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Education commercial services OBC- delay with development due to capacity within the team, workstreams have been refined. Planning workshop to be held New Year H&S – Data gathering underway, report to be produced Jan 2024, current H&S training contracts been reviewed. All of which will contribute to OBC Neutral vendor – working group established, analysis underway. Project Lead maternity cover successfully recruited. Timeline extended to 2025 due to Oracle fusion implementation. Pest control alternative not yet identified. The progress of these workstreams are monitored at CTB	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Health and Safety – Skills gap analysis is complete. Next steps to be agreed at a workshop WC 5th Feb Neutral Vendor Phase approach agreed, reflective of new timeline and capacity in HR. Educational Services – Resource pressures easing with a new SIA post agreed. Further discussion required regarding 'status' of project i.e. transformational or service improvement. Meeting to be arranged in Feb to be discussed. Social Letting - Due to the announcement made by the Chancellor in the Autumn budget – an increase in LHA rate to the 2024 rates from April the project team must review the financial offer, margins and understand how this may influence landlords decision making in respect of the proposed model. Cashless – Activities agreed to
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A6.0	HRA 30 year Business Plan	Director- Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing	Assistant Directors - Housing Management and Asset Management		Autumn 2021	Jun-23	Focus 2				
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A6.5	Stock Condition Surveys Undertaken to inform HRA business plan	Director- Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing			Sep-23	Sep-24	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month- The work is underway and on track.	On Track- little or no slippage	As last month- The work is underway and on track.
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A6.6	Refresh of HRA Business plan	Director- Housing	Cabinet Member for Housing			TBC	TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month There is a review currently being undertaken on the early years of the business plan as part of the MTFS process. The plan will be further reviewed in Q1 Apr 2024 as the regulatory requirements are confirmed and the initial results of the stock condition surveys are available.	On Track- little or no slippage	As last month There is a review currently being undertaken on the early years of the business plan as part of the MTFS process. The plan will be further reviewed in Q1 Apr 2024 as the regulatory requirements are confirmed and the initial results of the stock condition surveys are available.

January Update Due

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A6.7	Procurement of second tranche of Stock condition Surveys	Director- Housing	Director- Housing			TBC	TBC	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month The ongoing operational delivery of stock condition surveys have been built into the plans for next year so will commence April 2024 and be ongoing for two further years.	On Track- little or no slippage	As last month The ongoing operational delivery of stock condition surveys have been built into the plans for next year so will commence April 2024 and be ongoing for two further years.
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A8.0	Refresh Corporate Parenting Strategy	Director- Children & Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Jan-22	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Strategy development and refresh	SD.A8.3	Corporate Parenting Strategy - yearly assurances provided to the Corporate Parenting Board	Director- Children & Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Sep-23	Annually	N/A	Assurance Action	due sept 2024	Assurance Action	due sept 2024
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	SD.B1.0	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Director- Law & Governance	Leader of the Council			Autumn 2021	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	Business planning workshops held in November/December - received positive feedback from attendees, and intelligence is being used to inform business planning for	N/A	
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	SD.B1.14	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Assessment - appointment of consultant for data analysis - appointment of consultant for strategy development	Director- Law & Governance			Manager, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team	Feb-23	Jul- 24	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month-Update report went to leadership. 4 equality objectives approved. New approach to staff networks and updated public sector equality duty compliance. Review being undertaken in regards to the additional resources needed in the EDI to implement the Equalities framework	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Work is currently underway to develop the EFLG Audit Action plan, which will be presented to LT during March 2024. The team have also developed the 2nd PSED Service User Report for 2023-24 which will be published by March 2024 and ensure that the council is compliant and meeting is legal duties. Further work is been undertaken to support the 4 interim EDI Objectives and it proposed that updates will be presented to LT during Q1. The development of the EDI Strategy has slipped due to resources within the team.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	SD.B1.15	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy approved and published	Director- Law & Governance	Leader of the Council		Manager, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team	Jun-24	Jul-24	N/A	Not due to start	due July 24	Not due to start	due July 24
MTFP & Capital Strategy	SD.D1.0	Fundamental review of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and Capital Strategy	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Jan-22	Ongoing	Focus 1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MTFP & Capital Strategy	SD.D1.3	New Assurance Action (strategy implemented through budget plans): Budget Report to Cabinet (2023-2026) reflects funding gaps identified in MTFP	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			Feb-23	and annually thereafter	N/A	Assurance Action	Due feb 2024	Assurance Action	Due feb 2024
MTFP & Capital Strategy	SD.D1.4	New Assurance Action (embedding the approach): MTFP and Capital Strategy refreshed and approved in October each year	Director- Finance	Deputy Leader			October 2023	and annually thereafter	N/A	Assurance Action	due October 2024	Assurance Action	due October 2024

January Update Due

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
Consultation and Engagement	SD.E2.0	Incorporate Public Consultation Results into Performance Management Framework	Chief Executive	Leader of the Council			Autumn 2022		Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Customer Journey	SD.F1.0	Customer Journey Strategy	Assistant Chief Executive	Deputy Leader	Director Business Strate	Strategic Lead - Customer	Oct-22	Mar-24	Focus 2	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Interim Strategy to be developed In-house for 2024-27, work has commenced on this. Discussions are on-going re: future direction of travel and the procurement of a Strategic Partner to review the Customer Journey.	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	Information is being pulled together to start to draft the CJ strategy including work on Customer Standards.

January Update Due

Theme 4 - Decision Making

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	January Update Due	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)	
Role and Function of Scrutiny and Audit	DM.C3.0	Manage position on historic issues through work with ARAC chair	Director- Law & Governance	Deputy Leader			Dec-21	Ongoing	Focus 2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Role and Function of Scrutiny and Audit	DM.C3.1	Assurance action: Watching brief to ensure that historic matters do not re-surface	Director- Law & Governance	Deputy Leader			Quarterly	Sep Dec Mar June	N/A	Assurance Action	due january	Assurance Action	Continued monitoring of issues by new monitoring officer. No evidence of attempts to revisit historic matters and monitoring officer is sighted on all previous areas of concern.	

Theme 5- Procurement & Commercial

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	January Update Due	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Waste Contract	PC.A1.0	Introduction of a more focused framework for contract monitoring	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			Autumn 2021	Aug-22	Focus 2	Complete	assurance actions in place	Complete	assurance actions in place
Waste Contract	PC.A1.3	Assurance Action- Report provided to Officer Leadership on a quarterly basis. Regular reporting through PMF	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			Feb-23	quarterly (from Feb) Feb May Aug Nov	N/A	Assurance Action	due Feb	Assurance Action	due Feb
Waste Contract	PC.A1.4	Assurance Action- Annual report on leisure and waste contracts going through to cabinet member	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			Nov-22	annually	N/A	Assurance Action	due Nov 24	Assurance Action	due Nov 24
Waste Contract	PC.A1.5	The large contracts in BE for waste/street cleansing, and both leisure providers will be added to the Intend contract management module.	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services				monthly	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	January update - as previous- Waste contract now on Intend and go-live December '23. Subject to testing of waste contract, next step will be SLT Leisure Contract.
Waste Contract	PC.A2.0	Review of the contract to refocus our communications and contract monitoring in areas of poor performance and to ensure the council receives the full provisions within the contract from Serco	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			Autumn 2021	Jan-23	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	January Update Due	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
Waste Contract	PC.A4.0	Street Cleansing Recovery Plan – completion and implementation	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			Autumn 2021	Mar-23	Focus 2	N/A		N/A	
Waste Contract	PC.A4.3	Assurance Action- Senior management meeting - annual plans requested- service delivery plan from SERCO is contractually compliant and includes elements of street cleansing.	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			22-Nov	quarterly (from Nov) Nov Feb May Aug	N/A	Assurance Action	due Feb	Assurance Action	due Feb
Waste Contract	PC.A5.0	Manage the delayed Serco Fleet replacement programme in line with the requirements of the contract	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			Autumn 2021	End 2023	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Waste Contract	PC.A5.2	Fleet replacement complete	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services				End 2023	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	New vehicles arrived and into service.
Waste Contract	PC.A5.3	Assurance Action- Monthly fleet steering group taking place where the documentation considered by the group is contractually compliant.	Director - Borough Economy	Cabinet Member for Environment Services			22-Nov	quarterly (from Nov) Nov Feb May Aug	N/A	Assurance Action	Due feb	Assurance Action	Due feb

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	January Update Due	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
SEND Transport	PC.B3.0	Procurement of 2024 SEND Transport Contract	Director - Children and Education				Nov-22	Apr-25	Focus 2	N/A	n/a	N/A	n/a
SEND Transport	PC.B3.2	Mobilise project team and establish project governance	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education Dept Leader	Director - Law & Governance Director - Finance	Group Head - Education	Aug 23	Sept 23	N/A	Complete	Business planning workshops held in November/December - received positive feedback from attendees, and intelligence is being used to inform business planning for 2024/25. Draft Continuous Improvement Framework developed for discussion with Transformation and Learning & Development to align approach across key agendas (meeting scheduled for January 2024)	Complete	Complete
SEND Transport	PC.B3.3	Commence Procurement	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education Dept Leader	Director - Law & Governance Director - Finance	Group Head - Education	Jan-24	Sep 23	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	Complete	On track- working with Legal on a flexible purchasing system. The framework will be in place July/August 24 to run all the new contract through. It will support and encourage SME operators to join the framework which will provide much needed competition and challenge.(SM 16/01/24-dw)
SEND Transport	PC.B3.4	Working with contract management consultant to introduce and embed robust contract management arrangements	Director-Finance	Dept Leader / Cabinet Member for Children and Education	Director – Children & Education		Jan-23	Ongoing	N/A			Complete	work was done on existing contracts, no changes could be made at the time. The lessons learnt from this will be used on the new contract management arrangements in the future. (SM 16/01/24-dw)
SEND Transport	PC.B3.5	NEW action- Assurance: SEND Procurement	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			February		N/A	New Action Added	assurance action added	New Action Added	assurance action added
New System Procurement	PC.C1.0	Explore implementation of a corporate performance management system	Assistant Chief Executive	Dept Leader			Jun-21		Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	January Update Due	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)
New System Procurement	PC.C1.1	Options Appraisal	Assistant Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Strategic Lead - Service Improvement		Oct-23	N/A	Significant issues / actual/projected slippage- more than 2 months	RAG rating changed from AMBER to RED as have missed the timescales we set ourselves, this is due to conducting further engagement with services to ensure requirements are captured from across the council prior to discussion of Options Appraisal and Business Case at ICT Approval Panel and Corporate Transformation Board in New Year.	Significant issues / actual/projected slippage- more than 2 months	Engagement with service areas complete. Following discussion with Director Finance and AD ICT, further work required to further explore Oracle Fusion as a potential solution. Cross-council stakeholder group to be established for the project to ensure needs of the organisation are understood and explored. Initial meeting with procurement has taken place and the project is in the procurement pipeline for commencement at a future date if required.
New System Procurement	PC.C1.2	Business Case and Implementation Plan Considered	Assistant Chief Executive	Deputy Leader		Strategic Lead - Service Improvement		TBC based on selected option	N/A	Not due to start	Not due to start	Not due to start	Not due to start

Theme 6-Partnerships & Relationships

														January Update Due	
Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating	
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)		
Sandwell Children's Trust	PR.A1.0	Continue with robust governance arrangements in place ensuring the accountability of SCT to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people in Sandwell in line with the contract	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Autumn 2021	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Sandwell Children's Trust	PR.A1.7	New KPIs reported through PMF	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Aug-23	Sep-23	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	SCT KPIs have been agreed across SCT and the DFE following the review by the DFE appointed Improvement Board Chair. The review has not just looked at the KPIs but the operating tolerances too.	On Track- little or no slippage	The new approved contract KPIs will be reported through PMF effective Q1 2024/25		
Sandwell Children's Trust	PR.A1.8	KPI's (along with accompanying tolerances) implemented in Q2	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Sep-23	Dec-23	N/A	Medium Progress- actual/ projected slippage of 1-2 months	As above commentary	On Track- little or no slippage	As above commentary		
Sandwell Children's Trust	PR.A2.0	Establish and maintain positive relationship between SMBC and SCT at senior officer and member level	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Autumn 2021	Ongoing	Focus 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Sandwell Children's Trust	PR.A2.3	Assurance action: Feedback provided on a 6 monthly basis on the continuation of regular cross - SMBC/SCT leadership team meetings.	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Jan	6 monthly Jan July	N/A	Assurance Action	due January 24	Assurance Action	Scrutiny Meeting Date Feb 2024 (Jacquie Smith & Emma Taylor to attend)		
Sandwell Children's Trust	PR.A3.0	Establish corporate approach to working with SCT on shared issues, such as corporate parenting and delivery of Early Help service	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Autumn 2021	Ongoing	Focus 2		Updates provided and there is also the SCT governance structures inc OPB, SPB and Improvement Board supported by a range of senior meetings inc the Cabinet Member, DCS, Chair of the SCT Board, CEO of SCT. N/A		Updates provided and there is also the SCT governance structures inc OPB, SPB and Improvement Board supported by a range of senior meetings inc the Cabinet Member, DCS, Chair of the SCT Board, CEO of SCT. N/A		
Sandwell Children's Trust	PR.A3.4	Outcomes around early help and corporate parent reporting through PMF at Q1	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education			Sep-23	Sep-23	N/a	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	On Track- little or no slippage	Scheduled throughout 2024		
Effective Local Structures	PR.C1.0	Review partnership structures within the 'People's sphere'	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education / Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health	Director-Adult Social Care Director- Public Health				Focus 2		Action completed since the formation of the overarching 5 Boards.- assurance action to monitor		Action completed since the formation of the overarching 5 Boards.- assurance action to monitor		
Effective Local Structures	PR.C1.1	Initiation of Project to review and remodel the pathway between children's and adults' services (preparing for adulthood project)	Director - Children and Education	Cabinet Member for Children and Education / Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health	Director-Adult Social Care Director- Public Health			May-23	N/A	On Track- little or no slippage	December update- as last month	Complete	The PFA Project Board meeting scheduled for November 2023 was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 29th January 2024. Project activity continues in the Stage one / Prepare phase. Following submission of the PFA preparatory findings report in 2023, further analysis has been completed to fulfil next steps/actions in relation to case file audits and post age 17 referral analysis. These reports have now been submitted for review and comment. We continue to bring together and liaise with internal and external partners to identify project dependencies and required future collaborative working. Action is monitored through MTFs, adults and Transformation Board this action will be removed from IP.		

January Update Due														
Static data			Owners				Dates		Focus	Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating		Progress against plan	Evidence of status rating
Workstream	Ref	Action	Director Lead	Cabinet Member	Other Leads	Update Owner (if different)	Start date	Due date	Main Action Risk	Status (December 2023)	Update (Initial and Date)(December 2023)	Status (January 2024)	Update (Initial and Date) (January 2024)	
Effective Local Structures	PR.C1.6	Assurance action- Receive a 6 monthly update from DPH and DAS to provide assurance that governance remains in place to test adequacy of partnerships through system-wide thematic deep dives and that any issues are being addressed by the partnership.	Director - Public Health		Director - Adult Social Care		6 monthly	April 24 October 24	Focus 2	Assurance Action	Interview for Project Manager post conducted on 4th October but candidate unsuccessful. 07/12/23 A new consultant in Public Health is due to start on 12/02/23 who will lead on this area. A Long term conditions needs assessment and infant mortality needs assessment has been commissioned by ICB to look at needs in Sandwell.	Assurance Action	Programmes of work are progressing jointly and funded by ICB. Winter booklet (december) Infant mortality needs assessment (Dec) Long term conditions deep dive (Dec) Work well bid (19th January) Ongoing Discussions around MMUH (new hospital) and Adult social care cost disparities	
VCS Relationships	PR.D1.0	Relationship with Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) and Funding to Voluntary & Community Sector.	Leadership Team	Cabinet Member for Communities			Mar-22	Jul-23	Focus 2	N/A	Regular contact has been maintained with CM and CW to continue discussions regarding links between the PFA Project and the SEND Eco-System Programme. PFA board due to take place in Nov to discuss potential links/activities with a range of other projects currently underway.	N/A		
VCS Relationships	PR.D1.3	Consultation on VCS Draft Strategy	Assistant Chief Executive			Director - Housing	Jan-23	TBC	N/A	Action on Hold	Business planning workshops held in November/December - received positive feedback from attendees, and intelligence is being used to inform business planning for 2024/25. Draft Continuous Improvement Framework developed for discussion with Transformation and Learning & Development to align approach across key agendas (meeting scheduled for January 2024)	Action on Hold	Further work in progress to develop approach for wider VCS engagement and funding.	
VCS Relationships	PR.D1.4	Approval of VCS Strategy	Leadership Team			Director - Housing	TBC	TBC		Not due to start	Project activity continues to be in Stage On / Prepare / Phase Two (follow on actions).	Not due to start	Project activity continues to be in Stage On / Prepare / Phase Two (follow on actions).	

Improvement Plan Theme Progress Summary January 2024

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
Organisational Culture	<p><u>Establishing Organisational Culture</u></p> <p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Team Framework was agreed and is being implemented across the Council. Launch and Share events with managers have now concluded. Framework was introduced at all staff briefing in July 2023. • Organisational Health indicators have been reported for 2022-23 and the trends were used to inform the People Strategy and roll out of the One Team Framework. The People Strategy was presented to Leadership Team in October 2023 and priorities were agreed. • Employee Engagement Survey conducted in September 2023 to provide a temperature check on culture, with results received in early November 2023 with a plan to disseminate to directorates in place. • The Member and Officer relationship continues to be positive and is enabling the Council to move forward with decisions. To support continuous improvement, further insight was collated in Autumn 2023 through the Employee Engagement Survey and semi-structured interviews with a sample of Members and Officers. 	<p>January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual refresher of Corporate Governance Training delivered to members • Mechanisms identified for ongoing insight and assurance around the Officer and Member relationships <p>November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directorships and Trusteeship training delivered. <p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal of new approach to Employee performance review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 2 Engagement: Determining Desired Culture - March 2023. Complete • Approval of document setting out the desired organisational culture - March 2023. Complete • Workforce Strategy approved- Due March Cabinet • Management Development Programme Agreed- Pilot held in April 23 • Corporate Induction Revised. Complete

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration around future workshops for all members based on thematic areas of council activity to enhance member participation and feedback. • Values and Behaviours Task and Finish Groups began w/c 21st November and is on track for update to Leadership team in February 2024 <p>Progress this month:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce strategy decision made to obtain Cabinet approval which is scheduled 13 March 2024. It is on the Forward Plan and currently with Directors for final consultation/comments. • Regular Values and Behaviours messaging shared through weekly communications with staff. Update on embedding Values & Behaviours to be brought to IPRM 1 February. • Employee performance review (appraisal) updated processes to be communicated later in January and early February 2024. The new approach is based around coaching conversations so there will be classroom-based training available to book from 11th March – 3rd April. Ready for the full launch from April 1st - the annual review cycle. All associated documentation will be on the intranet ready to use. <p>Next steps:</p>	<p>presented to Trade Unions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Strategy Presented to Leadership Team <p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward plan of all Member Briefings in place for next 3 sessions • Project plan for launch of One Team Framework- Update of programme containing all workstreams presented to Leadership team <p>August</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Team review of All Member briefings - Complete • Processes relating to employment of Chief Officers included in induction programme for committees at start of Municipal Year- Included in MDP • Approval of refreshed Member Development Programme for start of Municipal Year. Complete • Employee Recognition Scheme launched- Date tbc • Guidance in place for effective working with MPs- May 2024 • Social Media policy reviewed- August 2023 Complete

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Strategy to go to Cabinet in March One Team Framework update to be provided to IPRM in February 2024 Learning and Development offer soft launch will be shared in Directorate Live Events starting 25 January. Face to Face and Online sessions will be arranged to provide ongoing support. <p>Issues raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OC.A2.1- Workforce Strategy amber rated due to slippage on due date. Date to be amended at change control. Strategy on forward plan for March Cabinet with the aim for the Strategy to become effective April 2024 <p>Focus 2 Exceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OC.A2.1 Workforce Strategy approved- Amber rated due to slippage due decision to obtain Cabinet approval. date to be amended on Change control Progress commentary: Decision to obtain Cabinet approval Scheduled 13 March 2024. On Forward plan and with Directors for Final consultation/comments. OC.C4.2 Compile insight into the Member-Officer Relationship in preparation for Autumn sessions with LGA (Local Government Association) around the Member-Officer Relationship Due 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal for Employee Performance Review created with Values embedded Feedback from launch and Share sessions fed back to leadership Social Media Policy review complete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Governance Development Programme Agreed – in Progress Delivery of Corporate Governance Programme commences- Commenced

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<p>November, Amber relating to slippage- date to be amended on Change control.</p> <p>Progress commentary: Member dynamics- all member survey and focus group (to understand case working and working relationships) this is intended to provide an evidence base for LGBCE boundary review but is also being used to provide a snapshot of members interactions with the council and its officer base and to identify areas of focus for improvement. Pre-council workshops showcasing a range of service areas - will complement this work by raising awareness for both members and officers and supporting the development of positive relationships. Survey will take place end of January and beginning February. Out turn report will go to full council and will support a wider range of work e.g.: customer. Will also look to align with member development programme and proposed member induction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC.E2.4 Formal Employee Recognition Scheme - approach and resources identified- Red rated- date to be changed at change control Progress commentary: Values & behaviours Task & Finish Group on employee recognition gave positive feedback on proposed formal recognition scheme, based on celebrating examples of the council's Values & Behaviours in action. Next step is to take proposal to Leadership team for approval/adoption. Anticipated launch date is May 2024. • OC.G1.3 Governance Training and Development- Amber rated Due May 2024 		

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<p>Progress commentary: Assistant Director Legal and Assurance and Assistant Chief Executive are working on a programme of training materials and supporting road show workshops for Officers on decision making requirements with a focus on improvement to report quality and content to support improvement to decision making.</p>		
<p>Corporate Oversight</p>	<p>Focus 1</p> <p><u>Customer Journey Programme</u></p> <p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme governance remains in place. Housing Solutions have carried out a number of process mapping workshops covering the areas highlighted- Adult Social Care, Borough Economy, Housing Options and Revenues and Benefits. A sharing event was carried out 23 August 2023. • Internal meetings have taken place led by CTO to agree and address the `quick wins` identified. These were presented to Customer Journey Board in November 2023. The methodology, resource, and timescales for Phase 2 of the process mapping, following the learning from the Phase 1 work, is being drafted by the CTO and is scheduled for approval at CJ (Customer Journey) Board in January. 	<p>January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisal process agreed and ready for launch from April 2024 • Ward Co-ordinator roles have been instrumental in supporting Members to tackle local Ward based issues and initial anecdotal feedback is that these roles are making a real difference. <p>November</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oracle- Discovery phase complete- Feb 23. Complete • Oracle- Modelling phase complete- June 23. Complete • Oracle Fusion implemented- July 24. On track • Corporate debt recovery processes reviewed- Complete April 23 • Sign off of 2020/21 accounts Complete • Sign off of 2021/22 accounts On track to submit to GT in January 24

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council has collectively (including Housing, Regeneration, Borough Economy) been working to improve the response to cases on the member portal. <p>Progress this month:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings are continuing to be attended to feedback on the Cllr Portal. Further session will take place pre Full Council on the 30 January 2024, whereby Members can come along and discuss any cases/concerns with key service areas. Feedback from this session will be used to inform future sessions. Attendance at Town Members Board Meetings continued to take place throughout December & January to feed back the work that has been completed on resolving Member portal issues. The introduction of the Ward Co-ordinator roles has been instrumental in supporting Members to tackle local Ward based issues and initial anecdotal feedback is that these roles are making a real difference. Members of the Customer team are continuing to chase for feedback on overdue Cllr Portal cases. <p>Next steps:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q2 reporting to leadership 28th November <p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VERTO user acceptance testing complete <p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills gap analysis complete for financial services and a training programme is now complete and in place- delivery will take place over the next 6 months <p>August</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft State of Borough report received from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation PMO in place – Complete November 2023 Corporate PMO in place – Complete November 2023 Verto system implemented – Commenced Corporate Transformation Board operational- ToR and Membership to be re-set following Local Partnerships Review - Complete

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback in January 2024 Pre-Full Council Member event <p>Issues raised: SD.F1.0 - Customer Strategy development showing as Amber due to Risk relating to the action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions are ongoing around the wider piece of work that will run concurrently to procure a Strategic Partner/Provider to undertake a more in-depth Strategy across Customer taking into account co dependencies with ICT/Digital Strategies. The approach was taken to Customer Journey Board on the 30th of November and a deadline given of April 2024 for the 3-year strategy to be launch was agreed. Information is being pulled together to start to draft the Customer Journey strategy including work on Customer Standards. <p><u>Resolve Issues relating to the completion and sign-off of final accounts</u></p> <p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2020/21 accounts have been signed off by the auditor with no qualifications. 21/22 accounts – agreed with Grant Thornton that audit dates will be moved to early 2024 to allow more internal quality assurance process before external audit takes place 	<p>Economic Intelligence Unit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Planning Framework drafted 	

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government is looking at the approach for 2022/2023 accounts due to the national context of delays in local government audit. <p>Progress this month:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2021/22 accounts are drafted. Grant Thornton have allocated resources for the 2021/22 audit to be submitted January 2024 <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Await audit completion <p>Issues raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No issues raised <p><u>MTFP</u></p> <p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MTFP projects are being managed within the Corporate Transformation Programme and project management methodology and transformation design principles are being applied. Work to develop and review MTFS (Medium Term Financial Strategy) and MTFP for 2024/25 with members conducted 		

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<p>over Summer and Autumn 2023, to develop achievable/deliverable savings and a balanced Budget for 2024/25.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of benchmarking information to inform services to include in future transformation activities. • MTFS Autumn Update approved by Cabinet on 15 November 2023 consultation carried out on savings options in train to feed into development of draft budget for 2024/25. Focus groups conducted with residents, VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) organisations and SHAPE Forum, and online survey was open until 2 January 2024. <p>Progress this month:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Budget taken to the Scrutiny session on 15 January 2024. • The Draft Budget will go for consideration at Cabinet in February 2024 before decision by Full Council on the 20 February 2024. <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Budget taken to Cabinet and Council in February 2024 <p>Issues raised:</p>		

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Issues raised <p><u>Corporate Transformation</u></p> <p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation Design Principles agreed. Review was held with Local Partnerships and the report has informed the establishment of Corporate PMO (Project Management Office). The Corporate Transformation Board's terms of reference have been revised and regular meetings scheduled. User acceptance of VERTO has been completed and the launch started. <p>Progress this month:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft launch of VERTO in Corporate Transformation Office in December. Corporate Transformation Office will be moving to live site mid-January, R&G live in Feb. Work with Communications is currently underway regarding the soft launch communication. <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out of VERTO across other directorates 		

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<p>Issues raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No issues raised <p>Focus 2 Exceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CO.B3.1 Develop a Continuous Improvement Framework –Red rated- revise delivery date at change control Progress commentary: Draft Continuous Improvement Framework developed based on best practice and aligned with transformation approach. Next step is to align with Leadership & Management development programme and develop proposal for 'good ideas' process for capturing staff ideas • CO.D3.4 Programme of end-to-end process reviews- Amber rated Progress commentary: This exercise remains paused pending review of the report and update to leadership • CO.D3.7 Develop Business case for Transactional Finance Unit - Amber rated- Progress commentary: This exercise remains paused pending review of the report and update to leadership 		

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
Strategic Direction	<p>Focus 1- no focus 1 in this theme</p> <p>Focus 2 Exceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SD.A5.3 Complete Full Business Cases for identified Business Steams in line with Commercial Project Plan approved by Leadership Team- Amber Rated Due October 23 Progress Commentary: Health and Safety – Skills gap analysis is complete. Next steps to be agreed at a workshop WC 5th Feb Neutral Vendor Phase approach agreed, reflective of new timeline and capacity in HR. Educational Services – Resource pressures easing with a new SIA post agreed. Further discussion required regarding ‘status’ of project i.e. transformational or service improvement. Meeting to be arranged in Feb to be discussed. Social Letting - Due to the announcement made by the Chancellor in the Autumn budget – an increase in LHA rate to the 2024 rates from April the project team must review the financial offer, margins and understand how this may influence landlords decision making in respect of the proposed model. 	<p>January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications and Corporate Affairs Strategy delivered as part of BAU <p>November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) update report went to leadership- 4 equality objectives approved <p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative workshops to conclude this month Commercial Project Officer recruited 	<p>Commercial Strategy Approved-Commercial Workstream included in 2023/24 Budget March 23</p> <p>Regeneration Pipeline: Strategic delivery partner in place- Cabinet report approved July 23</p> <p>Approval of Communications and Corporate Affairs Strategy- Complete</p> <p>ED&I Strategy Approved- September 2024. On track</p> <p>Regular Residents' Survey & Budget Consultation in Place – Complete.</p>

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<p>Cashless – Activities agreed to inform next steps</p> <p>Educational Psychology – Finance partners updated and provided good insight. Next step to de-segregate statutory from opportunity but also consider the dependencies on the wider schools piece.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SB.B1.14 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Assessment- Amber Rated Due July 2024 Progress Commentary: Work is currently underway to develop the EFLG (Equality Framework for Local Government) Audit Action plan, which will be presented to Leadership Team during March 2024. The team have also developed the 2nd PSED Service User Report for 2023-24 which will be published by March 2024 and ensure that the council is compliant and meeting its legal duties. Further work is being undertaken to support the 4 interim EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) Objectives and it proposed that updates will be presented to LT during Q1 (2024/25). The development of the EDI Strategy has slipped due to resources within the team. 	<p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative workshops held with LGA to inform communications approach • Corporate Procurement Strategy Action plan finalised <p>August</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative workshops held with LGA to inform communications approach • Corporate Procurement Strategy Action plan finalised 	<p>Customer Journey Strategy Approved- On track for draft by March 2024</p> <p>Approval of Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy- 2023/24 MTFP Approved February 2023; 2024/25 MTFP on track for approval February 2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRA 30-year Business Plan approved- Approved February 2023. Stock condition surveys being undertaken.
Decision Making	<p>Focus 1- no focus 1 in this theme</p> <p>Focus 2- no exceptions to report</p>	<p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny committee produced annual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader to confirm Executive's position on any further review

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
		report- due at October council	relating to the Wragge and Cox reports – Complete-
Procurement & Commercial	<p>Focus 1- no focus 1 in this theme</p> <p>Focus 2 Exceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PC.C1.1- Performance Management System- Options appraisal- Red rated Due Oct 23 – Date change at change control Progress commentary: Engagement with service areas complete. Following discussion with Director Finance and AD ICT, further work required to further explore Oracle Fusion as a potential solution. Cross-council stakeholder group to be established for the project to ensure needs of the organisation are understood and explored. Initial meeting with procurement has taken place and the project is in the procurement pipeline for commencement at a future date if required. 	<p>January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Fleet vehicles have arrived as part of Serco Fleet replacement and are into service <p>November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste contract now on Intend- Go Live December <p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEND3- Project team identified, launch meeting diarised and ToR agreed. <p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of Phase 2 Tech forge complete <p>August</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste and Leisure Contracts added to In-tend contract management module- Steady progress. Waste contract on Intend. • Street Cleansing Recovery Plan implemented- Ongoing delivery Fleet replacement complete- Expected end 2023 • SEND Transport Contract Monitoring arrangements in place- On track • SEND3 procurement commences – Complete • Corporate Performance Management System in place-

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of recommendations for Waste contract complete- lessons learnt booked in following industrial action in June/July 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options appraisal due October • Lion Farm - Report to Cabinet on determination of position of developer- Transferred to 'business as usual' management • Arrangement in place for future delivery of leisure services- Complete • Phase 2 Tech Forge implemented- Complete
Partnerships & Relationships	<p>Focus 1- no Focus 1 in this theme</p> <p>Focus 2 Exceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR.C1.1- Initiation of Project to review and remodel the pathway between children's and adults' services (preparing for adulthood project) Amber Rated. Progress commentary: The PfA (Preparing for Adulthood) Project Board meeting scheduled for November 2023 was cancelled due to 	<p>January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCT KPIS approved by DfE, SMBC and SCT, and will be reported through PMF (Performance Management Framework) effective Q1 2024/25 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of SCT (Sandwell Children's Trust) Contract concludes- - complete. • Transitions Project Commences- Project commenced

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
	<p>unforeseen circumstances. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 29th January 2024.</p> <p>Project activity continues in the Stage one / Prepare phase. Following submission of the PfA preparatory findings report in 2023, further analysis has been completed to fulfil next steps/actions in relation to case file audits and post age 17 referral analysis. These reports have now been submitted for review and comment. We continue to bring together and liaise with internal and external partners to identify project dependencies and required future collaborative working.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PR.D1.3- Consultation on VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) Draft Strategy- On hold Progress commentary: Further work in progress to develop approach for wider VCS engagement and funding. 	<p>November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitions Projects: Benchmarking findings report complete for the project to review and remodel the pathway between children's and adult's. <p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmarking findings report complete for the project to review and remodel the pathway between children's and adult's <p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing for Adulthood Project- Benchmarking meetings completed with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitions Project incorporated within Corporate Transformation Programme- date tbc VCS Strategy approved- On hold

Theme	Summary	Achievements this period	Key Milestones
		<p>Dudley MBC and Birmingham City Council</p> <p>August</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Initial findings report for Preparing for Adulthood Project shared with the Preparing For Adulthood Project Board in July	

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Appendix 4 – Statutory Recommendation Status Summary January 2024

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
<p>S1 - 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</p>	<p><u>Organisational Culture</u> Assurance Activity to ensure effective contributions of Scrutiny and Audit and to sustain positive Officer and Member Relationship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from committees is collected and reviewed regularly. • All member survey and focus group to be carried out, to understand case working and working relationships. This is intended to provide an evidence base for LGBCE boundary review but is also being used to provide a snapshot of members interactions with the council and its officer base. Identifying areas of focus for improvement. • Pre council workshops showcasing a range of service areas - will complement this work by raising awareness for both members and officers and supporting the development of positive relationships. Survey will take place end of January and beginning February. Outturn report will go to full council and will support a wider range of work e.g.: customer. • LGA (Local Government Association) sessions planned post elections <p><u>Corporate Oversight</u> ERP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and Procurement, HR & Payroll will all go-live in July 2024. • Benefit rationalisation taking place across the Programme workstreams following completion of Design Phase. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oracle Fusion Implemented- Modelling phase complete. Next phase to focus on realisation phase/development stage. Go live date July 2024. • Regeneration pipeline: strategic delivery partner in place – Cabinet approval to procure July 2023 <p>Completed milestones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of SCT Contract concludes- Complete • Review of scrutiny arrangements- Complete • Approval of any changes to scrutiny (if required following review)- Complete • Termination notice for SLT contract approved by Cabinet- complete • Revised contract governance arrangements in place for Serco contract- complete

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit rationalisation taking place across the Programme workstreams following completion of Design Phase. Benefit profiles will be developed and baselined ahead of Go-Live. • Working group established with Heads of Services to progress financial benefits. • System configuration due to new CoA (Chart of Accounts) extended through Jan. • Data Migration 3 will complete on 26/01/24. • Data Migration 4 Cycle started on 2 Jan, • Systems Integration Testing (SIT) for HCM (Human Capital Management) will complete on 19/01/24. • Gateway 4 Criteria to Exit Realisation Phase/ SIT Stage and Entry to Realisation Phase/ UAT Stage agreed at 18/01/24 Programme Board. • Gateway 4 approval with Programme Board planned for 01/02/24 <p><u>Strategic Direction</u> Strategy Development and Refresh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regen Strategy and Pipeline: Pipeline 6 monthly update presented to Cabinet July 23. • Regeneration pipeline- approval to procure a strategic delivery partner was agreed at Cabinet in July 23. Report will return to Cabinet once procurement has been successful. • VERTO- Soft launch of VERTO in Corporate Transformation Office in December. Corporate Transformation Office will be moving to live 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste and Recycling Recovery Plan Implementation - Complete • Street Cleansing Recovery Plan approval – Resubmission to Waste Management Board in - Complete • SERCO contract performance reporting embedded in Performance Management Framework - Complete • Option appraisal for future leisure management options – Complete • Scrutiny work Planning event - Complete • Procure new support provider to deliver Oracle Fusion-complete • Approval of Regeneration Strategy and Pipeline- Complete • Early Help Strategy approved and launched- Complete • Corporate Parenting Strategy Refresh Approved- Complete • SEND Transport procurement published- complete • SMBC/SCT Leadership meetings - Complete

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
	<p>site mid-January, R&G live in Feb. Work with Comm's is currently underway regarding the soft launch communication.</p> <p><u>Decision Making</u> No actions in this theme</p> <p><u>Procurement & Commercial</u> Waste Contract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of quarterly corporate monitoring through PMF. • Report provided to Officer Leadership Will slip to December / January to allow the settlement of the industrial action to be included in the report (key contract action in quarter). • Annual reports prepared; will be presented to Cabinet Member for Leisure & Tourism 13/12/23 and Cabinet Member for Environment 13/12/23 • Waste contract now on Intend and go-live December '23 • Senior Management Meetings and Partnership Board meetings proceeding as scheduled. Service Delivery Plans approved by Partnership Board. • Monthly Fleet steering groups taking place • Fleet vehicles received and in service. <p>SEND Transport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Team agreement, directorate reps have been confirmed, the terms of reference are being finalised and the first meeting will take place at the end of Q3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCT Contract performance reporting embedded within Council PMF-Complete

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme board reps confirmed across council directorates. AD Education Support Services coordinating the board meeting and Terms of Reference. • SEND 3 to be a strand of the overall transformation plan. Task & Finish Group to drive delivery. • Working with Legal on a flexible purchasing system. The framework will be in place July/August 24 to run all the new contract through. It will support and encourage SME operators to join the framework which will provide much needed competition and challenge <p>New System Procurement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Management System- Systems demos have taken place. Options appraisal and business case being finalised, further engagement with service areas being conducted to refine requirements. • Asset Management - The phase two for Techforge implementation has now been completed. The team have undertaken a project closedown exercise detailing everything that has been completed across both phases along with any workstreams/actions that will now become business as usual. <p>Lion Farm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert Determination process has been completed and removed from the Improvement plan to be managed as Business as Usual. <p>Leisure Contract:</p>	

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supplementary agreement with SLT agreed 13.07.23 to extend SLT's operation of leisure centres (including SAC) to 31.03.27. Enhanced contract management regime and framework in place. Aquatic Centre Handover to operator (Sandwell Leisure Trust) took place as scheduled on 13 July, open to the public 24 July Continuation of quarterly corporate reporting through PMF. Contract to be put on to Intend <p><u>Partnerships & Relationships</u> Sandwell Children's Trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCT KPIs have been agreed across SCT and the DfE (Department for Education) following the review by the DfE appointed Improvement Board Chair. The review has not just looked at the KPIs but the operating tolerances too. Outcomes around early help and corporate parent reporting through PMF The new approved contract KPIs will be reported through PMF effective Q1 2024/25 	
S2 - The Council must ensure that the learning in relation to commercial decisions, procurement and contract	<p><u>Organisational Culture</u> <u>Officer Learning and Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Leadership Development on hold pending restructure of senior levels. <p><u>Embedding Constitutional Changes</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Governance Training Delivery –Commenced and approach to next phase agreed <p>Completed milestones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular Resident Survey in place – 2023 surveys in place

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
<p>management highlighted in this report are understood through the organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader scenario-based learning, Officers involved in pulling training across finance, procurement and governance have undergone significant changes of personnel. • Next step is bringing a new project team together to agree training detail and to diarise. Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance and ACE are working on a programme of training materials and supporting road show workshops for officer on decision making requirements with a focus on improvement to report quality and content to support improvement to decision making. • Delivery of Directorships and Trusteeships Training –Carried out with the offer extended to Officers with council appointments to boards etc and will be carried out on an annual basis • CIPfA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) carried out the Annual refresher of Corporate Governance Training scheduled to the end of December. <p>Member Learning and Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from committees that we continue to review. • Induction arrangement for May 24 currently in development and will be followed by refreshed MDP (Member Development Programme) programme for 24-25. • Council has recently appointed a new lead officer for member development which will increase capacity and focus. <p>Corporate Oversight Performance Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial Strategy approved – approved • HRA 30 Year Business Plan approved • Revised Financial Regs - approved • Implementation of Asset Management System -phase 1 complete • Revised Scheme of Delegation – approved • Corporate Asset Management Strategy Approved- Approved • Budget Holder Role Profile agreed - Complete • Establish Performance Management Framework – Complete • First Performance Management Report - - Complete • Revised PCR, and Sale of Land and Buildings Protocol – Complete • New Member Induction- Complete • Member Development Programme - Complete and BAU • Asset Management System Procured- complete

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly reporting of corporate performance management framework in place to senior officers and members via Cabinet and Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board. • Q2 Performance Report went to Budget and Corporate Scrutiny MB on 4th January, due to go to Cabinet on 17th January. Data for Q3 report is being collated. Corporate Performance Management resources in place from February 2023. • Budget pressures and mitigations are discussed at LT each month • Benchmarking used in budget planning up to date and used as part of refresh of MTFS (Medium Term Financial Strategy) and planning for 2024/25 budget onwards. <p><u>Strategic Direction</u></p> <p>Strategy Development and Refresh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Safety – Skills gap analysis is complete. Next steps to be agreed at a workshop WC 5th Feb • Neutral Vendor- Phase approach agreed, reflective of new timeline and capacity in HR. • Educational Services – Resource pressures easing with a new SIA post agreed. Further discussion required regarding ‘status’ of project i.e. transformational or service improvement. Meeting to be arranged in Feb to be discussed. • Social Letting - Due to the announcement made by the Chancellor in the Autumn budget – an increase in LHA rate to the 2024 rates from April the project team must review the financial offer, margins and understand how this may influence landlords' decision making in respect of the proposed model. 	

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cashless – Activities agreed to inform next steps • Educational Psychology – Finance partners updated and provided good insight. Next step to de-segregate statutory from opportunity but also consider the dependencies on the wider school's piece. <p><u>Procurement & Commercial</u> Corporate Asset Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1 implemented. • Phase 2 commenced. The integration of data into the system complete • Phase 2 Configuration and organisation of data completed September • Project closedown exercise complete detailing everything that has been completed across both phases along with any workstreams/actions that will now become BAU (business as usual). <p><u>Partnerships & Relationships</u> No actions in this theme</p>	
S3 - Senior leadership, both officers and members, must demonstrate that they can continue to work together effectively, that they	<p><u>Organisational Culture</u> Establishing Organisational Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Strategy to go to Cabinet for approval 13 March 2024. On Forward plan and with Directors for Final consultation/ comments • Comms strategy is being delivered regularly. • Task and finish groups commenced week beginning 21st November with update to Leadership team in February 2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Strategy – Due to be agreed at Cabinet March 2024 <p>Completed milestones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational Culture – Part 2 Engagement – determining the desired culture – complete

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal for appraisals drafted and consultation commenced on 10th October with recognised TU's - accepted in principle. Paper taken to JCP (Joint Consultative Panel) on the 18th of December. Updated processes to be communicated later in January and early February. <p>Officer Learning and Development -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Leadership Development on hold pending restructure of senior levels. <p>Officer and Member Relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ongoing mechanisms for insight and assurance around the Officer Member Relationship includes views from external reviews, standards cases, feedback from Directors, Group Leaders, and Chief Whips. Semi-structured interviews with Members early October are being conducted to capture insight into relationship. All member survey and focus group to be carried out, to understand case working and working relationships. This is intended to provide an evidence base for LGBCE boundary review but is also being used to provide a snapshot of members interactions with the council and its officer base. Identifying areas of focus for improvement. Pre council workshops showcasing a range of service areas - will complement this work by raising awareness for both members and officers and supporting the development of positive relationships. Survey will take place end of January and beginning February. Outturn report will go to full council and will support a wider range of work e.g.: customer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of document / statement setting out desired organisational culture – ‘Our Values: Our Behaviours’- Complete Organisational Culture - Part 1 Engagement – Starting the Conversation- Complete New Member Induction - Complete Meeting structures to support Senior Leadership (Officer and Member) – Complete Member Development Programme approved- Complete

Statutory Recommendation	Summary	Milestones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGA sessions planned post elections • <p>Member Learning and Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from committees that we continue to review. • Induction arrangement for May 24 currently in development and will be followed by refreshed MDP (Member Development Programme) programme for 24-25. • Council has recently appointed a new lead officer for member development which will increase capacity and focus. <p><u>Corporate Oversight</u> No Actions in Theme</p> <p><u>Strategic Direction</u> No actions in Theme</p> <p><u>Decision Making</u> No actions in Theme</p> <p><u>Procurement & Commercial</u> No actions in Theme</p> <p><u>Partnerships & Relationships</u> No actions in Theme</p>	

Appendix 5 – Scrutiny & Audit Recommendation Status Summary January 24

<p>Grant Thornton Key Recommendation 7 (2021): Members in key statutory roles, in particular in relation to Cabinet, scrutiny, standards and audit, need to be provided with effective development training and support. The Member Development Programme should be reviewed to ensure corporate governance forms part of the training for members with governance roles</p>	
<p>External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings</p>	<p>Grant Thornton acknowledged the progress of the Member Development Programme and noted that it has been augmented with additional training sessions delivered by the LGA (Local Government Association) focusing on the Member and Officer Relationships, and in delivering a development programme for Cabinet.</p> <p>In their follow-up review, Grant Thornton made a further recommendation in relation to the Member Development Programme as a whole but did not make any points around learning and development in relation to scrutiny specifically, as they acknowledged the improvements made.</p> <p>The recommendation made by Grant Thornton relating to the MDP (Member Development Programme) was: Improvement Rec 19 (2022): The Council needs to build on the progress being made on member development and conclude the 2022/23 programme including the review of member PDPs and take further steps to finalise arrangements on succession planning for members in SRA roles.</p> <p>The LGA commented on the council's commitment to review the member development programme at regular intervals and set out that it is important to ensure that the pace of delivery is made to feel sustainable. The LGA follow-up review acknowledged that the improvements to scrutiny have been supplemented with a range of training and additional training sessions on member and officer relations is due to be facilitated by the LGA on 27 February 2024.</p>
<p>Summary of activity and next steps</p>	<p>The current MDP has been updated to reflect the review of Member PDPs and updated arrangements for new Member Induction following the number of new Members elected in May. A new Member survey is being conducted, however, there has been a low return rate as yet. Members have been completing analysis after each training session. Further analysis of these will be undertaken and this, along with findings from face-to-face Member sessions on the Member-Officer relationship and engagement with LGA will be used to inform the review of MDP and inform new Member induction for 2024-2025.</p>

	<p>Scrutiny Members’ and ARAC Committee Members’ learning needs remain under review by the Chairs together with supporting Officers. Scrutiny Chairs are also receiving coaching and mentoring training from external providers. A learning and development plan for audit members is currently being drafted to ensure that key skills needed for the role is clear. This is linked in with CIPFA’s ‘Audit committees: practical guidance for local authorities and the police’ guidance.</p> <p>Further training with external providers is being explored including with neighbouring authorities to ensure shared learning and the opportunity to engage with peers to discuss new ways of working.</p>
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Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation I4 (2021): Officer and Member Relationships – the forward plan of the Cabinet should be shared with the Audit Committee and Scrutiny Board to help structure their agenda planning	
External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings	<p>Grant Thornton acknowledged that the ‘forward plan of Cabinet business has been made available to all members to improve awareness and transparency.</p>
Summary of activity and next steps	<p>The forward plan is shared with all scrutiny boards (in so far as it relates to that respective scrutiny board) to help identify areas for pre-decision scrutiny activity and to ARAC at every meeting to assist with the Committee’s work planning. This will continue.</p>

Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation 12 (2021): Officer and Member Relationships – There is a need to ensure that members of scrutiny and audit committees are aware of their governance roles including how to interrogate reports and ask the right questions	
External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings	<p>Positive feedback was received about scrutiny and audit in the follow up reviews.</p> <p>In their follow up review Autumn 2022, Grant Thornton set out that ‘There is a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work</p>

	<p>programming across the different committees across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees.’... and ‘Overall, positive progress has been made to improve the culture and professionalism of key Council committees, with the scrutiny function making particular progress.’</p> <p>The LGA commented that ‘it is clear from the people we spoke to that this key strand of the council’s governance arrangements [scrutiny] is going from strength to strength’. And commented on scrutiny’s ‘renewed sense of energy and drive’.</p> <p>Grant Thornton did not make any further recommendations around the role of scrutiny or audit.</p>
<p>Summary of activity and next steps</p>	<p>Ongoing activity is in place to ensure that scrutiny and audit continue to make an effective contribution to the Council’s governance arrangements.</p> <p>This includes the regular meetings to develop and nurture strong, healthy working relationships with members and officers. Chairs of scrutiny boards have regular agenda setting meetings with Directors and officers to ensure that the content of reports enables a rich discussion and debate at Scrutiny and not just information sharing. Scrutiny Board chairs collectively are meeting regularly, whether it is a pre-meeting or prior to Cabinet to agree lines of questioning in advance as well monitoring performance of Boards, attendance, engagement, etc. Audit are having pre meetings and work is ongoing to ensure shared learning and cross cutting areas are discussed at regular meetings between the overarching Chair of Scrutiny and the Audit Chair as well as regular meetings with the Chair of Audit and the Section 151 Officer.</p> <p>Job roles, scrutiny protocols and a framework have been developed and embedded to guide the way scrutiny is conducted, details how Cabinet members and officers interact with scrutiny and also helps to support and drive a change in culture and mindset of both members and officers to ensure that Sandwell has an effective overview and scrutiny function.</p> <p>A learning and development plan for audit members is currently being drafted to ensure that key skills needed for the role is clear and members of ARAC can work towards the skills identified as part of their PDP.</p>

	These arrangements will continue over Municipal Year 2024-2025.
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Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation 34 (2022): Audit Committee – now that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has agreed the action to bring this long-standing matter to resolution [review into the Cox and Wragge Report], it will be important that – as the Audit and Governance Panel recognised – the Council manages its position so that the matter does not resurface, so that it can move on and focus on its corporate objectives	
External Follow-up Reviews 2022 Findings	<p>In their follow up review, Grant Thornton outlined that: ‘The Audit Committee has continued to operate throughout the year in a manner focussing on significant governance matters’ and that ‘Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council’s arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks’. Grant Thornton noted that the Council Leader is due to confirm the Executive’s position on any further review and made an additional improvement recommendation as follows:</p> <p>Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation 22 (2022): A final decision on the Cox report needs to be made by the Leader before this matter can be considered formally closed.</p>
Summary of activity and next steps	<p>A report was received by ARAC on 5 June which set out the Executive’s position and the matter has been concluded. The ARAC minutes were reported to Council in July 2023.</p>

Jul-23										Change Control
To be completed by action owner										
Change Number	Theme	Action reference	Action Title	Owner	Date Raised	Type of Change	If date change is required		Change/ Impact of change (incl. any dependencies)/ Reason for change	
							Change date from	Change date to		
336	Organisational Culture	OC.A2.1	Workforce Strategy approved	Chief executive	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Nov-23	Mar-24	Change of date to allow approval to be obtained at Cabinet.	
337	Organisational Culture	OC.C4.2	Compile insight into the Member-Officer Relationship in preparation for Autumn sessions with LGA around the Member-Officer Relationship	Director-Law & Governance	22/01/2024	Change to action description	n/a	nh/a	Compile insight into the Member-Officer Relationship in preparation for Spring sessions with LGA around the Member-Officer Relationship in preparation for post-election change in political composition	
338	Organisational Culture	OC.C4.2	Compile insight into the Member-Officer Relationship in preparation for Autumn sessions with LGA around the Member-Officer Relationship	Director-Law & Governance	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Nov-23	Jun-24	Change of date for completion to include new members following elections.	
339	Organisational Culture	OC.C.4.4	New action added: Mechanisms for ongoing insight and assurance around the Officer and Member relationship: 1. Survey Complete 2. Areas of concerns identified 3. Action plan to address identified area of concern.	Director-Law & Governance	22/01/2024	Add - New Sub Actions	n/a	n/a	new action added to follow on from identification of mechanisms for ongoing insight and assurance.	
340	Organisational Culture	OC.D5.3	Review of Member Development Programme	Director-Law & Governance	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Feb-24	Mar-24		
341	Organisational Culture	OC.D5.4	Agreement of revised MDP	Director-Law & Governance	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Feb-24	Mar-24		
342	Organisational Culture	OC.E2.4	Formal Employee Recognition Scheme - approach and resources identified	Chief executive	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Oct-23	May-24	Change of due date so that Task and Finish groups could be included in the discussions and development of the approach	
343	Corporate Oversight	CO.A1.12	New action: Completion of realisation phase/SIT Stage	Director-Finance	22/01/2024	Add - New Sub Actions	n/a	n/a	new action added	
344	Corporate Oversight	CO.B3.1	Develop a Continuous Improvement Framework	Chief executive	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Oct-23	TBC	new date to be determined following meeting with Transformation and L&D	
345	Corporate Oversight	CO.C1.9	Consider integrating revenue, Capital and Performance reporting	Director-Finance	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Mar-24	Jul-24	start date will need to flex to July 2024 as this was linked to launch of Oracle Fusion (launch date changed from April 2024 to July 2024)	
346	Corporate Oversight	CO.F5.0	Customer Journey Programme	Director-Regeneration & Growth	22/01/2024	Closure of Main action resulting in closure of workstream	n/a	n/a	Closure of main action resulting in closure of workstream- all actions complete at this time	
347	Corporate Oversight	CO.G1.4	Pilot an approach to service planning	Chief executive	22/01/2024	Change to action description	n/a	Start date: Sept 23, End Date: June 2024	Action to be revised to 'Implement service planning framework'	
348	Strategic Decision	SD.B1.14	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Assessment - appointment of consultant for data analysis - appointment of consultant for strategy development	Director-Law & Governance	22/01/2024	Change of Delivery Lead(s)	n/a	n/a	Change from L&G to ACE	
349	Procurement & Commercial	PC.A2.0	Review of the contract to refocus our communications and contract monitoring in areas of poor performance and to ensure the council receives the full provisions within the contract from Serco	Director- Borough Economy	22/01/2024	Closure of Main Action	n/a	n/a	The ongoing management of the Serco contract is now effectively BAu remove January	
350	Procurement & Commercial	PC.D3.5	NEW action- Assurance: SEND Procurement	Director-Children & Education	22/01/2024	Add- New Assurance Action	n/a	n/a	New assurance action added to monitor the SEND 24 procurement	
351	Procurement & Commercial	PCC1.1	Options Appraisal (Performance Management system)	ACE	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Oct-23	Mar-24		
352	Partnership & Relationships	PR.A1.7	New KPIs reported through PMF	Director-Children & Education	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Sep-23	July 24	change to include Q1 reporting complete	
353	Partnership & Relationships	PR.A1.8	KPI's (along with accompanying tolerances) implemented in Q2	Director-Children & Education	22/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Dec-23	Jul-24	change to include Q1 reporting complete	
354	Corporate Oversight	CO.C2.4	Assurance action: Quarterly Budget Monitoring Reports made to Leadership Team, Cabinet and Scrutiny	Director-Finance	26/01/2024	Closure of Assurance Action	n/a	n/a	Closure of assurance action- regular reports are made and are programmed in for future delivery	

355	Corporate Oversight	CO.E1.0	Corporate Transformation programme	Director-Finance	26/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	TBC	Jun-24	Due date set
356	Corporate Oversight	CO.E1.4	Programme and Project Management System Implementation	Director-Finance	26/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	TBC	Apr-24	Due date set
357	Strategic Decision	SD.A3.0	Communications and Corporate Affairs Strategy Development and Delivery	Chief executive	26/01/2024	Closure of Main Action	n/a	n/a	Internal comms strategy in place and being delivered as part of Business as usual
358	Strategic Decision	SD.A5.0	Develop and implement the Commercial Strategy	Director-Finance	26/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Oct-23	Oct-24	change to due date
359	Strategic Decision	SD.A5.3	Complete Full Business Cases for identified Business Steams in line with Commercial Project Plan approved by Leadership Team	Director-Finance	26/01/2024	Change to delivery timescales (actions and milestones)	Oct-23	Jun-24	Change to due date
360	Corporate Oversight	CO.C2.5	Assurance action: Where budget pressures identified, assurance provided that action has/is being taken (monthly summary comment from S151 Officer / raise issues)	Director-Finance	26/01/2024	Closure of Assurance Action	n/a	n/a	Closure of assurance action as VFM panels have now been implemented for all spends over £1000

Improvement Plan Risk Register

January 2024



1. Best start in life for children and young people



2. People live well and age well



3. Strong resilient communities





4. Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods





5. A strong and inclusive economy





6. A connected and accessible Sandwell



Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
IP1	<p>Improvement Plan objectives and member / officer engagement in those objectives</p> <p>If programme objectives are not clearly defined to ensure they are within scope, deliverable, understood and agreed and/or that there is unclear ownership of actions and workstreams, then the programme will proceed with no clear direction, may become unmanageable (incl. scope creep), and/or missed opportunities resulting in slower progress than planned, failure to meet external review recommendations and a prolonged Government intervention</p>	6 (Green)	6 (Green)	3 (Green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement as part of the development of the Improvement Plan - sharing themes and workstreams with staff and members Communications Plan implemented for governance review, CPC and Statutory Notice Objectives for each Theme within the Improvement Plan identified Regular reporting to Cabinet, ARAC and Scrutiny in place. Council approval of Improvement Plan and reports to SoS. Regular Staff communications on progress of Improvement Plan in place Improvement Plan Actions embedded into Corporate Plan and Business Plans to provide assurance of sustainable improvement Key components of Finance Improvement Plan embedded in IP and Corporate Plan All Improvement Plan actions have an identified Responsible Officer and Cabinet Member Arrangements in place to provide business continuity following SH & GD departure <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications Plan delivered including all staff briefings including key messages around Improvement Plan Staff and member engagement through Organisational Culture change programme Ensure Executive Directors are aware of Improvement Plan governance and responsibilities and develop ownership of the plan as part of induction
IP3	<p>Allocation of sufficient resources to project management and project delivery/ maintaining Business as Usual while delivering the Improvement plan</p>	8 (Amber)	8 (Amber)	4 (green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terms of Reference for internal Improvement Plan Review Meeting updated to reflect government intervention, single Improvement Plan and assurance framework


Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
	<p>If sufficient resources (capacity and capability) and where necessary additional resources are not allocated to the management and delivery of the improvement plan then this may result in officer fatigue, loss of motivation and the programme will fail to deliver all of its objectives.</p>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PMO support being provided by existing experienced resources within Service Improvement • Resource gaps / pressures associated with actions within the Improvement Plan have been identified • Council on 07/06/22 approved Use of Improvement & Capacity Reserve and 2021/22 underspend allocated to Improvement Plan actions • Resource issues and risks associated with the Improvement Plan reviewed monthly by Leadership Team and Register maintained • Appointment of interim corporate transformation capacity to establish programme and project management governance arrangements, as well as moving forward key transformational activity • Improvement Plan Actions embedded into Corporate Plan and Business Plans to provide assurance of sustainable improvement • Local Partnerships Review of PMO concluded <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LT work on prioritisation to conclude to ensure that the improvement priorities are clear and resources are available to manage risk of officer fatigue and loss of motivation. • Establishment of resourced Corporate PMO • National Graduate Development Scheme - placements to be focused on IP priorities • Ensure Executive Directors are aware of Improvement Plan governance and responsibilities and develop ownership of the plan as part of induction

Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
IP4	<p>Project and risk governance assurance arrangements</p> <p>If a robust assurance framework is not put in place to in respect of project assurance, including detailing roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders (eg Cabinet, Scrutiny, ARAC, partners, IB, etc) then the council may be unable to effectively monitor and evidence the improvement required.</p>	6 Green	3 Green	3 (green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of additional capacity to support delivery and implementation of key projects taken place in Asset Management, Finance, Service Improvement and Legal Services • Terms of Reference for Improvement Plan Review Meeting in place • Governance approach included within Council report 07/06/22 • Risk identification has taken place • Agreement for Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPFA to review progress regularly • Improvement Plan Risk Register in place • Terms of Reference for internal Improvement Plan Review Meeting updated to reflect government intervention, single Improvement Plan and assurance framework including role of Scrutiny and Audit Committees. • Roles of Cabinet, Scrutiny and Audit agreed with Chairs • Quarterly reports to Cabinet, Audit and Scrutiny well-established and on forward plan for 2023-24 • Scrutiny consideration of culture theme progress in Dec 22 • Consideration of external review reports by Scrutiny and Audit • Update to Improvement Plan to reflect findings from GT, LGA and CIPFA follow-up reviews • Grant Thornton follow up review 2023 lifted Statutory Recommendations and found "no evidence of any significant weaknesses for ensuring that the Council makes informed decisions and properly manages risk" <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny regular review on Culture Theme progress • Agreement for ongoing external assurance activity • Consider additional action to address further recommendations from Grant Thornton follow up review Autumn 2023
IP5	<p>Communication Strategy-If a robust communications strategy is not put in place detailing how, when and what information is</p>	8 (Amber)	8 (Amber)	4 (green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review visits from GT, LGA and CIPFA held Autumn 2022. Reports received from GT and LGA and presented to Cabinet. Review report

Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
	shared with the various internal and external stakeholders, then not everyone will be aware of their respective roles and responsibilities for delivering the improvement plan and effective service delivery. In addition, the DLUHC may lose confidence in the council's ability to improve resulting in extended/ additional intervention.					<p>from CIPFA received Jan 23 and presented to ARAC. Due to be presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny in March</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications Approach set out in Improvement Plan approved by Council 07/06/22 • Key messages document for stakeholders in place • Regular PMO/Communications meetings to ensure key messages are embedded within internal and external communications • Communication with stakeholders to share details of transition between KBD and SL. • Communication with stakeholders to share progress update and annual report June 2023. <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with stakeholders to share details of Improvement Plan • Recruitment to vacancy within comms structure • Development of post-intervention communications strategy
IP6	<p>Investment and Financial Resources</p> <p>If sufficient/ additional financial resources are not made available, and the IP is expected to be delivered from existing budgets then the IP may not be delivered within the necessary timescales or to scope.</p>	8 (Amber)	8 (Amber)	8 (Amber)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular comms with stakeholders taking place as per comms plan including incorporation in all staff briefings • Resource gaps / pressures associated with actions within the Improvement Plan identified • Council on 07/06/22 approved use of Improvement & Capacity Reserve and 2021/22 underspend allocated to Improvement Plan actions • Resource issues and risks associated with the Improvement Plan reviewed monthly by Leadership Team • Appointment of interim corporate transformation capacity to establish programme and project management governance arrangements, as well as moving forward key transformational activity • Regular monitoring of improvement plan is in place and key milestones are being delivered <p>Further Actions</p>

Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review resource allocation to deliver the Improvement Plan and determine if there are any gaps Identify additional resources or reprioritise activity following identification of resource gaps Graduate recruitment to focus on IP priority projects
IP10	<p>Performance Management Framework (PMF) and Data Quality</p> <p>If a robust PMF is not put in place and appropriate quality data captured then the council will be unable to effectively monitor and evidence improvement, delivery of the Improvement Plan and delivery of the Corporate Plan resulting in a failure to achieve the Council's objectives.</p> <p>Closed as programme risk, moved to Service Improvement Risk Register to be managed within Business-as-usual arrangements.</p>	4 (Green)	4 (Green)	4 (Green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance Management Framework approved in April 2022 Evidence of success outlined within each of the Improvement Plan themes focusing on outcomes for each theme Improvement Plan Monitoring approach approved by Council and regular monitoring in place Resources approved by Council to address staffing resources required to sustain PMF 2022/23 Quarterly Corporate Performance Report presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny (Q1 Sept/Oct 22, Q2 Dec 22/Jan 23) Residents Survey and Budget Consultation exercise conducted in Summer 2022 to feed into PMF and 2023/24 service and financial planning Process in place for monthly and quarterly monitoring at corporate level Corporate approach to consultation and engagement with residents, including regular residents survey agreed by Leadership Team. Member Officer Survey conducted to provide a temperature check on the relationship Improvement Plan activity embedded in Corporate Plan and Business Plans Refreshed KPIs included in Corporate Plan refresh and streamlined reporting to Leadership Team (from Q1 report) Development of Customer Experience metrics as part of Corporate Plan refresh <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence collation to be produced to support IP Recruitment to additional corporate performance team posts

Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance Management System options appraisal and procurement to provide capability for performance management Refresh of Member Officer Survey / alternative mechanism conducted to provide a temperature check on the relationship
IP11	<p>Continued focus and resources allocated to historic issues</p> <p>If the council does not focus on the Improvement plan and corporate plan priorities and continues to focus and allocate resources on historic issues, then this will impact the timely delivery of both the Improvement Plan and Corporate Plan.</p>	4 (Green)	4 (Green)	4 (green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assurance from LGA CPC Follow up Review around development of PMF Improvement Plan contains activity to be concluded, and lessons learnt embedding from historic issues Cabinet and Leadership Team approach to historic issues Regular monitoring of improvement plan is in place Progress on GT recommendations specifically related to the proper functioning of Scrutiny and Audit Committees. Lessons learnt captured in relation to SEND transport Leader has confirmed executive's position in relation to a further review in relation to Wragge/Cox and this was reported to ARAC in June 2023 <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessons learnt framework to be introduced as part of continuous improvement plan. Lessons learnt to be collated relating to historic issues and shared across organisation Maintain watching brief of council activity to ensure resources are not diverted to historical issues
IP12	<p>Risk approach and progress monitoring (optimism bias)</p> <p>If the approach taken to risk scoring and/or progress monitoring against the delivery plans is unrealistic (e.g. being overly optimistic around progress and timescales or</p>	6 (Green)	3 (Green)	6 (Green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant Thornton follow up review of progress against historical issues Corporate risk scoring definitions applied Definition in place for progress monitoring Red/Amber/Green progress monitoring for Improvement Plan Roles of Scrutiny and Audit confirmed

Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
	likelihood and severity of a risk) then there will be a failure to appropriately manage the programme and a loss of confidence in its delivery.					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to Scrutiny and Audit Committees presented in September 2022 • PMO reviewed use of RAG ratings for consistency and to ensure that progress monitoring is presenting a realistic view and reflecting risk associated with actions as well as progress against plans (September 2022). • Grant Thornton follow up review 2023 lifted Statutory Recommendations and found "no evidence of any significant weaknesses for ensuring that the Council makes informed decisions and properly manages risk" <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular reporting to Cabinet, Scrutiny and ARAC and Commissioners' views
IP13	<p>Constitutional Changes</p> <p>If key governance changes (agreed during 2022) are not embedded throughout the organisation and put into practice, then opportunities will be missed, progress will be limited, and there may be non-compliance with council processes.</p>	9 (Amber)	9 (Amber)	6 (Green)		<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GT, LGA, and CIPFA follow up reviews provide assurance • Alignment of workstream with organisational culture theme through Officer participation in Culture Working Group • Revised set of guidance and templates in place to support the changes made around key decisions • First round of training delivered to budget holders and procurement card holders in relation to spend thresholds and procurements processes. • New Scrutiny Handbook launched • New EIA guidance issued for decision-making • Sub-delegation schemes developed with Directors • Member Development Plan Refreshed • Decision-making arrangements (forward plan, report sign off etc.) reviewed. • Governance Review Phase 2 project plan in place to embed the constitutional changes (Corporate Governance Development Programme) <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Phase 2 of Mod.Gov

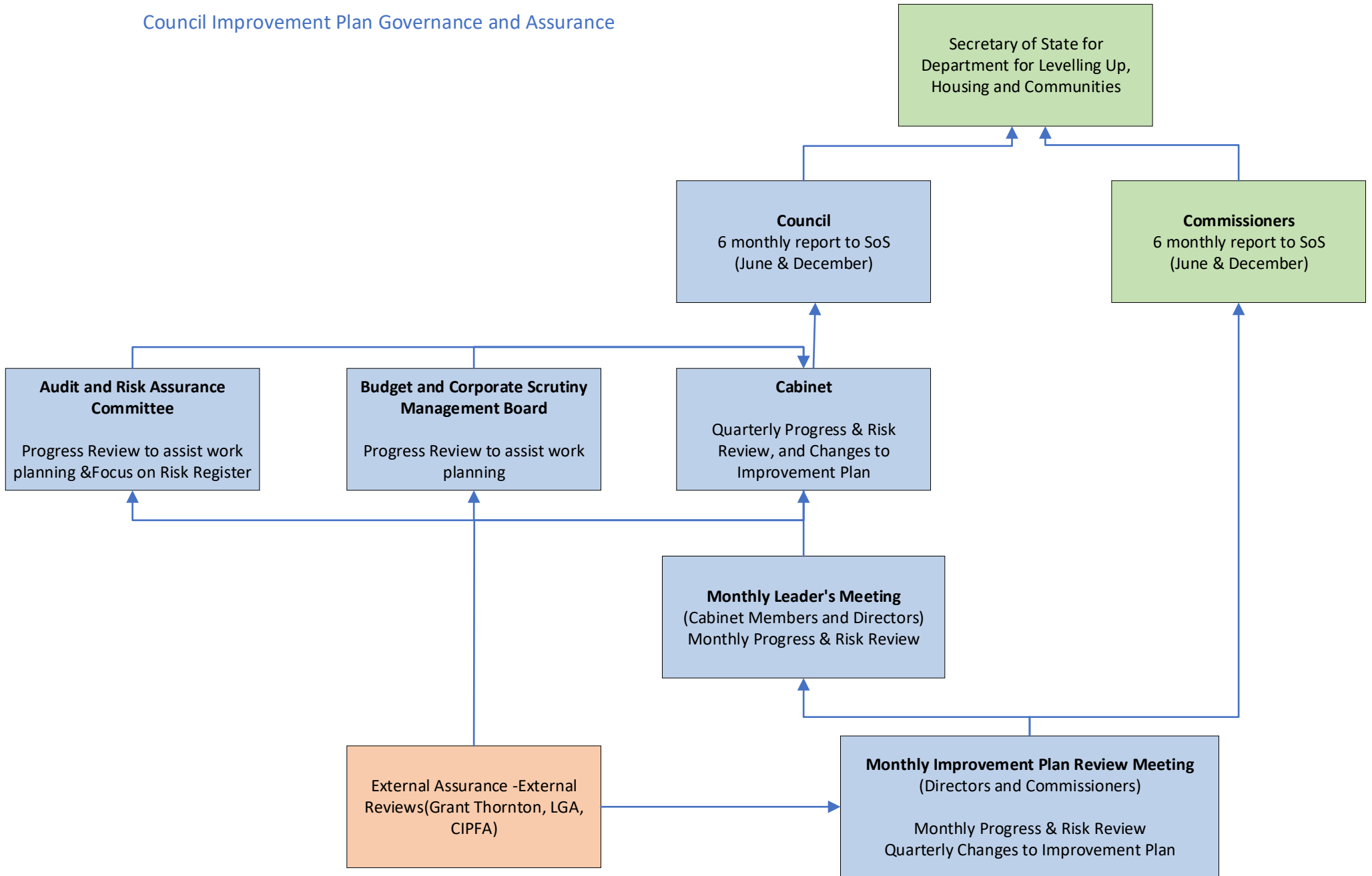
Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)							
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a programme of learning for Officers around effective decision making Development of local KPIs to monitor performance in relation to decision-making e.g. timeliness of report submissions, publication of reports, use of exemptions, forward plan notice given on time. MDP Delivery Monitoring of local KPIs (once introduced) 							
IP14 SRR 27a 06/09	<p>Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Central Government Funding and Resource Allocation</p> <p>Local Government continues to operate in an uncertain financial environment arising from reducing central government funding, increasing demand for services, and more recently the impact of the high levels of inflation being experienced.</p> <p>If the government does not provide local authorities with clarity over the future plans for health and social care reforms, the Public Health grant, the Better Care Fund, the package of one-off social care grants, business rates reset and retention, and future years funding, and it continues with one year funding settlements then this inhibits local authorities' ability to effectively manage medium term/ three year plans and put in place the necessary processes and</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>23/24</td> <td>24/25</td> <td>25/26</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #90EE90;">*</td> <td style="background-color: #FFD700;">*</td> <td style="background-color: #FF0000;">*</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>* There are a number of factors that underpin the wider risk score for this risk, and the score will continue to remain fluid throughout each 12-month cycle as the council develops its MTFS, generally in-line with the below pattern. However, overall the council is confident that it has processes in place in order to be able to adequately mitigate these risks, and that it will remain able to effectively discharge its statutory responsibilities, including the setting of a balanced</i></p>			23/24	24/25	25/26	*	*	*			<p>Current and Ongoing Controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current and ongoing measures in place to Manage Risk as set out in the Strategic Risk Register The review by CIPFA on the council's financial management and governance arrangements, noted that the council was initially a progressive two-star (out of five) authority. The follow up review subsequently undertaken by CIPFA progressed this to a three-star. The review also looked at financial resilience and concluded that the council is financially stable and in recent years has been able to contribute towards reserves through achieving a balanced budget or an underspend. An underspend was delivered in 2022/23. A fundamental review of the MTFS (in line with the CIPFA recommendations) has been completed, to ensure that the council understands the challenges ahead and to ensure that the MTFP matches the ambitions of the corporate plan and regeneration plans for Sandwell. A balanced budget for 2023/24 was approved by Council on 21st February 2023 and includes savings totalling £21.4m. Monthly monitoring of savings is carried out by Finance Business Partners in year. Savings are RAG rated and reported to Directors monthly through DMT meetings and to LT budget meetings. Budget surgery meetings are held mid-year to review savings rated 'red', with a view to understanding any issues hampering delivery and to unblocking those issues. Budget surgery meetings are attended by the Director of Finance, appropriate Directors and a range of officers from across the organisation. Monitoring of savings includes any savings carried forward from previous years that were not delivered in those years.
23/24	24/25	25/26											
*	*	*											

Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
	<p>actions to manage funding pressures.</p> <p>If the council is unable to plan effectively as a result of funding uncertainty, and is unable to identify sufficient savings and put in place the necessary policies, processes and actions to manage pressures, pay and price inflation and manage its spending plans, then this will impact on the council's financial resilience and its ability to effectively discharge its statutory responsibilities including the setting of a balanced budget for future years. This will impact on the council's ability to deliver sustainable services to the people of Sandwell.</p>	<i>budget for future years.</i>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Star Chambers continue to be used to support budget setting. During August and September 2023, a Star Chamber meeting was held in relation to each Council directorate, focusing on the directorate's financial position, savings delivery within 2023/24, ongoing budget pressures and savings to be delivered in 2024/25. Star Chamber meetings include the Chief Executive and Portfolio Holders as well as the appropriate Director and Finance Business Partners. • Star Chamber meetings are used as the initiation process to generate further savings proposals for the following financial year and to test those proposals with elected members. This is the first step in the process towards balancing the budget for the following year. • Directorate budget pressures and growth are calculated annually by Finance Business Partners, and for Adult Social Care includes a growth model that extrapolates client numbers and average placement costs forward, building in assumed increases in market rates. • A Strategic Finance Manager post has been created, with a view to having a dedicated resource to creating and updating the MTFS model and to ensuring assumptions, eg, pay inflation assumptions, are calculated with consideration and in accordance with wider local authority group assumptions. • LG Futures have been commissioned to provide financial benchmarking data, including assumptions on grant income in future years, • Regular discussions take place with WMCA over the likelihood of when the business rates reset might transpire, and Sandwell's assumptions in this regard are aligned to the rest of the WMCA group of local authorities. • The MTFS position has been reported to Leadership Team on several occasions during the Autumn of 2023, and Directors have been fully engaged in the process of generating savings proposals to balance the budget gap in 2024/25. • The draft MTFS for 24/25 reports a deficit (prior to savings) of £13m. Savings proposals have been developed to balance the budget, supported by a business case document for each saving. The draft MTFS will be presented to Cabinet on 15th November. Cabinet

Risk Ref	Risk Title and Description	Previous Risk Score (Oct 23)	Current Risk Score (Jan 24)	Target Risk Score	Direction of Travel	Progress to Date (incl. current risk mitigating controls and further actions to be taken to manage risk)
						<p>workshops were held on 19th September and 25th October to engage Cabinet in the MTFS process and to ensure that elected members are willing to adopt each of the proposed savings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further iterations of the MTFS will be produced following the provisional and final settlement during Winter 2023/24. <p>Further Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued implementation of the action plan developed following the CIPFA review (as per the improvement plan timetable). • Cabinet workshops scheduled to continued development of MTFS and consider implications of Autumn Statement (November 2023) and outcome of consultation on savings proposals to inform Budget setting for 2024/25 • Use of benchmarking data to help identify opportunities for efficiencies, savings and service improvements. • The council continues to horizon scan and consider the impacts of potential government initiatives and policies on future funding sources and demand for council services.

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Council Improvement Plan Governance and Assurance



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Report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Subject:	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Terms of Reference Annual Review
Director:	Brendan Arnold Interim Section 151 Officer
Contact Officer:	Peter Farrow Audit Services and Risk Management Manager, peter_farrow@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee terms of reference be reviewed and approved.

2 Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 The terms of reference for the Committee were last reviewed in March 2023. It is recognised best practice that such terms of reference are reviewed annually by the Committee to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is a key component of the council’s governance, risk management and internal control framework.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Since they were last reviewed there have been no amendments to the terms of reference, and they reflect the latest model terms of reference provided by CIPFA in their Practical Guidance for local authorities and police audit committees.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	The council is not obliged by law to appoint an Audit Committee, but this course of action has been taken in line with guidance from CIPFA.
Risk:	The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is a key component of the council's risk management framework.
Equality:	It was not necessary to undertake 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 Climate Change implications in relation to this report.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no direct Corporate Parenting implications in relation to this report.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix A – Terms of Reference

8. Background Papers

- 8.1 There are no background papers.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Terms of Reference

Statement of purpose

Our Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is a key component of the council's corporate governance. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards.

The purpose of our Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. Its role in ensuring there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective. The committee has oversight of both internal audit and external audit, together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

Governance, risk and control

To review the council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework, including the ethical framework and consider the local code of governance.

To consider reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including compliance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code.

To consider the council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management in the council.

To monitor progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the committee.

To consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.

To review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the council from fraud and corruption.

To monitor the counter-fraud strategy, actions and resources.

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To review the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships or collaborations.

Arrangements for Audit and Assurance

To consider the council's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council.

Internal Audit

To approve the internal audit charter.

To review proposals made in relation to the appointment of external providers of internal audit services and to make recommendations.

To approve the risk based internal audit plan, including internal audit's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.

To approve significant interim changes to the risk-based internal audit plan and resource requirements.

To make appropriate enquiries of both management and the head of internal audit to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.

To consider any impairments to independence or objectivity arising from additional roles or responsibilities outside of internal auditing of the head of internal audit. To approve and periodically review safeguards to limit such impairments.

To consider reports from the head of internal audit on internal audit's performance during the year, including the performance of external providers of internal audit services. These will include:

- Updates on the work of internal audit including key findings, issues of concern and action in hand as a result of internal audit work;
- Regular reports on the results of the quality assurance and improvement programme;
- Reports on instances where the internal audit function does not conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Local Government Application Note, considering whether the non-conformance is significant enough that it must be included in the annual governance statement.

To consider the head of internal audit's annual report:

- The statement of the level of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Local Government Application Note and the results of the quality assurance and improvement

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programme that supports the statement - these will indicate the reliability of the conclusions of internal audit.

- The opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion - these will assist the committee in reviewing the annual governance statement.

To consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested.

To receive reports outlining the action taken where the head of internal audit has concluded that management has accepted a level of risk that may be unacceptable to the authority or there are concerns about progress with the implementation of agreed actions.

To contribute to the quality assurance and improvement programme and in particular, to the external quality assessment of internal audit that takes place at least once every five years.

To consider a report on the effectiveness of internal audit to support the annual governance statement, where required to do so by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

To provide free and unfettered access to the audit committee chair for the head of internal audit, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the committee.

External Audit

To support the independence of external audit through consideration of the external auditor's annual assessment of its independence and review of any issues raised by PSAA or the authority's auditor panel as appropriate.

To consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports, and the report to those charged with governance.

To consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor.

To comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.

To consider additional commissions of work from external audit.

To advise and recommend on the effectiveness of relationships between external and internal audit and other inspection agencies or relevant bodies.

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To provide free and unfettered access to the committee chair for the auditors, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the committee.

Financial and Governance Reporting

Governance Reporting

To review the annual governance statement prior to approval and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, including the head of internal audit's opinion.

To consider whether the annual evaluation for the annual governance statement fairly concludes that governance arrangements are fit for purpose, supporting the achievement of the authority's objectives.

Financial Reporting

To receive detailed training in respect of the process associated with the preparation, sign off, audit and publication of the Council's annual statement of accounts.

To monitor the arrangements and preparations for financial reporting to ensure that statutory requirements and professional standards can be met.

To review the annual statement of accounts. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the council.

To consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

Accountability arrangements

To report to those charged with governance on the committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements, and internal and external audit functions.

To report to full council on a regular basis on the committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference, and the effectiveness of the committee in meeting its purpose.

To publish an annual report on the work of the Committee, including a conclusion on the compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement.

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Report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Subject:	Annual Governance Statement 2021-22
Director:	Brendan Arnold Interim Section 151 Officer
Contact Officer:	Mike Jones Monitoring Officer, Assistant Director – Legal & Assurance mike_jones1@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendation


- 1.1 That the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee review the Annual Governance Statement for 2021-22.

2 Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To inform the committee of the contents of the council's Annual Governance Statement for 2021-22.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The council has adopted a code of corporate governance which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government and underpins the Corporate Plan. The framework requires the council to prepare an Annual Governance Statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which it complies with its code of governance on an annual basis, including how it has monitored the effectiveness of the annual governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes in the coming period. Every local authority must prepare a governance statement to accompany its Statement of Accounts.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- 4.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the council is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 4.3 The council has adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government and completes and publishes a governance statement with its statement of accounts.
- 4.4 The statement is signed by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council, who have a responsibility to ensure that the document is supported by reliable evidence and accurately reflects the council's internal control environment.



4.5 The governance statement has been prepared using the assurances provided from a variety of sources including external and internal audit, the strategic risk register, and the various other external reviews that took place during 2021-22 and subsequent years.

4.6 As a result of delays in the completion of the council's 2021-22 Statement of Accounts, the governance statement for 2021-22 can only now begin to be finalised, as such a statement should continue to operate up to the date of the approval of the Statement of Accounts which are now nearing completion. A further review of the statement will be carried out prior to their completion in order to ensure the statement remains valid.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	The council is required to prepare a governance statement to report publicly on the extent to which it complies with its code of governance, including how it has monitored the effectiveness of the governance arrangements in the year and on any planned changes in the coming period. The council's governance statement must accompany its Statement of Accounts.
Risk:	The Annual Governance Statement takes into account the whole of the council's risk management framework.
Equality:	It was not necessary to undertake 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 climate change implications from this report.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no direct corporate parenting implications from this report.

6. Appendices

Annual Governance Statement 2021-22

7. Background Papers

None



Annual Governance Statement 2021/22



Date

Foreword

We are pleased to present Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22.

We have now entered the second year of government intervention, and are working constructively with our Commissioners, against the targets for improvement we have established together.

But we also recognise we still have a long way to go on this journey.

While the Council is now working within a much stronger governance system, it will take time and hard work to become fully established. We still have significant gaps in capacity and capability to fill, and risks to be managed.

We have therefore taken the opportunity provided by the legal requirement to produce an Annual Governance Statement to take stock of our systems, to record the progress we have made, and to be honest about the progress we still need to make.

We welcome the engagement of our Commissioners, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and our external auditors Grant Thornton in scrutinising and challenging our systems and encouraging and supporting us to improve them further.

**Councillor Kerrie Carmichael,
Leader of the Council**

**Shokat Lal
Chief Executive**

Date:

Date:

1. Introduction

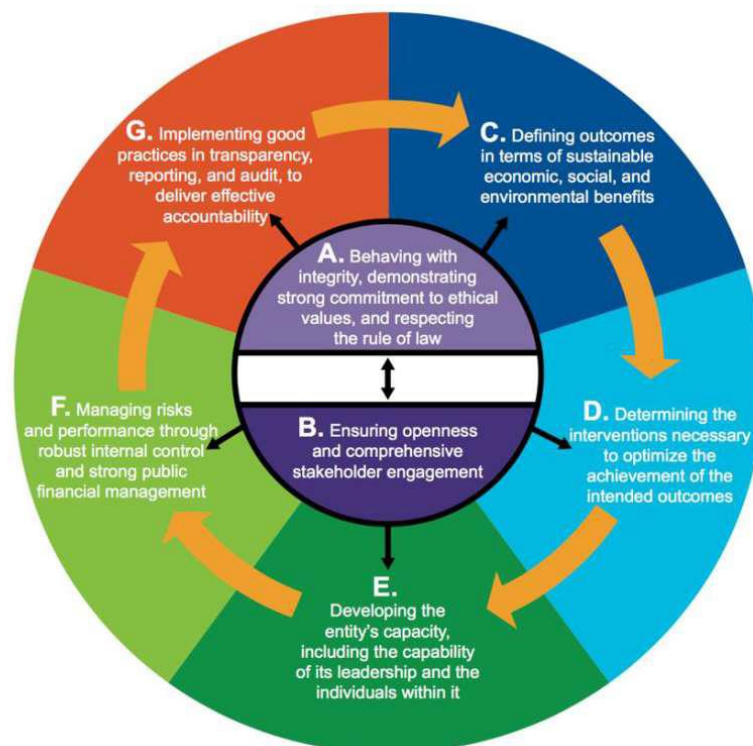
- 1.1 This Annual Governance Statement (the “Statement”) is a public facing assessment of the effectiveness of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council’s) governance framework during 2021-22. The Statement contains three main elements:
- (i) An explanation of the Council’s governance framework and context;
 - (ii) The Council’s review of the effectiveness of the governance framework in the reporting period based on internal and external data and assessments; and
 - (iii) The Council’s assessment of significant governance issues facing the Council and its action plan to manage and mitigate those issues.
- 1.2 Delivering good governance is a process of continuous review and improvement. This Statement provides a “snapshot” of the effectiveness of governance at the point of publication within the Council’s ongoing programme to review and improve its governance, as set out in its action plans.
- 1.3 This Statement meets the Council’s duty to prepare and approve an annual governance statement under regulation 6 (1) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015. The Statement will be approved by the Council’s Audit and Risk Assurance Committee under its delegated powers and signed by the Committee’s Chair and the Chief Executive.

Scope of responsibility

- 1.4 The Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. The Council also has a statutory best value duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- 1.5 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place robust arrangements for the governance of all its functions and the effective discharge of its duties and obligations, including the implementation of appropriate arrangements for the management and mitigation of risk. These arrangements are set out in this statement.
- 1.6 This statement is prepared to comply with the requirements of regulation 4(3) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the publication of an annual governance statement to accompany the statement of accounts.

2. Governance

- 2.1 Governance is the term used to describe the system by which the Council directs and controls its functions and relate these to its communities. It is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest, and accountable manner.
- 2.2 Good governance is vital in contributing to effective:
- (i) leadership and management;
 - (ii) performance and risk management;
 - (iii) stewardship of public money; and
 - (iv) public engagement and outcomes for our citizens and service users.
- 2.3 Conversely, weak, or poor governance is likely to have a detrimental impact and the Council's ability to deliver best value.
- 2.4 The Council has a Local Code of Corporate Governance, in line with the latest principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government.' These principles have been adopted in this statement and details of how they operate in the Council are set out below –



2.5 The Council would advise that job titles and responsibilities referenced within this statement have, since the time period this statement covers, been subject to review and update. For purposes of clarity, the following table sets out titles used within the statement and the current designated post for purpose of this responsibility.

2021/22 job title	Current job title
Director of Finance and Resources	Interim Director of Finance (note – the responsibilities will transfer to the new post of Executive Director of Finance and Transformation from May/June 2024).
Director of Law and Governance	Monitoring Officer - Assistant Director, Legal and Assurance

3. Governance and Control Frameworks

3.1 The Council’s governance framework comprises:

- (i) a suite of governance and strategic policies and documents;
- (ii) its systems and processes of governance; and
- (iii) the Council’s culture and people that direct and control the authority and its activities and through which it engages with and accounts to Sandwell’s communities.

3.2 The Council’s governance framework enables it to:

- (i) monitor and measure the achievement of its strategic objectives;
- (ii) deliver and measure assurance of best value;
- (iii) act ethically and openly; and
- (iv) manage risk to a reasonable level recognising that no governance framework can eliminate all risk or give an absolute assurance of effectiveness.

Extent of control and influence

3.3 This statement reflects the governance framework in place across the wider Group (the Council and companies within the substantive control of the Council) including:

- (i) **Sandwell Children’s Trust Limited (SCT)** – this is a trading subsidiary

company wholly owned by the Council and was set up on 1 April 2018, following a government Statutory Direction under Section 479A of the Education act 1996) to deliver children’s social care services. The Council is the primary funder to the Company, with a Council director and elected member represented on the Trust’s Board of Directors. There is a Service Delivery Contract (including a Service Support Agreement) between the Council and the Trust which sets out the contractual and governance arrangements between the parties.

- (ii) **Sandwell Land and Property Limited (SLP)** – this is wholly owned by the Council, was set up in January 2011 as a holding company for school assets. The company has now been dissolved as the protection originally believed to be afforded by the transfer of school assets to the Company can now be achieved in a more effective way.

- 3.4 In addition to the above, there is also a range of key services that are delivered through partnerships on behalf of the Council including with Serco, Sandwell Leisure Trust, and Riverside Housing. Contracts are in place and monitored for these arrangements

Purpose

- 3.5 The Governance Framework outlines the Council’s culture and values and comprises the systems and processes by which the Council is directed and controlled and details those activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads the community.
- 3.6 It enables the Council to monitor the achievements of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services and ultimately the desired outcomes.
- 3.7 Risk management and internal control are a significant part of the Council’s corporate Governance Framework and are designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. They cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The systems of risk management and internal control are based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council’s policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively, and economically.
- 3.8 The Governance Framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2022 and up to the date of the approval of the delayed Statement of Accounts.

Policy Framework

- 3.9 The **Council’s Vision 2030** outlines ten Ambitions for the long-term future of the Borough of Sandwell –

1. Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.
2. We have excellent and affordable public transport that connects us to all local centres and to jobs in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, the airport, and the wider West Midlands.
3. Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.
4. We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes.
5. Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.
6. Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure, and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.
7. Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.
8. Sandwell has become a location of choice for industries of the future where the local economy and high performing companies continue to grow.
9. Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.
10. Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.



3.10 The Council has developed a corporate plan '**The Sandwell Plan – Big Plans**' for a Great Place that sets out what the Council will do to deliver Vision 2030 and the 10 Ambitions over the next five years and is based upon six strategic outcomes. The driving theme behind the Plan is One Team: One Council, to reflect a culture of the organisation through strong leadership in an honest, open, and transparent environment.

3.11 The Plan was refreshed in September 2021 to ensure the strategic priorities reflected the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our communities and the services they need.

OUR STRATEGIC OUTCOMES



THE BEST START IN
LIFE FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE



PEOPLE
LIVE WELL
AND AGE
WELL



STRONG
RESILIENT
COMMUNITIES



QUALITY HOMES
IN THRIVING
NEIGHBOURHOODS



A STRONG AND
INCLUSIVE
ECONOMY



A CONNECTED
AND ACCESSIBLE
SANDWELL



Decision-making

The Constitution

3.12 The Council has a Constitution which sets out its rules for decision making and the checks and balances in place to ensure decision making is lawful, subject to scrutiny and is open and transparent, including but not limited to:

- (i) An **ethical framework** with Codes of Conduct for both Councillors and officers and obligations to register and declare private interests and gifts and hospitality;
- (ii) Clear delineation of the **separation of powers** between those exercised by the Leader and Cabinet and by Full Council and the powers delegated to committees by Full Council set out in their terms of reference;
- (iii) **Access to information rules** requiring decision making and other formal meetings of Councillors are held with advance notice in public and public access to all relevant documentation, unless the Council can demonstrate it is in the public interest to withhold the information;
- (iv) **Financial Procedure Rules** to govern how public money delivers best value;
- (v) **Contract Standing Orders** to govern how the Council procures goods, services, and works from external contractors; and
- (vi) A protocol on how Councillors and officers should work together (the “**Member-Officer Protocol**”):

3.13 The Full Council and the Leader and Cabinet have also agreed a **Scheme of Delegation** of executive and non-executive powers to officers. Corporate Directors are required to agree a scheme of delegation for the exercise of powers to officers within their directorates. The Leadership Team (see below) has agreed standard delegations to officers at tiers 3 and 4 of the officer structure.

3.14 In addition to the Constitution, the Council must comply with the general law as it governs local authorities and as interpreted by the courts. The constitutional rules are supplemented on an operational level by the Council’s clear framework for forward planning of decisions and workflows to ensure high quality evidence-based decision-making. The Constitution can be found [here](#) and includes the [Scheme of Delegation](#).

The Leader and Cabinet

3.15 The Council has adopted the strong ‘leader and cabinet’ form of executive arrangement under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 with a Cabinet of up to ten Councillors, meeting in public to make

executive decisions on matters of strategy and borough-wide significance.

- 3.16 Each Cabinet Member also has a portfolio of responsibility for the delivery of services, which are aligned to each of the 10 Vision Ambitions, for which they are accountable
- 3.17 The Leader has agreed a scheme of delegation of executive powers under which:
- (i) The Leader and Cabinet make significant decisions collectively, save in cases of urgency;
 - (ii) The Leader and Cabinet make all key decisions with a value over £500,000 or where there is a significant effect on two or more wards.
 - (iii) A Scheme of Delegation of all other “non-key” decisions are delegated to officers with powers dependent on their seniority and areas of responsibility.
- 3.18 The Constitution and the statutory framework governing local authorities reserve specific decision-making powers to the Full Council of all the Councillors. Most importantly, this includes the power to set the annual budget and Council tax and agree major policies. The Leader and Cabinet must make decisions within the budget and policy framework set by the Full Council.
- 3.19 Full Council appoints committees to makes decisions in specific areas, such as planning, licensing, and audit. Each committee has terms of reference setting out their delegated powers. Full Council and committees also delegate powers to officers. Full Council agrees its Scheme of Delegation of Powers to officers at every annual Council meeting in May.
- 3.20 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is critical to the oversight of good governance as its remit includes receiving assurance on the Council’s financial management, internal control, and anti-fraud measures, including the approval of the Council’s statement of accounts which includes this Statement.

Overview and Scrutiny

- 3.21 Full Council must appoint one or more member bodies to discharge statutory overview and scrutiny functions. The Council has 5 Scrutiny Management Boards –
- (i) Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
 - (ii) Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board
 - (iii) Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board
 - (iv) Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board
 - (v) Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board
- 3.22 Each Scrutiny Management Board agrees an annual work plan focusing on strategic priorities and adopts a “critical friend” approach towards the Leader

and Cabinet. The most effective scrutiny occurs pre-decision, and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny committees now each have a pro-active work programme. However, if a Scrutiny Management Board wishes to review a Cabinet decision after it has been made, it can exercise its power of call in.

- 3.23 Each Scrutiny Board may make recommendations to the Leader and Cabinet on the decision, who are required to reconsider their decisions taking account of any scrutiny recommendations.

All Councillors

- 3.24 The Council's practices are underpinned by three overarching principles:

- (i) **Respect for others.** Councillors should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person and by treating people with respect, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race, religion and belief, disability, age, marriage, and civil partnership. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the Council's statutory officers and its other employees.
- (ii) **Duty to uphold the law.** Councillors should uphold the law and, on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust that the public has entrusted in them.
- (iii) **Stewardship.** Councillors should do whatever they are able to do to ensure that the Council uses its resources prudently and in accordance with the law.

Conduct and behaviour of Councillors

- 3.25 The Council has a clear ethical framework based on the Standards of Conduct in Public Life (the Nolan Principles). The Monitoring Officer is the Council's lead officer for maintaining high standards of conduct in the authority reporting to the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee. The Committee has an independent (non-voting chair) and a further independent person appointed under the Localism Act 2011 to provide advice to the Monitoring Officer, the Committee, and individual Councillors subject to complaints.
- 3.26 There is a Code of Conduct for Councillors, including obligations to register and declare specific private interests at meetings (and not participate where required) and to declare gifts and hospitality from third parties. Councillors are required to receive training on the Code of Conduct and ethical standards.
- 3.27 The Council has a complaints procedure for the consideration of complaints that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for handling complaints and may require a complaint to be investigated. The Monitoring Officer may refer an investigation to a hearing by the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee to determine whether a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct and, if so, the sanction.

- 3.28 A Code of Conduct for employees and disciplinary policy is in place with an obligation to declare and register private interests and gifts and hospitality from third parties.
- 3.29 The Council's Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee has an annual work plan and receives a regular report on the Ethical Framework providing details of the declarations and conduct in the reporting period to identify issues and patterns for the Monitoring Officer and Full Council to consider.
- 3.30 The Council is committed to creating and maintaining an anti-fraud culture and high ethical standards in the administration of public funds. Commercial relationships between the Council and third-party organisations or individuals are subject to a robust due diligence process.

Officers

- 3.31 The Council's officers are employed to advise Councillors on matters of policy and strategy and to implement decisions at operational level using delegated powers (agreed under the Scheme of Delegation). Officers manage the Council's staff and all other aspects of day-to-day operations. The Council's management structure can be found in the Constitution [here](#)
- 3.32 The Council's Member Officer Protocol provides practical guidance on how Councillors and officers work together positively, respecting their different roles in delivering the Council's priorities. The Protocol provides guidance on the boundaries between the roles and responsibilities of Councillors and officers and can be found [here](#)
- 3.33 The Council has appointed officers to discharge powers that must be assigned to an individual officer, collectively known as statutory officers. There are three principal statutory officers for governance purposes (known as the "golden triangle"):
- (i) **Head of Paid Service** is the Chief Executive, who is responsible for all Council staff to deliver the Council's services and functions;
 - (ii) **Section 151 Officer** is the Director of Finance and Resources, who is responsible for ensuring the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs and ensuring value for money; and
 - (iii) **Monitoring Officer** is the Director of Law and Governance, who is responsible for ensuring legality and promoting high standards of public conduct.
- 3.34 Both the s.151 officer and monitoring officer have a statutory duty to suspend a Council decision being made if they consider it is likely to result in unlawful expenditure in the case of the s.151 officer or an unlawful decision in the case of the monitoring officer. The s.151 officer must also ensure the Council sets a

balanced budget each year and reports on the robustness of the Council's finances as part of the annual budget.

3.35 Other key statutory officers include:

- (i) **Director of Children Services**, who is responsible for the safeguarding of all children and young people;
- (ii) **Director of Adult Social Services**, who is responsible for safeguarding of vulnerable adults and meeting the needs of all adults with social care needs; and
- (iii) **Director of Public Health**, who has overall responsibility for the Council's duties to assess, protect and improve the health and wellbeing of the people in its area.

3.36 Leadership Team (LT) is the Council's senior officer group led by the Chief Executive and comprises the Council's Directors and other key officer invitees as required.

3.37 LT has overall responsibility and accountability for the vision and culture of the organisation, the implementation and development of political strategies and priorities, the organisation and management of staff, and delivery against the Council's priorities. Whilst LT as a body has no formal delegated decision-making powers, its members agree to exercise their delegated powers in a consistent way across the Council and the rationale for doing so.

3.38 LT provides a leading role in setting the culture of the authority and modelling standards of behaviour and performance, including ensuring it seeks and listens to feedback from staff and their representatives (trade unions).

3.39 Directors are personally accountable for the performance of services, compliance with Council policies and practices and systems of internal control within their directorate. The s.151 officer requires Directors to provide an annual letter providing assurance about their services and budget delivery and raise any concerns. These letters are reviewed by the s.151 officer and Finance for any concerns and issues and will be used in future performance management processes and will also provide supporting evidence when the Council undertakes a further self-assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code to demonstrate the Council has an effective framework of financial accountability. Each Directorate has a management structure to cascade information, guidance, and decisions from LT through the organisation and to allow for feedback back into LT.

3.40 The Council has a framework for the training and development of members and officers at all levels to ensure it has the capacity to meet the demands of delivering the Sandwell Plan, Vision 2030 and operational services. The appraisal system cascades the "golden thread" between the priorities in the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030 into individual officers' performance objectives and development needs.

3.41 LT and the Leader and Cabinet work collaboratively to deliver the Council's priorities and progress the development of policy through forward planning and cabinet reports. There are weekly joint briefing meetings and individual directors work with their respective Cabinet lead members, including consultation on the exercise of delegated powers and the development of future Cabinet reports within the portfolio. Outcomes from these meetings are fed into LT and Cabinet and joint meetings to ensure cross-cutting issues are identified and addressed.

4. Putting the principles into practice in Sandwell

- 4.1 Sandwell Council is confident that its governance arrangements are robust. Following central government intervention and the appointment of independent Commissioners the Council has reviewed, with the assistance of external specialist organisations, its corporate arrangements and has implemented a schedule of changes. The Council recognises, however, that improvement and progress will need to continue and evolve in order that we continue to respond to extensive change and to meet rising government and customer expectations about the quality and responsiveness of services.
- 4.2 The Council has an Improvement Plan in place that is monitored monthly by Leadership Team and quarterly by Cabinet, Audit and Scrutiny. The Council reports its progress to Central Government every six months. Significant progress has been made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan and the Council's progress has been recognised by the Commissioners and by our external reviewers (Grant Thornton, CIPFA and the Local Government Association (LGA)) who conducted follow up reviews in late 2022.
- 4.3 The Council acknowledges the amount of work ahead to continue the Council's improvement. Key areas of focus are organisational culture, customer journey, transformation and delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- 4.4 As indicated above, the Council's governance framework is consistent with the seven core principles of the CIPFA / SOLACE framework –

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial mismanagement

Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

- 4.5 Key elements of Council systems and processes form part of the Group's Governance Framework and the table below sets out the evidence relied upon that provides assurance that the CIPFA/ SOLACE framework has been complied with –

Core Principles of the CIPFA/ SOLACE Framework	Governance Framework Providing Assurance	Assurances Received and Review of Effectiveness	Issues Identified for action
<p>A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.</p> <p>B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.</p> <p>D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.</p> <p>E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.</p> <p>F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.</p> <p>G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Constitution (including the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer, and Chief Financial Officer) • Director of Public Health • Corporate Plan • Medium term financial plan • Strategic risk register • Scrutiny Function • Codes of conduct • Schemes of delegation • Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee • Audit and Risk Assurance Committee • Internal and external audit • Independent external reviews (Ofsted, ICO) • Code of Corporate Governance • Whistleblowing and Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy • Information Governance Board • Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations • Modern.gov - Committee management information system • Children's Trust Strategic Partnership, Operational Partnership, and Improvement Board • Customer Complaints and compliments system (My Sandwell portal) • Schools Forum • Health and Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant Thornton – Value for Money Governance Review • CIPFA's Financial Management Review • LGA Corporate Peer Challenge • Annual Statement of Accounts (delayed) • External Audit – Audit Findings Report (delayed as a result of the above) • Annual Internal Audit Report • Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report • Member and Executive Development Programmes • Ofsted Annual Report of HMCI of Education, Children's Services and Skills • Annual Local Government Ombudsman report • Annual Fraud Report • Sandwell Safeguarding Adult's Board and Children's Board Annual Reports • Annual Scrutiny Report • Investors in People • Ofsted monitoring visits • Sandwell Children's Trust Ltd Statement of Internal Control • Staff surveys • Self-Assessment - Financial Management Code 	<p>As detailed later in this Statement, following a range of external reviews, primarily the Grant Thornton Governance Review, LGA Corporate Peer Challenge the CIPFA Financial Management Review and the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, a number of statutory, key, improvement and other recommendations were made. These formed the basis of the Council's Improvement Plan which incorporated all of these recommendations. This will be the key driver for improving the Council's governance arrangements going forward.</p>

4.6 As detailed later in this Statement, following a range of external reviews, primarily the Grant Thornton Governance Review, LGA Corporate Peer Challenge the CIPFA Financial Management Review and the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, a number of statutory, key, improvement and other recommendations were made. These formed the basis of the Council's

Improvement Plan which incorporated all these recommendations. This is the key driver for improving the Council's governance arrangements going forward.

- 4.7 In reviewing the Council's priorities and its implications for its governance arrangements, the Council carries out an annual review of the elements that make up the governance framework to ensure it remains effective.

5. Key changes and challenges

5.1 The key changes to the Governance framework during 2021/22, or after the year end but prior to this statement being finalised include:

- The Leader of the Council resigned in September 2021, and the Statutory Deputy Leader assumed the role in accordance with legislative provisions until November 2021, when a new Leader and a new cabinet were appointed.
- A senior management restructure was completed during the year which was designed to meet the needs of the organisation as outlined in the Corporate Plan – “Big Plans for a Great Place.” Following the departure of the Chief Executive in July 2021, an interim Chief Executive was appointed in August 2021. Following national government intervention in March 2022, the interim Chief Executive was appointed as the Managing Director/Commissioner and was responsible for the oversight of the Council’s Corporate Improvement Plan. A new Chief Executive was appointed by the Council in November 2022 and commenced with the authority in February 2023.
- A new senior management structure was approved by Full Council in October 2023. As of December 2023, recruitment to the new Executive Director posts is underway.
- Following the Value for Money Governance Review conducted by Grant Thornton, Council approved an Improvement Plan in January 2022 which responded to the 37 recommendations of that report. This included three Statutory Recommendations. This Improvement Plan was revised and expanded in June 2022 to incorporate the recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (February 2022), the CIPFA Financial Management Review (February 2022) and Statutory Directions received from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. A comprehensive assurance framework has been established to ensure not only progress in achieving the activity required, but that the necessary improvements had been embedded and were sustainable. This included regular monitoring, capturing evidence of impact, reporting to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, and inviting external reviewers to undertake follow-up visits. Further detail on the Council’s Improvement Plan and framework is set out below.
- Completion of the review and update of the Member Code of Conduct was completed in 2021. The review included arrangements for dealing with complaints, social media policy for Elected Members, and gifts and hospitality.
- The Council has completed a review of its Scrutiny arrangements. A change programme arising from the review has been implemented and progress is being embedded and monitored.
- A holistic review of governance arrangements commenced in March 2022, following the review of corporate decision making by the Council’s external auditor and the Local Government Association.

- A Towns Deal Superboard was dissolved, and three local boards were established to oversee the delivery of the Towns Fund Programme and the projects within the town deal areas, respectively.
- An Equalities Commission was set up to provide further understanding and assurance on equalities across the Council. A dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion service was established in 2022 to support delivery of the Commissions ambitions. The EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) Strategic Roadmap and Action Plan was introduced in 2022.
- Implementation of a Corporate Performance Management Framework from April 2022, covering Council performance against a suite of measures and progress in delivering outcomes in the Corporate Plan. Regular reporting to senior officers, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees has seen an increased level of corporate oversight of key issues and action taken as a result, such as the Customer Journey Programme.
- Establishment of a Cyber Board to ensure that the Council has an awareness of, identifies, monitors, and manages any cyber related risks.
- Development and approval of a Climate Change Strategy 2020-2041 for Sandwell.
- Statutory Officers Group was established to provide a forum for the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer to discuss issues and matters arising in relation to their respective statutory roles, functions, duties, powers, and responsibilities. The group continues to meet with political group leaders and secretaries with a focus on the Council's governance infrastructure.
- The launch of 'My Councillor' portal – a platform to efficiently progress Councillor casework across the Council commenced in March 2021. This continues to provide members with an electronic casework system and is scheduled to be reviewed as part of the Council's commitment to improving relationships with its customers.
- The Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations were reviewed and revised following feedback from an independent CIPFA review. Changes were approved by Council in September and November 2022.
- Update of the emergency plan taking account of the experiences during Covid-19.
- Self-assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code.

Covid-19 Considerations (during 2021/22)

- 5.2 In 2020/21 and 2021/22 the Council, as with all other local authorities and Sandwell Children's Trust, continued to adapt the ways in which it worked to address Covid-19 in terms of its governance arrangements, safeguarding the borough's residents, supporting Sandwell businesses, and assisting with the roll out of Central Government Covid-19 related announcements, initiatives and policies. The Council's approach to governance during Covid-19 was clearly set out and shared with Councillors, the key aspects of which included:

- The Sandwell Covid-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan which outlined the locally led system for Sandwell to protect and promote health and wellbeing during the pandemic. This was further updated in April 2021 to include new challenges that had since been presented.
 - Sandwell Strategic Incident Management Team (SIMT) which was responsible for the day-to-day Covid-19 response and linked into regional governance structures including the Strategic Coordinating Group and Public Health England.
 - The deployment of the Council's Emergency Committee as the primary decision-making body during the initial lockdown period.
 - Enhanced delegated decision-making arrangements that enabled the Council to respond to the outbreak within agreed decision-making parameters.
 - Changes were also made to Financial Regulations during the emergency period, all of which later reverted to pre Covid-19 arrangements.
- 5.3 A Reset and Recovery Board was established in June 2020 with agreed Terms of Reference overseeing the emergency response (which included the establishment of a temporary food hub and welfare hub to support the most vulnerable) and the rest and recovery programme of activity. The Reset and Recovery programme involved new ways of working with officers working remotely and delivering services virtually where appropriate.
- 5.4 Some front-line services initially ceased or were delivered with reduced frequency. These were only restarted once a full risk assessment and reset request had been completed and signed off by the Council's health and safety team and Public Health team and approved by the Reset and Recovery Board. This process continued until 2022 when national restrictions and guidance relating to managing Covid-19 were relaxed.
- 5.5 Following the enactment of the provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 introduced in May 2020 on remote meetings, a full range of Council meetings took place using these powers and were streamed and made available on the Council's website.
- 5.6 Development of a Covid-19 risk register interfacing with the Council's strategic risk register ensured that the Council was aware of and took account of the key Covid-19 risks. The register was regularly presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee during 2020/21 and at the request of the Committee was later merged into the Council's Strategic risk register.
- 5.7 The Corporate Plan was refreshed with learning and recovery from the impacts of Covid-19 being a key theme that runs through the plan.

6. 2021/22 Review of Effectiveness

- 6.1 The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its Governance Framework including the system of internal control.
- 6.2 The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of Councillors and senior officers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance framework, Internal Audit's annual report, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee, the Governance and Constitution Review Committee, the Scrutiny function, and reports made by the Council's external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates (all of which are publicly available through the Council's website).
- 6.3 During 2021/22 the Council also had several external reviews primarily the Grant Thornton Governance Review, LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, the CIPFA Financial Management Review and the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Where appropriate, these have also informed the annual review of effectiveness.
- 6.4 A key component of the review of effectiveness is through the work of the Council's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and during the year the Committee continued helping to ensure that the Council had a modern, effective and risk focussed Committee. The Committee maintained its focus on the Council's risk management arrangements, gaining an increased assurance that the Council was managing its strategic risks and Covid-19 risks effectively, and maintained a strong working relationship, through regular meetings with the Council's External Auditors Grant Thornton, the Internal Auditors and Senior Officers.
- 6.5 Several recommendations regarding the way the Committee operates were made in the Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance review, and these were incorporated into the Council's Improvement Plan and continue to be monitored. In their report following their return visit in October 2022, Grant Thornton noted that in relation to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee they "found no evidence of significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks". All recommendations from Grant Thornton's initial Governance Review and their follow up visit have now either been embedded within business as usual or have been addressed.

Commissioners' Progress Reports

- 6.6 Commissioners' monitor the Council's progress in delivering the Improvement Plan. Regular meetings take place between Commissioners, the Chief Executive, Leadership Team and statutory officers. Commissioners also meet with the Leader, Cabinet Members as required.
- 6.7 The Commissioners report to the Secretary of State on the Council's progress

every six months. Reports have been published in December 2022, March 2023, and July 2023. Their fourth report is due to be submitted to the Secretary of State in early January 2024.

- 6.8 The first Commissioners' report to the Secretary of State observed the need for very tangible changes to be made in the Council in the immediate term reflecting the then early stages of the intervention with a recognition that "there are many challenges ahead". It was acknowledged that the Council had adopted a single improvement plan which encompassed actions in relation to all the recommendations in best value, governance and financial reviews. In turn, Commissioners had developed twelve "proxies for success" intended to use to evaluate progress during this intervention period.
- 6.9 Commissioners pointed to several early indicators of welcome progress including the arrival of new officers, the willingness of Sandwell's Cabinet and Councillors to start to respond to the recommendations from the reviews and very early signs of culture change.
- 6.10 The Commissioners second report to the Secretary of State provided commentary on improvements they have seen at the Council since June 2022 and made further comment on follow up reviews conducted by Grant Thornton, CIPFA and the Local Government Association. The Commissioners also confirmed the Council's appointment of a permanent Chief Executive. The Commissioners submitted an addendum to the report to account for the CIPFA review being finalised after the report was submitted.
- 6.11 In their most recent report published in July 2023, Commissioners concluded that there was cautious optimism for the improvement journey of the Council. Commissioners found the Council's leadership at political and officer level, had shown grip and determination to improve at pace and that if the level of focus, energy and commitment observed was maintained, then the required progress would be made. Commissioners in turn signalled their beginning to step back from the Council and have challenged Sandwell to demonstrate its ability to take forward its improvement independently.
- 6.12 The Commissioners' fourth report is being prepared currently and is due to be submitted to the Secretary of State in early January 2024.

Internal Audit

- 6.13 Internal Audit reviewed itself against the governance arrangements set out in the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit and the Council can confirm that the arrangements conform to these requirements, and general compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- 6.14 The Internal Audit Opinion for 2021/22 given in their annual report, was that as a result of a number of the key governance issues raised during the year, predominantly those detailed in the Grant Thornton Value for Money review with its accompanying statutory and key recommendations, and the action taken by the Government in appointing commissioners to the Council, Internal

Audit were unable to provide reasonable assurance for 2021/22 that the Council had fully adequate and effective governance processes. However, from the work they completed they were able to provide reasonable assurance that both risk management and internal control processes remained adequate.

- 6.15 They also noted that they had issued several limited assurance reports during the year. Similarly, there had continued to be delays in the finalising and signing-off of the Council's Statement of Accounts including both 2020/21 and 2021/22. This had a subsequent effect in delaying the receipt of the Annual External Auditor's Reports, which can be used to help inform the annual internal audit opinion, and in the ability to produce the Annual Governance Statement in a timely manner.
- 6.16 However, they also commented that during the year a number of activities and actions had been put in place as part of the Council's improvement journey, including an appointed Commissioner alongside a new Leadership Team, and a Single Improvement Plan pulling together the recommendations from a number of recent key independent and external reviews (including Grant Thornton's Value for Money Governance Review, CIPFA's Financial Management Review and the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge). Following the improvement actions the Council subsequently put in place, in 2022/23 Internal Audit were able to give reasonable assurance that the Council had adequate and effective governance processes.

External Audit

- 6.17 As referred to elsewhere in this Statement, following delays in the completion and sign-off of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts in August 2023, the Council's External Auditors Grant Thornton were also still auditing the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 and once completed, this should also provide an independent audit opinion of the financial statements.
- 6.18 Also, during the 2021/22 year the External Auditors issued their comprehensive Value for Money Governance review with its statutory, key and improvement recommendations, all of which have helped inform and drive the Council's Improvement Plan. Further reference is made to these throughout this statement.

CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government

- 6.19 The Council is required to confirm whether its financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in Local Government. The Statement sets out five principles which define the core activities and behaviours that belong to the role of the CFO and the organisational arrangements needed to support them.
- 6.20 A new Director of Finance joined the Council in August 2021. They subsequently left the Council in September 2023, and an interim s.151 Officer was appointed

in September 2023. A review of the role of the Council's s.151 Officer against the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer will be undertaken.

- 6.21 The Chief Finance Officer has been involved in preparing this statement and is satisfied that no matters of significance have been omitted from it.

Managing the risk of Fraud and Corruption

- 6.22 The Council has embedded effective standards for countering fraud and corruption through the adoption of and adherence to the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption. The Code is based on five principles and having considered these, the Council is satisfied that the organisation has adopted a response that is appropriate for its fraud and corruption risks and commits to maintain its vigilance to tackle fraud. During the 2021/22 year, a key area of focus on fraud risks was around pre and post payment assurance checks for the distribution of the various Covid-19 business support grants.

Sandwell Children's Trust Limited

- 6.23 The Sandwell Children's Trust became fully operationally on 1 April 2018. The Trust while owned by the Council has day-to-day operational independence with regards to its management and the delivery of children's social care services and is managed by a board of non-executive and executive directors. The Trust's accounts are audited separately by external auditors and for 2021/22 an unqualified opinion was provided.
- 6.24 The Trust's Internal Auditors provided reasonable assurance that the Trust had adequate and effective governance, risk management and internal control processes.
- 6.25 The statutory duty to provide children's social care services, however, remains with the Council. As such, comprehensive governance arrangements including Operational and Strategic Partnership Boards and a Service Delivery Contract and are in place to enable the Council to monitor progress of the Trust, consider performance and operational issues on a regular basis, and hold the Trust Board to account.
- 6.26 The Contract between the Council and the Trust stipulates the Trust must ensure that children's social care services are assessed by Ofsted as 'Requires Improvement' by 2020 and 'Good' by 2022. Due to Covid-19, during 2020 the relief clause within the Contract was enacted by the Council in respect of this measure because of Ofsted confirming that regulatory inspections were being suspended and would not take place again until 2021. However, a remote focussed visit by Ofsted was undertaken on 3 and 4 March 2021 to look at how social care services were being delivered during the pandemic. This found that:

“Both Sandwell Borough Council and Sandwell Children’s Trust have risen to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been able to demonstrate continued and enhanced partnership working across the Borough. The trust has managed to ensure that many of the most vulnerable children have been visited in their own homes, and, in partnership with schools, it has continued to identify and support those most in need.”

6.27 However, it also found that weaknesses in some areas identified in previous inspections remained and required addressing.

The Financial Management Code

6.28 The Council undertook a self-assessment exercise against the new Financial Management Code. The Code includes the following core principles by which authorities should be guided in managing their finances:

- Organisational leadership – demonstrating a clear strategic direction based on a vision in which financial management is embedded into organisational culture.
- Accountability – financial management is based on medium-term financial planning, which drives the annual budget process supported by effective risk management, quality supporting data and whole life costs.
- Financial management is undertaken with transparency at its core using consistent, meaningful, and understandable data, reported with appropriate frequency and with evidence of periodic officer action and elected member decision making.
- Adherence to professional standards is promoted by the leadership team and is evidenced.
- Sources of assurance are recognised as an effective tool mainstreamed into financial management and include political scrutiny and the results of external audit, internal audit, and inspection.
- The long-term sustainability of local services is at the heart of all financial management processes and is evidenced by prudent use of public resources.

6.29 The self-assessment found the Council to be in compliance with the Code. However, there were a limited number of matters where areas for improvement were identified. As a result of this, an action plan was prepared, and its implementation continued throughout the year.

Constitution Review

6.30 The ongoing review of the Council’s constitution and decision-making processes has continued during 2021/22 and this work will continue during up to 2024. The review to date has introduced changes to Cabinet, Executive Member and Officer delegation, a refresh of the Financial Regulations and Procurement and Contract procedure Rules; a review of the Scrutiny function around pre decision making and policy development; update to the Council’s decision-making arrangements including the forward plan and report templates

and report writing.

6.31 All elements of the constitution will have been reviewed by 2024. The review is being overseen by the Governance and Constitution Review Committee with the opportunity for all Councillors to be involved in the construct of any changes.

6.32 New Member and Executive Development Programmes have been delivered that have informed by the needs of Members and focus on their development, training, and support requirements from both a corporate and personal Councillor perspective. A newly elected Councillor induction programme was introduced in 2021 and has been subject to annual review and refresh to best meet the needs of those new to the Councillor role.

Previous Governance Issues from 2020/21

6.33 Governance issues which were originally identified back in 2020/21 and reported in the 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement are listed in summary below. Due to the passage of time since they were first identified, where such issues were still appropriate, they have been absorbed into the governance and wider key lines of enquiries included by Grant Thornton in their Value for Money Governance Review, and which form the basis of the Council's Improvement Plan.

- Children's Services
- Resilience of the Medium-Term Financial Plan
- Records Retention
- Technology Modernisation Programme
- Grants to Voluntary Sectors
- Inclusive Economy Deal
- Sandwell Land and Property Limited
- External Audit Recommendations
- Financial Management Code
- Equalities
- Legacy Issues Impacting on Governance
- Performance Management Framework

7. Significant Governance Issues

- 7.1 Based on the outcome of several external reviews, as already referenced throughout this statement, culminating in the Council's Improvement Plan, this is a summary of the key areas where issues were identified, and action is being taken to make the necessary improvements.

Value for Money Governance review

- 7.2 In December 2021 Grant Thornton issued their Value for Money Governance review making the following recommendations:

Statutory Recommendations

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Key Recommendations

- The Council's leadership needs to be relentless in its focus in delivering and embedding sustainable change and use its past history as a reference point when focusing on improvement.
- Critical to embedding the transformation and change required will be the appointment of the right permanent Chief Executive. The Council must ensure an effective recruitment process, including attracting a pool of appropriate candidates.
- The Council should ensure that a corporate performance framework is agreed so that the implementation of the Corporate Plan can be effectively monitored, and there is collective corporate responsibility rather than silo working.
- Members in key statutory roles, in particular in relation to Cabinet,

scrutiny, standards, and audit, need to be provided with effective induction and ongoing development, training, and support. The member development programme should be reviewed to ensure corporate governance forms part of the training for members with governance roles.

- The Council should develop and agree an action plan in relation to the statutory, key and improvement recommendations, ensuring that they are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound.

7.3 A range of Improvement Recommendations were also made across the following key lines of enquiry:

- The Children's Trust
- Sandwell Leisure Trust
- Providence Place
- Sandwell Educational Needs Transport
- Sandwell Land and Property Company
- MADE Festival
- Waste Service
- Governance and Legal Support re: DPH
- Lion Farm
- Introduction of new ERP system (Oracle)
- Chief Officers
- Senior Leadership
- Complaints
- Officers and Members relationships
- Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee
- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
- Financial Reporting

7.4 CIPFA were also 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.

7.5 The report from CIPFA received in January 2022 set out that the Council was financially stable and in recent years had been able to contribute towards reserves through achieving a balanced budget or an underspend, but that the authority had previously lacked ambition and innovation and had a very traditional approach to financial management. The scoring process generated an overall star rating between one and five, five being the highest. The Council achieved an overall rating of two stars and considered to be a progressive two-star authority with an encouraging direction of travel. In total CIPFA made 14 recommendations.

7.6 Following the various external reviews an Improvement Plan was agreed by

Council in June 2022. The Improvement Plan incorporated all of the recommendations from the Grant Thornton 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. Risk management was also embedded within the Council's programme management of the Improvement Plan, and a risk register has been developed which underpins the Council's strategic risk relating to the Improvement Plan.

- 7.7 The implementation of the recommendations in the Improvement Plan has been recognised as the key driver in enabling the Council to improve its governance processes going forward. In their letter to the Secretary of State in December 2022, the Commissioners stated that they were reassured by the continued commitment from members, leaders, and staff to deliver the improvement plan. They recognised that significant progress had been made as a result but cautioned that there remained a lot of work to be done.
- 7.8 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, the LGA and the CIPFA FM Model Re-assessment Report were received in December 2022/February 2023. They indicated that good progress was being made, with CIPFA identifying that Sandwell had moved to a 3-star rating since their initial review less than a year before. Progress has been reported through the appropriate routes.
- 7.9 The Improvement Plan is regularly refreshed through a documented Change Control process. This enables the Plan to be a living document and incorporate key areas for improvement, such as those arising from the external reviews follow up visits. It also enables actions to be closed when completed, or transition from implementation to monitoring/assurance activity. These changes are implemented on a quarterly basis and reported to Cabinet.

8. Future Assurance

- 8.1 As part of the governance and assurance arrangements for the Improvement Plan, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Budget, Corporate Scrutiny Management Board and Cabinet review will continue to monitor the progress of the Improvement Plan and utilise the plan for work programming purposes.
- 8.2 The Improvement Plan will continue to be in place until all actions have either been implemented, with assurance of effectiveness, or have been incorporated into business-as-usual approaches. As a first step towards this, the Council's Corporate Plan was refreshed in June 2023 to incorporate the ongoing activity from the Improvement Plan so that the Council can move towards a single plan covering all key strategic priorities.
- 8.3 As we look towards the Council coming out of intervention, our corporate approach to ongoing external assurance mechanisms is being designed/considered. This will incorporate bringing together findings external regulatory frameworks as well as seeking peer challenge and sector-led support on an appropriate basis.

Report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Subject:	Internal Audit Plan 2024/25
Director:	Brendan Arnold Interim Section 151 Officer
Contact Officer:	Peter Farrow Audit Services and Risk Management Manager, peter_farrow@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Risk and Assurance Committee review and approve the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25.

2 Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To inform the Committee of the contents of the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 and to seek approval.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Internal Audit operates across the council and helps it accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluating and improving the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Internal Audit Plan sets out the intended internal audit programme of work for 2024/25.
- 4.2 The completion of the plan will help inform the Head of Audit’s annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the council’s governance, risk management and internal control framework.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	Internal audit is a statutory service in the context of the Local Government Accounts and Audit Regulations (Amendment)(England) 2015. The Act states that: <i>“A relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance”</i> . These Standards have been adopted by the council’s internal audit section.
Risk:	The agreed actions detailed in Internal Audit reports are designed to mitigate risks.
Equality:	It was not necessary to undertake 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 climate change implications in relation to this report.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no direct corporate parenting implications in relation to this report.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Internal Audit Plan 2024/25



7. Background Papers

None



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Internal Audit Plan: 2024/25



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-	A quick guide to the audit planning process
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3	Assessing the effectiveness of the system of control
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6	Developing an internal audit plan
7	Considerations required of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, council management and the Section 151 Officer
8	Information to support the internal audit plan
9	Internal audit plan

A Quick guide to the audit planning process

Step 1 – Audit universe/auditable areas and the council's priorities

Identify the audit universe (i.e. a list of themes and areas that may require auditing) using a variety of methods:

- Areas of potential risk identified through a variety of sources (including the strategic risk register) as having the potential to impact upon the council's ability to deliver the objectives of the Corporate Plan and its statutory responsibilities, captured through a strategic risk register.
- Key areas, such as the key financial systems work we do to help inform and support the work of the external auditors, grant claim certification etc.
- Areas where we use auditor's knowledge, management requests and past experience etc.



Step 2 – Ranking

Assess each auditable area as high, medium or low assurance need using, where appropriate, the CIPFA methodology of materiality/business impact/audit experience/risk/potential for fraud.



Step 3 – Three-year view

High need areas will be reviewed annually, medium need usually once in a three-year cycle where appropriate, while a watching brief will remain on the low need areas.



Step 4 – Next year's plan

List the themes/areas and where appropriate the types of work that will be undertaken in 2024/25 in the internal audit plan.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

A Glossary of Terms

Governance

The arrangements in place to ensure that the council fulfils its overall purpose, achieves its intended outcomes for citizens and service users and operates in an economical, effective, efficient and ethical manner.

Control environment

Comprises the systems of governance, risk management and internal control. The key elements include:

- establishing and monitoring the achievement of the Corporate Plan
- the facilitation of policy and decision-making ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations – including how risk management is embedded
- ensuring the economical, effective and efficient use of resources and for securing continuous improvement
- the financial management of the council and the reporting of financial management; and
- the performance management of the council and the reporting of performance management

System of internal control

The totality of the way an organisation designs, implements, tests and modifies controls in specific systems, to provide assurance at the corporate level that the organisation is operating efficiently and effectively.

Risk management

A logical and systematic method of establishing the context, identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating, monitoring and communicating the risks associated with any activity, function or process in a way that will enable the organisation to minimise losses and maximise opportunities.

Risk based audit

An audit that:

- identifies and records the objectives, risks and controls
- establishes the extent to which the objectives of the system are consistent with higher-level corporate objectives
- evaluates the controls in principle to decide whether or not they are appropriate and can be reasonably relied upon to achieve their purpose, addressing the organisation's risks
- identifies any instances of over and under control and provides management with a clear articulation of residual risks where existing controls are inadequate
- determines an appropriate strategy to test the effectiveness of controls i.e. through compliance and/or substantive testing; and
- arrives at conclusions and produces a report, leading to management actions as necessary and providing an opinion on the effectiveness of the control environment

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The governance group charged with independent assurance of the adequacy of the internal control environment and the integrity of financial reporting.

Internal audit

Definition of internal auditing:

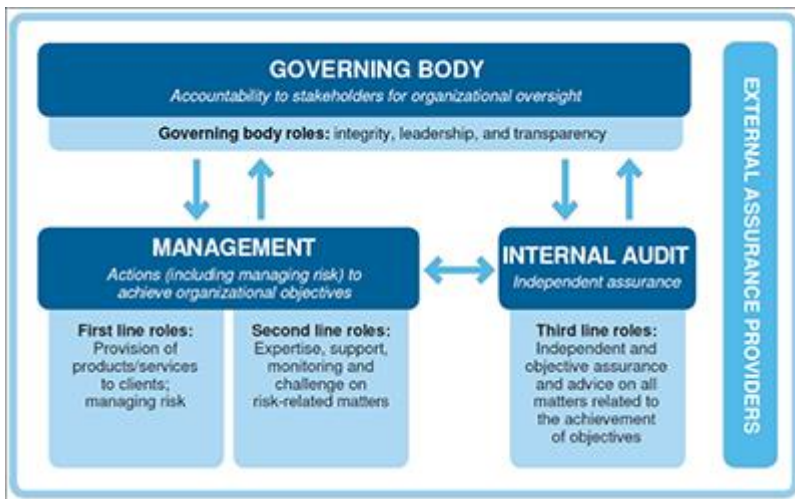
Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

Source: Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

Assurance

A confident assertion, based on sufficient, relevant and reliable evidence, that something is satisfactory, with the aim of giving comfort to the recipient. The basis of the assurance will be set out and it may be qualified if full comfort cannot be given. The Head of Audit may be unable to give an assurance if arrangements are unsatisfactory. Assurance can come from a variety of sources and internal audit can be seen as the 'third line of defence' with the first line being the council's policies, processes and controls and the second being management checks of this first line.

The Three Lines of Defence model



1 Introduction

The purpose of internal audit is to provide the Section 151 Officer and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee with an independent and objective opinion on risk management, control and governance and their effectiveness in achieving the councils agreed objectives. To provide this opinion we need to review on a cyclical basis, the governance, risk management and operation of internal control systems within the council. Internal audit is not a substitute for effective internal control. The proper role of internal audit is to contribute to internal control by examining, evaluating and reporting to management on its adequacy and effectiveness.

There is a statutory requirement for internal audit to work in accordance with the 'proper audit practices'. These 'proper audit practices' are in effect the 'Public Sector Internal Audit Standards'. The council has an internal audit charter which was approved by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and defines the activity, purpose, authority and responsibility of internal audit, and establishes its position within the council. This document sits alongside the charter and helps determine how the internal audit service will be developed.

The purpose of this document is to provide the council with an internal audit plan based upon an assessment of the council's audit needs. The assessment of assurance need exercise is undertaken to identify the systems of control and determine the frequency of audit coverage. The assessment will be used to direct internal audit resources to those aspects of the council which are assessed as generating the greatest risk to the achievement of its objectives.

2 Assessing the effectiveness of risk management and governance

The effectiveness of risk management and governance will form part of our individual reviews, in order to gather evidence to support our opinion to the council. This opinion is reflected in the general level of assurance given in our annual report and where appropriate within separate reports in areas that will touch upon risk management and governance, and from those provided by other assurance providers including the External Auditors.

3 Assessing the effectiveness of the system of control

To be adequate and effective, management should:

establish and monitor the achievement of the council's objectives and facilitate policy and decision making

identify, assess and manage the risks to achieving the council's objectives

ensure the economical, effective and efficient use of resources

ensure compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations

safeguard the council's assets and interests from losses of all kinds, including those arising from fraud, irregularity or corruption; and

ensure the integrity and reliability of information, accounts and data

These objectives are achieved by the implementation of effective management processes and through the operation of a sound system of internal control.

The internal audit plan contained within this report is our assessment of the audit work required to measure, evaluate and report on the effectiveness of risk management, governance and internal control.

The framework of assurance

The framework of assurance available to satisfy a local authority that the risks to its objectives, and the risks inherent in undertaking its work, have been properly identified and are being managed by controls that are adequately designed and effective in operation, may comprise a variety of sources and not only the work of Audit Services.

Audit Services holds a role within the council as the main independent source of assurance on all internal controls. The work of Audit Services is therefore, central to this framework of assurance. Therefore, Audit Services attempt to acquire an understanding not only of the council's risks and its overall whole control environment, but wherever possible, all sources of assurance.

In this way, Audit Services will be able to indicate whether key controls are adequately designed and effectively operated, regardless of the sources of that assurance. This role includes responsibility both for attempting to assess the assurance available to the council from other sources, whether internal or external, and for implementing a plan of internal audit work to obtain the required assurance.

Audit Services report to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, which is responsible for assessing the quality of the assurance available to the council and concerns itself with the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's internal control environment as assessed.

This document is, in the large part, risk-based and reflects the requirement for assurance (as well as current audit knowledge and the requirement to follow up earlier work). This plan includes work undertaken directly by Audit Services, but will also, wherever possible, take into account and recognise assurance work undertaken by other parts of the council or by external organisations, the adequacy of which will be assessed on an on-going risk basis.

The annual internal audit report to the council will include an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's control environment, and will, where appropriate, include reference to the assurance made available to the council by other providers as well as Audit Services.







4 Assessment of assurance need methodology

Internal audit should encompass the whole internal control system and not be limited only to financial control systems, the scope of internal audit work should reflect the core objectives of the council and the key risks that it faces. As such, each audit cycle starts with a comprehensive analysis of the whole system of internal control that ensures the achievements of the council's objectives.

Activities that contribute significantly to the council's internal control system, and also to the risks it faces, may not have an intrinsic financial value necessarily. Therefore, our approach seeks not to try and measure the level of risk in activities, but to assign a relative assurance need value. The purpose of this approach is to enable the delivery of assurance to the council over the reliability of its system of control in an effective and efficient manner.

5 The assessment of audit assurance needs

Identifying the objectives of the Corporate Plan and the associated risks

	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

The key risks to the council in meeting its objectives, as identified through its risk management process, at the time this plan was prepared, were:

Risk	
Children's Social Care	Council's Improvement Plan
Cyber Security	Sandwell Local Plan
Business Continuity Management	Climate Change
Compliance with the Data Protection Act, GDPR and the FOI Act	Strategic Workforce Development for Audit Social Care
Medium Term Financial Strategy, Central Government Funding and Resource Allocation	Adult Social Care Market Sustainability
Budget Monitoring and Management	Borough Archives
Statement of Accounts	Elections Act
Partner Organisations/Contractors Service Delivery	Equalities
Oracle Fusion Implementation	Organisational Culture
Customer Journey	Workforce Recruitment and Retention
Regeneration Funds Programme	

Identifying the "audit universe"

To undertake the assessment, it is first necessary to define the audit universe for the council. The audit universe describes all the systems, functions, operations and activities undertaken by the council. Given that the key risk to the council is that it fails to achieve its core objectives, we have identified the audit universe by determining which systems and operations impact upon the achievement of the Corporate Plan and the objectives above. These auditable areas include the control processes put in place to address the key risks.

Assessing the risk of auditable areas

Risk management is the process of identifying risks, evaluating their probability and potential consequences and determining the most effective methods of controlling or

responding to them. The aim of risk management is to contribute to continued service improvement through improved risk-taking activities, reducing the frequency of loss events occurring, and minimising the consequences if they do occur.

Source: Sandwell MBC Corporate Risk Management Strategy

There are a number of key factors for assessing the degree of risk within the auditable area. These have been used in our assessment for each auditable area and are based on the following factors:

- Risk
- Business impact
- Materiality
- Audit experience
- Potential for fraud and error

Deriving the level of assurance need from the risk values

In this model, these factors are translated into an assessment of assurance need. The risk ratings used are high, medium or low to establish the frequency of coverage of internal audit.

6 Developing an internal audit plan

The internal audit plan is based on management's risk priorities, as set out in the council's own risk analysis/assessment. The plan has been designed to, wherever possible, cover the key risks identified by this risk analysis.

In establishing the plan, the relationship between risk and frequency of audit remains absolute. The level of risk will always determine the frequency by which auditable themes and areas will be subject to audit. This ensures that key risk themes and areas are looked at on a frequent basis. The aim of this approach is to ensure the maximum level of assurance can be provided with the minimum level of audit coverage.

It is recognised that a good internal audit plan should achieve a balance between clearly setting out the planned audit work and retaining flexibility to respond to changing risks and priorities during the year. As the year progresses, it is likely that the risks and organisational priorities will change, resulting in changes to the plan. This is an issue within the local authority environment at this moment, particularly with regards to the pace of change and high level of uncertainty affecting the risk environment.

Auditor's judgement will be applied in assessing the number of days required for each audit identified in the plan.

The assessment of assurance need's purpose is to:

- determine priorities and establish the most cost-effective means of achieving audit objectives; and
- assist in the direction and control of all audit work

Included within the plan, in addition to audit days for field assignments are:

- a consultancy allocation, which will be utilised when the need arises, for example, special projects, investigations, advice and assistance, unplanned and ad-hoc work as and when requested

- a follow-up allocation, which will be utilised to assess the degree of implementation achieved in relation to recommendations agreed by management during the prior year; and
- an audit management allocation, which is used for management, quality control, client and External Audit liaison and for preparation for, and attendance at various meetings including the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

7 Considerations required of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, senior management and the Section 151 Officer

Are the objectives and key risks identified consistent with those recognised by the council?

Does the plan include all the themes which would be expected to be subject to internal audit?

Are the risk scores applied to the plan reasonable and reflect the council?

Does the plan cover the key risks as they are recognised?

Is the allocation of audit resource accepted, and agreed as appropriate, given the level of risk identified?

8 Information to support the Internal Audit Plan

Communication of results

The outcome of internal audit reviews is communicated, where appropriate, by way of a written report on each assignment undertaken. However, should a serious matter come to light, this will be reported to the appropriate level of management without delay.

Limited or No Assurance Reports

All internal audit reports given Limited or No Assurance will automatically be brought before the Council's Leadership Team.

Resourcing

The Council has its own internal audit function. Where appropriate, staff are either professionally qualified, or sponsored to undertake relevant professional qualifications. All staff are subject to an appraisal programme, which leads to an identification of training needs. In this way, we ensure that the team is suitably skilled to deliver the internal audit service. This includes the delivery of specialist skills which are provided by staff within the service with the relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

Quality assurance

Our processes comply with appropriate the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, and, where required, working papers and reports are subject to thorough review by professionally qualified audit and accountancy staff.

Council Wide areas with Audit input

Auditable Area	Purpose
Fraud Investigations	As required by the council's Financial Regulations and on behalf of the Section 151 Officer – the carrying out of investigations into areas of suspected fraudulent activity across the council, including housing and related fraud.
Counter Fraud Activities	Where appropriate, to undertake a series of council wide pro-active fraud activities, including the maintenance of key anti-fraud and anti-money laundering policies and procedures, targeted testing of areas open to potential fraud, maintenance of the council's fraud risk register, hosting fraud awareness seminars and surgeries, hosting and chairing the Midland's regional fraud group and national benchmarking exercises.
National Fraud Initiative	In accordance with Cabinet Office requirements, to lead on the council's NFI data matching exercise.
Risk Management	To provide on-going support, advice and challenge to the risk management process at strategic, programme and directorate level across the council.
Annual Governance Statement	To assist in the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement.
Follow up of Agreed Actions	The follow up of key internal audit recommendations made across the council in 2023/24.
Development and Advice	To provide ongoing general controls advice and assistance where required.
Consultancy	To provide advice and guidance on special projects, unplanned and ad-hoc reviews as necessary.
Management	Day to day management of the internal audit, risk management and counter fraud service, quality control, client and External Audit liaison and preparation for and attendance at various Member and senior officer meetings.
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Preparation and presentation of papers for the committee. Providing training to committee members as and when required.

Internal Audit Plan 2024/25

(ANA = Assessment of Audit Need)

Area	ANA
Key Financial Systems	
Accounts Payable	High
Accounts Receivable including write off processes	High
Payroll	High
Treasury Management	High
Main Accounting System	High
Budgetary Control	High
Benefits	High
Capital Accounting	High
Housing Rents	High
Council Tax	High
NNDR	High
Other areas	
Oracle Fusion – holding an assurance role within the implementation process, and where appropriate undertaking a range of audit checks both pre and post implementation.	High
Procurement and Contract Compliance – an annual high-level review of council spend to ensure compliance with legislation and the Procurement and Contract procedures rules.	High
SEND Passenger Transport – a review of the costs and delivery of the service.	High
Housing Revenue Account – a review on the monitoring of spend within the HRA.	High
Housing Transformation – a high-level review focussing upon how the council is delivering on its corporate objective to provide quality housing across the borough.	High
Governance – a review of key governance areas with a particular focus on the culture and behaviours that underpin member/officer relationships.	Medium
Use of Council Procurement Cards – a follow up review on recent recommendations.	Medium
Cash Handling a review of controls around the ongoing move towards becoming a cashless authority.	Medium
Levelling Up/Town Funds - regeneration and town-centre investment projects, focusing on the monitoring of spend, governance and approval processes.	Medium
Grants for New Build Properties – to ensure grants provided for the new build programme are in line with the grant criteria and deliver value for money.	Medium
Events Costing and Income Generation – a follow up review of past recommendations.	Medium
Appointeeship Unit – a review of the control over individual accounts.	Medium

Compliance with the Data Protection Act, General Data Protection Regulations and Freedom of Information Act	Medium
Riverside PFI and TMO's – compliance with key parts of council contracts	Medium
Priority Awards and homelessness designation (HRA) – review of housing application assessment in accordance with lettings policy including priority awards and review of the appeals process within this area.	Medium
Members Allowances - to provide assurance on the processes for the sharing of information between Democratic Services and Payroll and ensuring that index linked increases to allowances are applied correctly across the membership for basic and special responsibility allowances.	Medium
Building Schools for the Future – Consideration of any legacy control arrangements.	Medium
Early Years Support – a review of operational processes.	Medium
Adult Social Care – with a focus on care management	Medium
Schools – a cyclical review of the governance and financial procedures for council-maintained schools.	Medium
Certifications – a range of certification exercises including Discretionary Housing Payment Claims, Housing Benefit Subsidy Claims and any other grant certifications as and when required.	-

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Report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Subject:	Internal Audit Progress Report
Director:	Brendan Arnold Interim Section 151 Officer
Contact Officer:	Peter Farrow Audit Services and Risk Management Manager, peter_farrow@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee review and comment upon the Internal Audit Progress Report.

2 Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To inform the committee of details of the matters arising from internal audit work undertaken between April 2023 and January 2024.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Internal Audit operates across the council and helps it accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluating and improving the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Internal Audit Progress Report contains details of the matters arising from internal audit work undertaken between April 2023 and January 2024.
- 4.2 The purpose of the report is to bring the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee up to date with the progress made against the delivery of the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan. The information included in the progress report will feed into and inform the overall opinion in the Internal Audit Annual Report issued at the year end.
- 4.3 It summarises the audit work undertaken between April 2023 and January 2024, this includes:
- the areas subject to review (auditable area)
 - the level of audit need assigned to each auditable area (high, medium or low)
 - the number and type of recommendations made as a result of each audit review.
 - the number of recommendations accepted by management.
 - the level of assurance given to each system under review.
 - details of any key issues arising from the above.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	Internal audit is a statutory service in the context of the Local Government Accounts and Audit Regulations (Amendment)(England) 2015. The Act states that: <i>“A relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance”</i> . These Standards have been adopted by the council’s internal audit section.
Risk:	The agreed actions detailed in Internal Audit reports are designed to mitigate risks.



Equality:	It was not necessary to undertake 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.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no direct corporate parenting implications in relation to this report.

7. Appendices

Internal Audit Progress Report.

8. Background Papers

None.



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Internal Audit Progress Report
@ 31 January 2024



1 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to bring the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee up to date with the progress made against the delivery of the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan.

The information included in this progress report will feed into and inform our overall opinion in our Internal Audit Annual Report issued at the year end. Where appropriate each report we issue during the year is given an overall opinion based on the following criteria:

No Assurance	Limited	Reasonable	Substantial
Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

This is based upon the number and type of recommendations we make in each report. Each recommendation is categorised in line with the following:

Fundamental	Action is imperative to ensure that the objectives for the area under review are met.
Significant	Requires action to avoid exposure to significant risks in achieving the objectives for the area under review.
Merits attention	Action advised to enhance control or improve operational efficiency.

2 Summary of work completed between 1 April 2023 and 31 January 2024

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AAN		Assess
N/A		Not App

Auditable Area	AAN rating	Recommendations					Level of Assurance
		Fundamental	Significant	Merits attention	Total	Number accepted	
Reported previously:							
Climate Change	Medium	1	2	-	3	3	Limited
Use of Council Procurement Cards	Medium	2	5	-	7	7	Limited
Housing Benefits	High	-	1	1	2	2	Reasonable
Business Continuity	Medium	-	3	-	3	3	Reasonable
Temporary Accommodation	Medium	-	4	1	5	5	Reasonable
Mayors Charity	N/A	-	2	2	4	4	Reasonable
Waste Management	Medium	-	2	-	2	2	Reasonable
Accounts Receivable	High	-	-	-	-	-	Substantial
NNDR	High	-	-	1	1	1	Substantial
Riverside Leaseholders, follow-up	N/A	-	-	1	1	1	N/A
Riverside Method Statements	N/A	-	-	-	-	-	N/A
Reported for the first time:							
Direct Payments	High	-	1	1	2	2	Reasonable
Council Rents	High	-	1	1	2	2	Reasonable
Treasury Management	High	-	-	2	2	2	Substantial

Auditable Area	AAN rating	Recommendations					Level of Assurance
		Fundamental	Significant	Merits attention	Total	Number accepted	
Council Tax	High	-	-	-	-	-	Substantial
School audits reported previously:							
Meadows	N/A	-	2	3	5	5	Reasonable
Abbey Infant	N/A	-	1	-	1	1	Substantial
Abbey Junior	N/A	-	1	-	1	1	Substantial
Sandwell Community School Grant Certification	N/A	-	-	-	-	-	N/A

Audits underway as at 31 January 2024
• Cyber Security
• Budgetary Control
• Cash Handling, follow up
• Voluntary Sector Support
• Payroll
• Accounts Payable
• Riverside Rents, follow up
• Riverside, Environmental Challenge Fund
• Housing Revenue Account

3 *Issues to bring to the committee's attention for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 January 2024*

Direct Payments

The purpose of the review was to provide assurance that Direct Payments are being effectively administered, and to ensure the required outcomes are being achieved. The review focussed upon the roles and responsibilities relating to the finance element of the direct payment process within the council.

The committee may recall that in our previous review issues were raised about the backlog of a large number of reviews of client accounts, which help verify if the client is using the direct payment for its intended purpose.

We are pleased to report that since our last review the backlog of reviews had been cleared. The client's direct payment accounts are now on target to be examined after an initial six months of operation, where they will then be risk rated according to operating factors. All high and medium risk cases then receive more frequent reviews, with all accounts receiving at least an annual review.

In addition, a new Direct Payment policy had been approved and implemented.

However, we did note that on occasions incomplete or unclear documentation under which capacity appointments were being made was held. Appointments can be made under an authorised or nominated capacity to clients' accounts. Appointments made under an authorised capacity relate to clients with eligible care and support needs who lack mental capacity, whilst appointments made under a nominated capacity relate to an individual who receives care and has mental capacity but have chosen a specified individual to help manage their direct payment account. Adult Social Care is responsible for the completion of the relevant documentation with the client /representative as part of the set-up of the direct payment facility. The Direct Payments Team are then responsible for the processing of these documents. A recommendation was made and grade to help ensure that this is rectified.

Council Rents

The council manages approximately 27,300 council properties. The rental income from which is used to fund the management and maintenance of the council's housing stock and other housing services.

Our review included the reconciliation of the rent roll (which identifies the council's housing stock/property records), reconciliation of the rents system to the cash receipting system, changes to housing stock, the annual calculation of the rent debit and the receipt of rental income.

Social rents are set using a government formula which calculates a 'formula rent' for each property and we noted that on occasions properties can be found to have small rent charges that differed to the social formula rent calculated for similar properties. This has been flagged with the team and they continue to endeavour that the social formula rent is applied wherever possible, in particular when new tenancies are entered into.

Treasury Management

Strong Treasury Management is important for the council in ensuring that sufficient funds are available to deliver the day to day operations, ensuring an acceptable balance is achieved between security, liquidity and return for any investments held.

The council has a Treasury Management Strategy which is approved each year. This strategy defines treasury management activities and is used to manage the daily cash flow through short-term borrowings and investments alongside a long-term strategy for the management of the Council's debt portfolio.

The CIPFA Treasury Management Code indicates that members with responsibility for treasury management receive adequate training in this area. We noted that while specific training on this had not yet been provided, it was planned that such training was to be introduced.

4 Other activities undertaken by Audit Services

CIPFA – Audit Committee Updates

We continue to present the regular CIPFA Audit Committee Updates to the committee as and when they are published.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Terms of Reference

We continue to review and update the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Terms of Reference on an annual basis.

Internal Audit Plan

The Internal Audit annual plan for 2023/24 was submitted to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee for approval.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report

Assistance was provided in the preparation of the Annual Report on the work of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Internal Audit's role in investigating allegations of Fraud

We continue to take part in investigations into allegations of potential fraud and where appropriate these are reported separately to the committee.

Annual Governance Statement

We play a key role in the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement which forms part of the annual published Statement of Accounts.

Advice and Guidance

We provide on-going advice and guidance to the council to assist with the continuous improvement of the overall control environment and to ensure compliance with relevant new legislation.

Liaising with the External Auditors

Where required, we continue to work with and assist the council's External Auditors.

Wider Client base

The council's internal auditors also provide the internal audit service to Sandwell Children's Trust, Sandwell Leisure Trust and the West Midlands Fire Service, and reports directly to these organisations audit committee, or equivalent, as appropriate.

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Report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

22 February 2024

Subject:	Cabinet Forward Plan
Contact Officer:	Anthony Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer Ant_lloyd@sandwell.gov.uk







1 Recommendations

1.1 That the Committee notes the content of the Cabinet Forward Plan.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The Cabinet Forward Plan is attached at Appendix 1 for the Committee to note and highlight any concerns.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

 	<p>A planned work programme will help the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee achieve its objectives.</p>
 	
 	

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Cabinet Forward Plan will be reviewed at each meeting.



5 Alternative Options

5.1 There are no alternative options.

6 Implications

Resources:	There are no risks arising directly from this report.
Legal and Governance:	
Risk:	
Equality:	
Health and Wellbeing:	
Social Value	
Corporate Parenting	

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Cabinet Forward Plan

8. Background Papers

None



The following items set out key decisions to be taken by the Executive:-

	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
1	<p>The Statutory Employer Liability Insurance and Support Services Contract – Authority to Procure</p> <p>Approval to appoint a provider after a compliant tender process.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Justin Haywood</p> <p>Director: Rashpal Bishop - Director of Adult Social Care</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Decision - Adults Social Care and Health (Cllr Hartwell)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>February 2024</p>		<p>Report</p> <p>Risk Register</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessment</p>

	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
2	<p>Cycle More Sandwell</p> <p>Approval to appoint a provider after a compliant tender process.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Ricky Byrnes</p> <p>Director: Liann Brookes-Smith - Director of Public Health</p>	<p>Cabinet Member - Public Health and Communities (Cllr Khatun)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>February 2024</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>Report Risk Register</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
3	<p>Improvement Plan update</p> <p>Quarterly update of the Improvement plan to Council</p> <p>Contact Officer: Dawn Webster</p> <p>Director: Shokat Lal</p>	<p>Cabinet - Leader (Cllr Carmichael)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>	<p>20 March Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Board 22 feb- ARAC</p>	<p>Improvement Plan Monitoring tool.</p> <p>Statutory recommendations Summary.</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
4	<p>Performance Management Framework – Q3 Monitoring</p> <p>Report on the Q3 Corporate Performance measures and the update on progress on delivering the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Kayleigh Walker/Kate Ashley</p> <p>Director: James McLaughlin</p>	<p>Cabinet – Finance & Resources (Cllr Piper)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>	<p>Scrutiny Management Board on the 20th March</p>	<p>Not yet available for Q3 but each quarter there will be a covering report and the first appendix will be the Corporate Performance Report</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
5	<p>People Strategy</p> <p>The People Strategy recognises the critical role that a motivated, skilled and capable workforce plays in every aspect of service delivery and continuous improvement. This sets out a framework of key priorities and activities over the next three years.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Victoria Lee - AD HR/OD</p> <p>Debbie Sant – L&OD Manager</p> <p>Director: James McLaughlin, Assistant Chief Exec.</p>	<p>Cabinet – Finance & Resources (Cllr Piper)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>		<p>People Strategy Document</p>



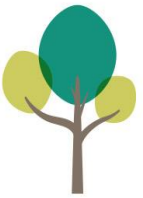
	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
6	<p>Corporate Plan Delivery</p> <p>Contact Officer: Kate Ashley, Sarah Sprung</p> <p>Director: James McLaughlin</p>	<p>Cabinet – Finance & Resources (Cllr Piper)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>		<p>Report and appendix detailing how the Corporate Plan will be delivered through the Assistant Director Business Plans</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
7	<p>Market Fee Uplifts</p> <p>Approve the proposed fee increases to the care and support market for 2024/25 to ensure a sustainable response to support peoples assessed social care needs</p> <p>Contact Officer: Christine Guest</p> <p>Director: Rashpal Bishop - Director of Adult Social Care</p>	<p>Cabinet - Adults Social Care and Health (Cllr Hartwell)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>		<p>Report</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
8	<p>Customer Service Transformation Programme – Appointment of Implementation Partner</p> <p>To appoint an implementation partner to undertake an organisational wide major programme of transformational change for customer service.</p> <p>James McLaughlin: Assistant Chief Executive</p>	<p>Cabinet - Adults Social Care and Health (Cllr Hartwell)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Report and Outline Business Case</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
9	<p>Highfields Primary School – Making significant changes (prescribed alternations) consultation outcome; change of age range.</p> <p>Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education</p> <p>Contact Officer Martyn Roberts Rachel Hill</p> <p>Councillor Simon Hackett, Cabinet Member for Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>	<p>N/A</p>	



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
10	<p>Camera Enforcement of Endorsable Traffic Offences – West Midlands Regional Working Agreement'</p> <p>Contact Officer: Mervyn Bartlett</p> <p>Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy</p>	<p>Cabinet - Environment & Highways (Cllr Millard)</p>		13 March 2024		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
11	<p>Supported Accommodation Tender 2024</p> <p>Approval to go out to tender for Supported Accommodation provision from 1 August 2024</p> <p>Contact Officer: Karl Robinson</p> <p>Director: Dean Epton</p>	<p>Cabinet</p> <p>Councillor Rollins (Housing and Built Environment)</p>	Public	13 March 2024	Post	Cabinet Report



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
12	<p>Events Governance and Safety Advisory Group Terms of Reference</p> <p>Contact Officer: Matthew Huggins</p> <p>Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy</p>	<p>Cabinet - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)</p>		<p>13 March 2024</p>		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
13	<p>Sandwell Valley Master Plan and 10 Year Business Plan</p> <p>Contact Officer: Matthew Huggins</p> <p>Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy</p>	<p>Cabinet - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)</p>		<p>13 March 2024</p>		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
14	<p>Levelling Up Partnership Programme Update</p> <p>To receive an update on the delivery of the Levelling Up Partnership for Wednesbury following Cabinet approval in September 2022</p> <p>Contact Officer: Rebecca Jenkins</p> <p>Assistant Director: Tammy Stokes – Assistant Director</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>	<p>TBC</p>	



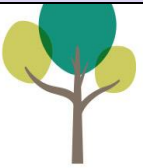
	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
15	<p>City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Grants – Delegation of authority to accept grants.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Andy Miller – Strategic Planning & Transportation Manager</p> <p>Director: Tammy Stokes – Assistant Director Growth & Spatial Planning</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>	<p>No</p>	



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
16	<p>West Bromwich Indoor Market</p> <p>Cost Pressures Brief description Report to agree funding package for the delivery of West Bromwich Indoor Market and approval to procure contractor.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Alexander Oxley</p> <p>Director: Tony McGovern</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>		<p>13 March 2024</p>		<p>Cabinet Report</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
17	<p>Long Term Plan for Towns - Smethwick</p> <p>Contact Officer: Jenna Langford</p> <p>Director: Tony McGovern</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>		
18	<p>Levelling Up Fund Round 3 bid submission</p> <p>Contact Officer: Jenna Langford</p> <p>Director: Tony McGovern</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
19	<p>Sandwell Design Code - Supplementary Plan</p> <p>Contact Officer: Jenna Langford</p> <p>Director: Tammy Stokes (Assistant Director – Spatial Planning and Growth)</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>	Public	13 March 2024		Cabinet Report EQIA
20	<p>Levelling Up Zone</p> <p>Contact Officer: Bart Shirm</p> <p>Assistant Director: Tammy Stokes – Assistant Director Spatial Planning and Growth</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>		13 March 2024		



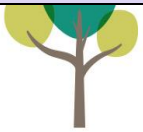
	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
21	<p>Single Settlement Memorandum of Understanding between WMCA & HMG</p> <p>Contact Officer: Tammy Stokes</p> <p>Assistant Director: Tammy Stokes – Assistant Director Spatial Planning and Growth</p>	<p>Cabinet - Regeneration & WMCA (Cllr Hughes)</p>		<p>13 March 2024</p>		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
22	<p>Proposed Relocation of Causeway Green Primary School to Brandhall Village Development, Oldbury To approve the procurement of a school development to replace existing facility</p> <p>Contact Officer: Martyn Roberts</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett - Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>June 2024</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Report by Director of Children and Education</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
23	<p>Funding for Major Capital Projects</p> <p>Brief description: Request for capital budget for Darley House and The Lakes refurbishment projects</p> <p>Contact Officer: Sarah Ager</p> <p>Director: Dean Epton</p>	<p>Cabinet</p> <p>Councillor Rollins (Housing and Built Environment)</p>	<p>Exempt</p>	<p>13 March 2024</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Cabinet Report</p>
24	<p>Community Hubs</p> <p>Contact Officer: Helen Green</p>	<p>Cabinet -</p> <p>Public Health and Communities (Cllr Khatun)</p>		<p>June 2024</p>		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
25	<p>Bid to Arts Council England – Libraries Improvement Fund Round 3 (depending on amount)</p> <p>Contact Officer: Dawn Winter</p> <p>Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy</p>	<p>Cabinet - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)</p>		June 2024		
26	<p>Sandwell Cultural Compact</p> <p>Contact Officer: Dawn Winter</p> <p>Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy</p>	<p>Cabinet - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)</p>		June 2024		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
27	Cultural Development Fund Bid Contact Officer: Dawn Winter Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy	Cabinet - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)		June 2024		
28	Allotments Review and Strategy Contact Officer: Matthew Huggins Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy	Cabinet - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)		June 2024		



ONE COUNCIL
ONE TEAM

	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
29	Funding for Heritage – Oak House Contact Officer: Dawn Winter Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy	Cabinet – Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)		June 2024		
30	Fishing Policy Contact Officer: Matthew Huggins Director: Alice Davey – Director of Borough Economy	Cabinet - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Padda)		June 2024		



ONE COUNCIL
ONE TEAM

By virtue of paragraph(s) 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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