

Summons and Agenda Council

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You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, to be held on Tuesday, 19 March 2024 at 6.15 pm (or on the rising of the Extraordinary Meeting of Council) for the purpose of transacting the following business:-

The Mayor of Sandwell, Councillor Bill Gavan MBE, In the Chair

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 - 350

To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 20 February 2024 as a correct record.

4 Announcements

To receive announcements from the Chief Executive and the Mayor.

5 Written Questions

351 - 356

To consider written questions under Standing Order No. 9 from

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

6 Improvement Plan Progress - Grant Thornton Follow-up Report 2023

357 - 420

To receive Grant Thornton's Value for Money Governance Review Follow Up Review Report of December 2023.

7 **Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 Update** 421 - 468

To receive updates from the Council's lead representatives on:-

- (a) West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority;
- (b) Transport for the West Midlands;
- (c) West Midlands Police and Crime Panel;
- (d) West Midlands Combined Authority.

8 **Performance Champions – Progress Report** 469 - 480

To receive a progress report from Performance Champions.

9 **Corporate Parenting Board Work Progress** 481 - 526

To receive an update on the work and progress of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Decisions

10 **Sandwell Council submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) - proposed council size** 527 - 696

To approve the submission and accompanying documentation to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), fulfilling stage one of the LHBCE electoral Review.

11 **Pay Policy 2024 & Gender Pay Gap Reporting** 697 - 710

To consider the Pay Policy 2023 and Gender Pay Gap Report.

- 12 **Designation of Statutory Chief Officer – Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer/Senior Information Risk Owner** 711 - 714

To confirm the designation of Alex Thompson, designate Executive Director – Finance and Transformation, as the Council’s Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer/Senior Information Risk Owner with effect from 7 May 2024.

- 13 **Interim changes to Scheme of Delegation** 715 - 770

To approve the interim changes to the Scheme of Delegation pending review of the Scheme of Delegation in line with the new Strategic Leadership Team structure.

Procedural

- 14 **Notices of Motion**

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

- 14(a) Inclusion of Co-operative Housing models in the Sandwell Local Plan. 771 - 772
- 14(b) Inclusive personal protective equipment (PPE) 773 - 774
- 14(c) Modern Slavery and Sandwell Council. 775 - 776
- 14(d) Ban on Pavement Parking 777 - 778

For information purposes, minutes of the following meetings are confirmed and included on the Modern.Gov website:-

- [Audit and Risk Assurance Committee;](#)
- [Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board;](#)
- [Cabinet;](#)
- [Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee;](#) and
- [General Purposes and Arbitration Committee.](#)

Dated: 11 March 2024



Shokat Lal

Chief Executive

Sandwell Council House

Freeth Street

Oldbury

West Midlands

Distribution

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

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Minutes of Council

**Tuesday 20 February 2024 at 6.01pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: His Worshipful The Mayor, Councillor Gavan (Chair);
Deputy Mayor, Councillor E M Giles;

Councillors Abrahams, K Allcock, Ashraf, Bhullar, Carmichael, Chambers, Chapman, Crompton, Davies, Dhariwal, Dhatt, Dunn, Fenton, Fisher, Fitzgerald Gavan, E Giles, J Giles, L Giles, W Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hemingway, Hinchliff, Hughes, Jalil, Johnston, Kalebe-Nyamongo, Kaur, Khatun, Kordala, Loan, Maycock, Mayo, Melia, Millar, Millard, Moore, Muflihi, Owen, Padda, Pall, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Shaeen, J Singh, N Singh, Smith, Taylor, Tromans, Trumpeter, Uddin, Webb, Weston, Wilkes and Williams.

Officers: Shokat Lal – Chief Executive; Mike Jones – Assistant Director Legal and Assurance and Monitoring Officer; Suky Suthi-Nagra – Democratic Services Manager; Stephnie Hancock - Deputy Democratic Services Manager, Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer, Anthony Lloyd – Democratic Services Officer and Kennedy Brown – Sergeant at Arms.



12/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akpoteni, M Allcock, Anandou, Chidley, Choudhry, S Gill, Khan, Lewis, Randhawa, Rollins and Younis.

13/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared at the meeting.

14/24 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary meetings of Council held on 30 January 2024 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

15/24 **Announcements**

The Chief Executive announced that the “Any of Us” film project on fostering recruitment, which was produced through a national collaboration with local authorities across England had been recognised with two awards at the comm2point0 UnAwards.

Sandwell Children’s Trust were one of the founding and lead members on the project at national level, with awards won in both the “Best Collaboration” and “Best Creative Comms” categories. The awards were presented to the Chair of the Trust, Rt Hon Jacqui Smith, at Metsec House on 30 January



16/24 **Written Questions**

Questions received under Standing Order No. 9. were asked of the relevant members and responses were received.

17/24 **Improvement Plan Progress - Grant Thornton Follow-up Report 2023**

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

A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022. Under the Statutory Directions, the Council was required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six-months following approval of the Plan. The first report was submitted in December 2022.

The Secretary of State had recognised the vast improvements made by the Council during intervention. Additionally, it was highlighted that Grant Thornton had determined that they were satisfied that the Council had made appropriate progress against the three statutory recommendations and that these could be lifted.



Treasury General Fund and HRA Budget and Capital Programme and Council Tax Resolution 2024/25

Council considered the Council Finances and Council tax Resolution for the period 2024/25.

The Final Local Government Finance Settlement was announced on 5 February 2024. The key points from the settlement were as follows:-

- the Council Tax referendum limit would be 2.99% for local authorities, with social care authorities allowed an additional 2% Adult Social Care precept;
- Local Government Funding Reform – the Fair Funding Review and reset of Business Rates growth would not be implemented in 2024/25;
- the Social Care Grant had increased by £692m to £4.5bn nationally. The increase for this Council equated to £10.87m;
- Adult Social Care Discharged Fund increased by £200m to £500m nationally. Sandwell MBC received an increase £2.15m to take total grant to £5.38m;
- Adult Social Care Market Sustainability Improvement Fund totalling £1.05bn for 2024/25. Sandwell MBC saw an increase of £3.76m with grant now totalling £8.08m;
- no change to the Better Care Fund;
- Services Grant continuing to see reductions from £822m in 2022/23 to £464m in 2023/24 to £77m in 2024/25. The decrease in these grants were being used to fund other increases within the overall settlement. Sandwell MBC saw a reduction of £3.47m with final grant amount totalling £0.65m.



Fees and Charges

The Council's portfolio of fees and charges had been updated using a figure of 5% although this would change if charges were later specified by Government or there were other relevant constraints. In a small number of cases, charges had been raised beyond this adjustment factor.

Reserves Position

The Council had two types of reserves:-

- earmarked Reserves which were for specific future projects, commitments or risks, both revenue and capital;
- unallocated balance, which was to ensure the Council could manage unexpected financial challenges.

The level of unearmarked reserves as at 31 March 2022 was £16.6m based on the unaudited financial statements for 2021/22 and estimated to be £17.4m as at 31 March 2024.

Council Tax Proposals

The Draft Budget 2024/25 assumed a 2.99% increase in core Council Tax and this had been adopted as a general planning assumption across Local Government.

The Autumn Statement and Provisional Finance Settlement confirmed a referendum limit of 2.99% for core Council Tax and allowed 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept. This meant that the Council could raise Council Tax by a total of 4.99% in 2024/25.



Each 1% increase in Council Tax raised approximately £1.3m in additional Council Tax income and also ensured that the Council Tax Base was maximised for future years. This was an important consideration because if this opportunity was not taken, further cuts to key services would have been required to balance the budget in future years.

75% of chargeable properties in Sandwell were in Council Tax Bands A and B (42% Band A and 33% Band B).

Housing Revenue Account

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was a ring-fenced account for the Council's housing stock and was shown separately to the General Fund. Income came from rent and service charges and expenditure related to the management and maintenance of the stock.

Capital Programme

The total Capital Programme for 2024/25 was recommended to be set at £144.476m for the General Fund. This was to be funded by a combination of grants, earmarked reserves and revenue contributions. Prudential borrowing levels were budgeted to be £21.504m for the General Fund.

The programme included an indicative amount of £10m for the Schools Programme as the Basic Need Allocations had not yet been confirmed by Government.



In accordance with Standing Order No. 13, Councillor William Gill moved an alternative budget proposal, which was duly seconded by Councillor Fisher:-

Approve the adoption of the following Amendment; such that the Draft Budget and resolution for 2024/25 be varied as follows:

- a. Full Council does not agree the 2% Adult Social Care Levy thus reducing funding to the Council in 2024/25 in the sum of £2.588m;
- b. Full Council agrees to provide free car parking on Saturdays resulting in reduced income to the Council in the sum of £159,000;
- c. Full Council agrees to provide financial support to enable the Shopmobility Service to continue operating in the financial year 2024/25 in the sum of £53,000;
- d. Full Council notes that the total additional net cost to be met by the General Fund following recommendations 4 (a), (b) and (c) above amounts to £2.8m;
- e. Full Council agrees the following compensatory savings to offset the additional net cost pressures introduced by Section 4 of this Amendment to the General Fund resulting in the following decisions;
- f. to cease production of 'The Herald' Council newspaper with a full year and recurring saving of £66,000;



- g. to make recurring savings of £416,000 by reducing councillor allowances by 50%. This would be subject to consultation with, and Full Council taking into consideration, any recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel;
- h. to cease all Special Responsibility Allowances with a full year and recurring saving of £428,000. This would be subject to consultation with, and Full Council taking into consideration, any recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel;
- i. to make a saving of £34,000 from the Travel budget (car mileage);
- j. to make a contribution from Earmarked Reserves in the sum of £1.856m through reduction in the resources earmarked for the Customer Journey and Climate Change.

The Council's S151 officer, in compliance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, had stated that the Amendment was inconsistent with the tenets of good financial management and was not aligned with financial prudence.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, and Standing Order 13 (4), the amendment relating to Council Finances 2024-25 was put to a named vote as follows:-

For
Councillors Abrahams, Chapman, Dunn, Fisher, W Gill, Kordala, Trumpeter and Weston.



Against

Councillors K Allcock, Ashraf, Bhullar, Carmichael, Chambers, Crompton, Davies, Dhariwal, Dhatt, Fisher, Fitzgerald, Gavan, E Giles, J Giles, L Giles, Hackett, Hartwell, Hemingway, Hinchliff, Hughes, Jalil, Johnston, Kalebe-Nyamongo, Kaur, Khatun, Loan, Maycock, Mayo, Melia, Millar, Millard, Moore, Muflihi, Owen, Padda, Pall, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Shaeen, J Singh, N Singh, Smith, Taylor, Tipper, Tromans, Uddin, Uppal, Webb and Wilkes.

Abstentions

None

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost and Council moved to consider the original budget.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, and Standing Order 13 (4), the decision relating to Council Finances 2024-25 was put to a named vote as follows:-

For

Councillors K Allcock, Ashraf, Bhullar, Carmichael, Chambers, Crompton, Davies, Dhariwal, Dhatt, Fisher, Fitzgerald, Gavan, E Giles, J Giles, L Giles, Hackett, Hartwell, Hemingway, Hinchliff, Hughes, Jalil, Johnston, Kalebe-Nyamongo, Kaur, Khatun, Loan, Maycock, Mayo, Melia, Millar, Millard, Moore, Muflihi, Owen, Padda, Pall, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Shaeen, J Singh, N Singh, Smith, Taylor, Tromans, Uddin, Uppal, Webb and Wilkes.

Against

Councillors Abrahams, Chapman, Dunn, Fisher, W Gill, Kordala, Trumpeter and Weston.



Abstentions
Councillor Tipper.

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

Resolved:-

- 1.1 That Council approve the recommendations from Cabinet at the meeting of 7th February 2024 on the Draft Budget 2024/25 as listed below:
 - I. That it be noted that the Council Tax Base was agreed at Full Council on 12th December 2023.
 - II. That it be noted that the Council Tax Support Scheme was approved at Full Council on 12th December 2023.
 - III. That it be noted that Housing Rents and Service Charges were uplifted by Full Council on 12th December 2023
 - IV. That the report of the Section 151 Officer, included at paragraphs 6 to 25 of the Draft Budget 2024/25 report , as required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget calculations and adequacy of proposed financial reserves be noted



- V. That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy at [Appendix A](#) of the Draft Budget 2024/25 report is approved, which incorporates the following recommendations:
- a. The MTFs and embedded MTFP as an estimate of the Council's current financial position at January 2024.
 - b. The Guiding Principles as framework for financial planning for the period of the MTFs.
 - c. The Capital Planning Principles to guide the preparation of the Capital Programme in the years ahead.
 - d. The planned development of the Transformation Programme to date and through 2024/25 and endorse the extension of the transformational approach to other services of the Council.
 - e. The Budget Timetable set out in this report.
 - f. The submission to DLUHC of a proposal to employ flexible use of capital receipts in financial year 2024/25 and to delegate the amendment and final approval of this proposal to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Interim Director of Finance together with the Assistant Chief Executive.
 - g. The onward submission of the Winter 2024 update of the MTFs to the next meeting of Full Council.
 - h. The adjustments to fees and charges as set out in



Annex 12.

- i. The savings proposals set out at Annex 5 subject to removal of proposals relating to the closure of Shopmobility, the resultant reduction in savings (£53,000 in 2024/25) to be met by an equivalent contribution being made from Earmarked Reserves;
- VI. That an increase of 2.99% in the level of general council tax for 2024/25 is approved;
 - VII. That an increase of 2.00% in the level of Adult Social Care precept for 2024/25 is approved;
 - VIII. That the General Fund Budget net budget of £333.008m at [Appendix B](#) (Updated), including the proposed total increase of Council Tax for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council of 4.99%, in accordance with the Council Tax Referendum Principles as set by Government for 2024/25 is approved.
 - IX. That the report at [Appendix D](#) on the Dedicated Schools Grant and Schools funding is approved which incorporates the following recommendations such that Council:
 - a. adopt the minimum transition option for calculating schools funding in 2024/25
 - b. approve the Growth Funding at £1.60m in 2024/25
 - c. approve the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund in



2024/25

- d. approve the transfer of £0.512m funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) to fund the attendance service
 - e. approve the CSSB, De-delegated and Education Function proposals as set out in Annex A (with the exception of Schools in Financial Difficulty).
 - f. adopt the allocation by block per paragraph 5 of that Appendix; and
 - g. note the details of the Schools Funding Settlement.
- X. That the General Fund Capital Programme at [Appendix E](#) is approved;
- XI. That the Housing Revenue Account and HRA Capital Programme at [Appendix F](#) is approved including:
- a. Noting that Full Council on 12th December 2023 approved recommendations of the report entitled 'The review of council tenants rents and housing related property charges' as outlined in paragraph 8 of Appendix F and Annex 1.
 - b. The HRA Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as set out in Table 2 (Updated)



- c. The HRA estimated working balances in 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 15 of [Appendix F](#).
 - d. The investment principles for the HRA Capital Programme as set out in paragraph 19 of [Appendix F](#).
 - e. The HRA Capital Programme control totals as set out in Table 3 of [Appendix F](#).
 - f. The HRA Treasury Management Strategy as set out in paragraph 4 of [Appendix F](#).
 - g. The 30 year HRA Business Plan as set out in Annex 2 of [Appendix F](#).
- XII. That the Capital Strategy and Capital Financing Strategy at [Appendix G and H](#) of this report is approved.
- XIII. That the Investment Strategy set out at [Appendix I](#) is approved.
- XIV. That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement at [Appendix J](#) is approved including:
- a. The Borrowing and Investment Strategy for 2024/25
 - b. The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2024/25
 - c. The Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 to 2026/27, summarised at Annex 6



- d. Expected new net borrowing of £40.4m in 2024/25
- XV. That the Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework at [Appendix K](#) is approved including:
- a. The Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework for 2024/25 comprising the policies set out at Annexes 1 to 9 of the [Appendix K](#);
 - b. the Council Tax Award of Discount Policy (Annex 2), Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy (Annex 3), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Policy (Annex 8), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Hardship Relief Policy (Annex 7) and War Pension Policy (Annex 9) as set out [Appendix K](#); and
 - c. that authority be given to the Director of Finance – Section 151 Office in conjunction with Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, and in consultation with the monitoring officer to make necessary changes to the policies during 2024/25 due to the Cost of Living Crisis;
- XVI. That the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer is authorised to make any further financial adjustments, corrections, or amendments in relation to the final input of budgetary information into corporate finance systems;



XVII. that the Section 151 Officer is authorised to make transfers to or from reserves during the financial year to ensure that adequate reserves are maintained and adjusted when spend from earmarked reserves is required;

XVIII. that the Section 151 Officer is authorised to adjust the funding sources applied to the Capital Programme during the year to maximise flexibility in use of capital resources and minimise borrowing costs where possible;

(2) that having received confirmation of approved final precept amounts from West Midlands Fire Service and West Midlands Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner, the following Council Tax is approved:

1. that it be noted that the Council meeting on the 12th December 2023 approved the amount of 78,217.27 as its Council Tax base for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 33 (5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;
2. that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992: -

- (a) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act; £1,372,642,200



- (b) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act; £1,236,772,502
- (c) Being the amount by which the aggregate at 2(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year; £135,869,698
- (d) Being the amount at 2(c) above, all divided by the amount at 1 above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year; £1,737.08
- (e) Valuation Bands

	Core Amounts	Adult Social Care Amounts	Total
A	£990.33	£167.72	£1,158.05
B	£1,155.39	£195.67	£1,351.06
C	£1,320.44	£223.63	£1,544.07
D	£1,485.50	£251.58	£1,737.08
E	£1,815.61	£307.49	£2,123.10
F	£2,145.73	£363.39	£2,509.12
G	£2,475.83	£419.30	£2,895.13
H	£2,971.00	£503.16	£3,474.16

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 2(d) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council in accordance with



Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;

3. That it be noted that for the year 2024/25 the major precepting authorities have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below: -

Valuation Bands	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority	Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands
A	£50.13	£143.70
B	£58.49	£167.65
C	£66.84	£191.60
D	£75.20	£215.55
E	£91.91	£263.45
F	£108.62	£311.35
G	£125.33	£359.25
H	£150.40	£431.10



4. That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 2(e) and 3 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, sets the following amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2024/25 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Band

A	£1,351.88
B	£1,577.20
C	£1,802.51
D	£2,027.83
E	£2,478.46
F	£2,929.09
G	£3,379.71
H	£4,055.66

5. That the Chief Financial Officer is authorised to take any necessary action to collect revenues and disburse monies from the relevant accounts;
6. That the requirements of any relevant legislation, to consider reports as a consequence of the approval of the Council's Finances 2024/25 report, is dispensed with on the grounds that in the opinion of the Council the items are urgent.



Cabinet Recommendations to Council

At its meeting on 17 January 2024, Cabinet recommended to Full Council that the existing contract procedure rules be amended to reflect a tendering evaluation quality weighting of 10-30% on Social Value for all services, goods and work contracts.

The existing Social Value Policy (2010-2013) for Sandwell was deemed not fit for purpose in that it did not reflect contemporary best practice and did not align with the Social Value in Sandwell priority as set out in the Sandwell Business Growth Plan which was approved by Cabinet on 15 November 2023.

The existing policy only applied to services and goods contracts; however, the Social Value in Sandwell Policy proposed to go further and include works contracts. The existing tendering evaluation weighting of 5-30% on Social Value for services and goods contracts was not ambitious enough, considering the contract values of services, goods and works the council had commissioned, the planning applications it determined and the investment it levered into the borough. Increasing the minimum weighting to 10% with a maximum of 30% demonstrated the council's commitment to maximising Social Value outcomes that could be derived due to the council's influence as an anchor organisation.

Resolved that a tendering evaluation quality weighting of 10-30% on Social Value for all services, goods and works contracts is approved and that the existing Contract Procedure Rules are amended to reflect this change.

Meeting ended at 7.48pm following an adjournment between 6.21pm and 6.29pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk



Medium Term Financial Strategy

2024/25 to 2028/29

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council



Finance Directorate

Winter 2024

Prepared: February 2024

Version: MTFS Winter 2024 FINAL FOR COUNCIL

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Introduction

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is a key document in the Council's financial planning cycle. This document sets out the strategic financial approach that the Council will adopt in supporting delivery and completion of the Improvement Plan and the portfolio of other strategies and plans that support delivery of the services in the Borough. The MTFS seeks to explain how the Council will distribute its resources in this endeavour over the next five years. In order to deliver the Corporate Plan the Council will need to operate carefully within specific quantitative financial targets. These targets manifest themselves as budget limits, within which the Council must deliver its services over the period of the MTFS. There will be no room for overspends on the future journey and the Council needs to refresh its approach to operate with highly disciplined financial management arrangements. By doing so, the Council will be able to minimise the risk of the financial perils which have engulfed some local authorities in the recent past and demonstrate a level of financial stability and good management that the community in Sandwell is entitled to expect.

Brendan Arnold FCPFA
Interim Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer

26 January 2024

The MTFS - Form and Purpose

1. The purpose of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is to set down the approaches that will be used by the Council in assembling, organising and deploying its financial resources to (i) deliver the objectives set down in the Improvement Plan presented to Full Council on 7 June 2022, and updated in December 2022, June 2023 and subsequently.
2. The MTFS contains a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which sets out the planning assumptions and financial limits formed by the relevant funding constraints presently assumed. These will be updated quarterly moving forward. This is the second presentation of a quarterly update to frame the development of the 2024/25 Budget at Full Council on 20 February 2024. This update reflects the impact of the Provisional Finance Settlement for 2024/25 and the adjusted MTFP appears at Annex 7. Accordingly, this version of the MTFS contains sufficient information to construct the framework within which the Council's Budget for 2024/25 is capable of being set.
3. It should be noted that development of the Council's MTFS is a key recommendation of the VFM Governance Review undertaken by Grant Thornton in 2021 and forms a notable action within the Council's Improvement Plan. Accordingly, the suitable development and use of the MTFS has been identified by Commissioners as one of the key considerations in advising the Secretary of State of progress made by the Council on its journey to improvement. More generally, it is important to note that like all Councils, the Council is *required under statute* to set a balanced Budget for 2024/25 during March 2024.
4. The MTFS sets out (i) a set of Guiding Principles which are presented for agreement by Cabinet and Council in seeking to obtain sustainable financial balance in the medium term and (ii) the design and operation of specific programmes and other initiatives that will provide savings and cost reductions sufficient to be considered in balancing the 2024/25 Budget on 20 February 2024.
5. It follows that this document is to be seen as a dynamic part of the Council's financial operations in the future and is of critical importance on the Council's ongoing improvement journey.

Background & Context

6. On 22 March 2022 a process of Intervention was initiated by the Secretary of State in response to the issuance by the External Auditor of their report following the Value for Money Governance Review containing statutory recommendations.
7. In seeking to address the recommendations from the External Auditor's report as well as those resulting from the CIPFA Financial Management Review and a Local Government Association Peer Challenge, the Council has – with the oversight of the Commissioners – adopted an Improvement Plan which is closely monitored by the Leadership Team, the Cabinet, Scrutiny function and Full Council. Although Intervention was not driven from a financial perspective as part of this process the Council needs to be able to assure that its financial affairs can be managed in a sustainable way.

Strategic Goals

8. The MTFS has the following strategic goals:
 - a. To provide a framework within which the Council is able to achieve a series of balanced budgets in the medium term to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan and Improvement Plan, demonstrating sustainable improvement.
 - b. By so doing to reach for and assure both financial stability and sustainability and to deliver these in the short, medium and long terms.
 - c. To enable successive budgets to be balanced using a set of Guiding Principles that are commonly adopted across the Local Government Sector and to apply these rigorously; and
 - d. To provide a budget and risk structure within which the Corporate Plan and Improvement Plan can be completed to meet the needs of stakeholders.

Key Points of Briefing

9. The MTFS and accompanying MTFP - following an extensive and detailed review including receipt of the Provisional Finance Settlement - is suggesting that the previously forecast Budget shortfall in the region of £13m in 2024/25 was substantially correct. Looking backwards, this figure has changed in the course of financial year 2023/24, reflecting the usual and expected refinement and testing of initial planning assumptions.
10. The movement between the Budget in 2023/24 and the Draft Budget 2024/25 are shown in Annex 8 and include the following changes.
 - a. Additional savings identified.
 - b. Downward adjustment and stress testing of anticipated savings following a review of the underlying assumptions.
 - c. The challenging and adjustment of cost pressures previously admitted to the MTFP.
 - d. The impact of the Provisional Finance Settlement 2024/25 received on the 18 December 2023 and the Final Finance Settlement 2024/25 received on the 5 February 2024.
11. From the analysis presented it is clear that it remains the case that the Council must select ongoing savings amounting to £11.988m to balance 2024/25 Budget and a further £7m of temporary cost reductions to deal with short term pressures; the overall total is £18.988m as shown in Table 1.
12. In any local authority the overall suite of savings selected to ensure that the MTFP is balanced in the medium term will reflect a blend of (a) savings gathered from efficiencies and adoption of best practice (b) the adjustment of service levels (sometimes suspension or cessation of previous service levels) and (c) transformational savings. The Council has explored will continue to explore all of these dimensions as it considers the means of balancing the Budget in 2024/25 and, subsequently, in the years following.

13. As part of this process the Council has already taken steps to deliver a *transformational* approach to delivering savings and will seek to widen and strengthen its response in this direction in both the short and medium terms. To this end a transformation programme to implement *Oracle Fusion* - a corporate Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system - is already underway and set to go live in the early Summer of 2024. In addition, a Transformation Strategy has been prepared, and a Corporate Transformation Board has been established to guide and control the use of transformational approaches in the years ahead. These materials are attached to this report at Annex 10. It should be clear that the benefits of the transformational endeavours described are to develop better value for service users and to enhance the customer journey.
14. As part of these ambitions the Council acknowledges the need to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines including adopting the Corporate Landlord Model (itself a transformational programme) for management of its property estate. As part of this emergent Property Transformation programme the Council acknowledges a need to further develop its proposals for significant asset disposals and to bring these to decision at pace. Equipping these approaches with policies around flexible working, team building and to develop a One Team approach to service delivery are already underway and will be further developed.
15. Additional opportunities in the application of transformational approaches exist in Housing, Adult Social Care, Customer Services and elsewhere (with regard to the delivery of transactional services generally); work is underway to inform development of clear business cases in these areas during 2024/25 and 2025/26. In addition to programmes that are service focussed, a range of other projects has been assembled. The Transformation Strategy appears at Annex 10.
16. The Council has commenced a resident engagement exercise through the Summer and Autumn of 2023 and this - together with the Consultation and Engagement Plan (See Annexes 3 & 4) - forms the Council's approach to meeting its responsibilities in this area as part of setting the Budget for 2024/25. The savings of c. £12m for which approval is sought to balance the 2024/25 Budget are shown in Annex 5.
17. A Budget Timetable for the 2024/25 Budget process is also presented and appears at Annex 2. In line with the highest standards of transparent governance this timetable includes specific challenge and review on 15 January 2024 by the Council's Overview & Scrutiny function through the Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board as part of the consultation process.
18. The MTFs (and MTFP) will be further updated for subsequent meetings of Cabinet, the Scrutiny function and Full Council in the course of financial year 2024/25.

The Guiding Principles

19. In undertaking its financial operations over the period of the MTFs the Council is asked to adopt the following Guiding Principles ('The Principles'). The Principles are based on sound management and professional practice. They are presented as *Guiding Principles* because there may be occasions where – after careful consideration - the exigencies of strategic or operational management may necessitate from time to time a departure from the Principles.

No.	Guiding Principles
1	Fees & Charges will be reviewed annually and adjusted for inflation, comparability and competitiveness.
2	As a compassionate Council, in setting charges, the impact on vulnerable groups will be considered carefully and equalities impact assessments prepared where needed.
3	Service level spend will be benchmarked regularly with a suitable peer group and proposals to align with the benchmark will be brought forward.
4	The Council will seek to adopt incrementally a policy of Digital First in service delivery generally but as a compassionate Council will be mindful of the risks of <i>digital exclusion</i> in doing so.
5	A rolling programme of Service Reviews launched as part of the Star Chamber process will continue from time to time within the timeframe of the MTFS and will be used to ensure that operating models, organisational design and cost footprints are subject to regular review and adjustment across the Council.
6	Service developments, savings and investment will be brought forward on the basis of business cases that must demonstrate feasibility, deliverability, and appropriate financial pay back and other investment appraisal techniques.
7	The Council will consult with residents and other stakeholders in the Borough in forming budget options.
8	Where business cases are prepared for decision a proactive approach will operate encompassing review in depth prior to such presentation; this will include rigorous application of investment appraisal techniques, peer review and use of the Scrutiny function to achieve searching review and challenge before business cases are adopted.
9	The Council will welcome approaches from regional and other partners for joint working and joint management initiatives.
10	The Council will seek to reach and maintain Unearmarked Reserves at a level of at least 5% of Net Expenditure (i.e. £16.65m based on estimated net expenditure in 2024/25 of £333m).
11	Given the financial position of the Council and the need to maintain key statutory services the Council will seek to maximise receipts from Council Tax and optimise receipts from fees and charges and other income over the period of the MTFS.
12	Growth in service budgets must be funded from (a) grants or other contributions, (b) realistic estimates of commercial income or fees and charges or (c) revenue savings. Following the setting of the 2024/25 Budget there will be a general planning assumption that no other growth will be adopted into the Budget within the period of the MTFS unless under the most pressing circumstances.
13	Council will develop moving forward enhanced means of assessing and managing risks at both strategic and operational levels and these will be used to inform the annual Budget process.
14	The Council will seek to make Value for Money decisions and be mindful of its obligations to obtain best value for the 'public purse' generally.
15	The Council will consider invest to save proposals in preparing the MTFS generally.
16	In making decisions to buy goods and services the Council will be mindful of powers to seek social value in procurement and reduce the carbon impact of decisions to assist with Net Zero.
17	In forming its budget plans the Council will specifically consider and take action to meet existing savings targets and reduce the cost of property holding where the continued holding of property is not justified by the need; in doing so the Council will seek to reduce overheads and channel resources to frontline services.
18	The Council – as a general guideline – will seek to constrain its Debt Service Costs (including MRP) within 7% of its Net Revenue Budget. In 2024/25 the figure is predicted to be 6%.

Financial Challenges: Governance & Decision Making

20. A full Budget Timetable appears at Annex 2 to this report. It must be noted that - following the Intervention already referred to - the Commissioners will in support of Cabinet - consider and receive the materials referred to below and will guide and advise the Council in fulfilment of their supporting role as part of the overall Improvement journey.
21. In summary, the following arrangements apply for decision making to set the 2024/25 Budget on 20 February 2024.
 - a. The Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held a Budget Enquiry and Review meeting to consider the Draft Budget proposals on 15 January 2024.
 - b. Cabinet to receive the recommendations from the Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board at its meeting on 7 February 2024; and
 - c. Full Council to consider the setting of the 2024/25 Budget on 20 February 2024 following a decision of Cabinet to recommend the Draft Budget to Full Council.

Consultation & Engagement

22. The views of Sandwell's residents, businesses and communities are integral to the development of a MTFs that reflects the priorities of the Borough. A two phased approach to engagement and consultation has been devised to support the development of the 2024/25 Budget and the MTFP. This has been designed to align to the Council's Consultation Principles:
23. Consultation lies at the heart of effective public policy development and service to the public. It should be a first thought and not an afterthought.
24. Consultation should never be used to communicate decisions already taken, and the outcome of consultation should never be pre-determined.
25. Consultation should be inclusive. Whenever possible, it should involve all parties/groups, including our children and young people, who can contribute to or are affected by the outcome of the consultation.
26. Phase One consisted of a face-to-face public engagement exercise with a representative sample of residents in Summer 2023. Building on the budget consultation activity conducted in 2022, this survey offered the opportunity for residents to provide input on their local priorities and preferences for delivering further council savings going into the budget setting process for 2024/25. The results of this helped inform the development of options for future savings. Details on the methodology used and responses are included at Annex 4. At the same time, the Council also conducted the SHAPE survey with primary and secondary school age children across the Borough. This survey captured the experiences of children and young people in Sandwell and what matters to them.

27. Phase Two commenced following approval from Cabinet on 15 November 2023. From 15 November 2023. This phase involved consultation with residents, businesses and communities on a basket of savings proposals set out in the Cabinet report to address the projected shortfall at that time. These savings options were shared with focus groups which represented residents and communities across Sandwell, and their views sought on whether the Council should adopt these options and what impact they could have. The timing of this consultation period was scheduled to feed into the meetings of Cabinet and Full Council in February 2024 that will be asked to take decisions on the Budget for 2024/25.

The focus groups were held as follows:

Focus Group	Date	In person / online	Number of Participants
Residents	21 and 27 November 2023	Online (at preference of participants)	9
Children and Young People (SHAPE Forum)	30 November	In person	7
Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations	7 December 2023	In Person	9
Business Ambassadors	11 January 2024	In Person	13

28. The detailed methodology and responses to the focus groups can be found in Annex 4.

29. An online survey was also conducted during this period, open for responses from 20 November 2023 to 2 January 2024. Upon close of the survey, the council had received 416 responses in total. A breakdown of the demographic profile of respondents can be found in Annex 4.

30. Whilst the number of participants in the focus groups and online survey do not represent a statistically representative sample of Sandwell's, the comments made by the different groups provide a useful insight into the views of different communities across the borough. The following points are a summary of the consistent themes which arose in the focus groups and online survey:

- Residents and representatives of the business community who participated in this exercise were largely unaware of budget challenge facing the Council, but accepted savings needed to be made.
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations were more aware than residents of the Council's financial position, and also recognised savings are required.
- Selling or renting out assets was supported as good way to make savings, as per the previous budget consultation activities. Communities expressed a preference for being more involved in determining the future of locally important or culturally significant assets.
- There was support for reducing the number of leisure centres in the borough, as long as easy access to centres was retained
- Increases in charges for businesses and development or where there is choice in using the service were supported, more so than increases in charges for services to vulnerable people
- Respondents would like to see events covering their costs rather than being subsidised

- by the council, as well as sponsorship by local businesses being explored
- There was strong support for improving efficiency of support services, use of Council fleet and focus on prevention and early intervention across all focus groups
- Green spaces in Sandwell are popular and valued – residents would like to see improvements in grounds maintenance, especially in parks and street cleansing
- Concerns shared that changes to waste management approaches will see an increase in littering, anti-social behaviour and fly tipping
- Support for savings from promoting independence and transformation of adult social care, providing care needs were met
- Respondents were keen that cuts across the board did not adversely affect residents who may be vulnerable, elderly or on low incomes
- There is a need to communicate more with residents on what changes will be made and the impact on residents.

Equality Impact Assessments

31. Where savings proposals related to a change of approach to service delivery in 2024/25, Service Leads have completed an Equality Impact Assessment screening assessment for each saving proposal to determine whether a full Equality Impact Assessment was required. The Equality Impact Assessment enables Service Leads to fully understand the risks and implications of removal, reduction, or a change in delivery. This has been undertaken in parallel to the consultation process.
32. A large proportion of savings for 2024/25 will be achieved through reduction in budgets that are no longer required to deliver services or increasing income targets in line with current levels achieved or based on reliable forecasts. Therefore, these proposals did not require a full Equality Impact Assessment.
33. Where a full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken, a small number of savings proposals have been identified as having a potentially negative impact on some protected groups. Where groups will be potentially negatively impacted, actions have been identified to mitigate the impact on residents and service users. These actions are documented in the Equality Impact Assessments and will be reviewed by services through existing governance processes.
34. There are a number of savings that may have an impact on the Council's staffing structures which will be subject to the Council's policies and procedures. As far as possible, these savings will be achieved through deletion of vacant posts. Until the consultation process is complete, the actual savings level or staffing impact cannot be confirmed. However, the savings proposals are still considered to be a prudent assessment of overall savings opportunities.
35. The outcome of the Equality Impact Assessments, alongside the findings of the consultation process, have been assessed and used to prepare final recommendations that are presented to Cabinet in February for approval.

The National Financial Background

36. The National economy is being driven by international economic events not least the impact of the war in Ukraine, ongoing issues with international supply chains and the ongoing impact of the Pandemic. One of the key issues that has emerged is the emergence of high levels of inflation in energy, food and other products and commodities which has caused very significant inflationary pressures in wholesale and retail markets across a range of goods and services; naturally these pressures have also related to increases in labour costs. The resulting inflationary pressure has not been seen in the

UK economy since the very high levels experienced during the late 1970's and early 1980's.

37. In recent years Local Government has received a much higher proportion of funding from local rather than national sources as has historically been the case. It follows that Government has inherited a position where it no longer has the appropriate levers or – following the support afforded to communities and businesses through and following the Pandemic and energy crisis – the resources to meet the inflationary pressure in the cost of service delivery.
38. The result is that much of the financial pressure has been left for local councils to manage and this has resulted and will continue to entail a need for largescale savings across the Local Government sector. That said, the savings currently required in this Council are currently forecast to be at the lower end of the savings envelope faced by some other local authorities.
39. On the back of these developments a 'cost of living' crisis has been described. This is something of which the Council is keenly aware. Accordingly, the Council will be invited subsequently in this budget approval process to maintain the Council Tax Support Scheme in Sandwell for 2024/25 without any downward adjustment to the level of support provided. There also needs to be an awareness that in the UK economy where inflation has been seen to rise beyond 6% per annum in the recent past, levels of Council Tax met by residents are likely to be have become less costly in real terms in recent years.

The Pandemic and ongoing Societal Changes

40. The ongoing impact of the Pandemic has resulted in a number of behavioural changes at a societal level which result in additional costs for local authority budgets. Examples nationally have included - but are not confined to - higher waste collection costs, pressure on the collection of commercial rents, changes in the demand for office accommodation associated with the emergence of 'working from home' as a 'new normal' and a consequential adverse impact on car parking income..
41. Although some of these effects are estimated to recover towards former levels in the medium term (particularly commercial rental income and car parking revenues) the evident financial pressures are expected to continue into the medium term. This is the case in Sandwell as for other councils.

General Budget Planning Assumptions

42. The following paragraphs set out a suite of headline planning assumptions which inform the construction of the MTFP; greater detail is presented in Annex 6.

Council Tax

43. As a response to the inflationary pressures in the economy the Government has in the Provisional Finance Settlement 2024/25 set the referendum threshold for Council Tax increases to an overall total of 2.99% and an additional Adult Social Care Precept of 2% for upper tier councils such as Sandwell.
44. The increase in Council Tax will be a decision of Council in each year moving forward but to do other than maximise potential increases would imperil the Council's ability to sustain statutory services at a reasonable level.

National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR)

45. The Government has for some years been considering reform of the NNDR system amid concerns from the business sector that the Rate imposes an unwarranted burden on the commercial sector. To this point no firm proposals have been brought forward by Government and so the MTFP uses the existing methodology to forecast the yield in the forward period of the Plan.
46. In addition, for Sandwell, the proposed Devolution Deal negotiated between the West Midlands Combined Authority and Government envisages maintenance of the existing NNDR pooling arrangements in the West Midlands to which the Council presently belongs for a further 10 years. These arrangements are expected to be to the advantage of the Council.

The Capital Programme

47. Services have undertaken a detailed review of the Capital Programme previously agreed by Council in February 2023 and this has been supplemented by new schemes requested by services. The overall level of programming requested to meet service priorities - where these require support from the Council - have been accommodated within the available revenue funding available. Further information appears in the Capital Programme reports (Appendices E, G and H to the Draft Budget report 2024/25).

The Capital Planning Principles

48. As previously agreed by Council in preparing the Capital Programme for 2024/25 (and looking forward generally within the period of this MTFS) the following *Capital Planning Principles* have been used in forming the Capital Programme which will be presented to Full Council for approval. In future, proposals that do not fall within these 'Capital Principles' will not – except in conditions of compelling exigency - be included within the Draft Capital Programme for the General Fund or the Housing Revenue Account.
 - a. Items of programming that relate to essential health and safety works and deliver compliance to the regulations within in the Council's property estate.
 - b. Items of programming that have a measurable beneficial impact on the carbon footprint of the Council and the Borough and which have affordable cost implications.
 - c. Essential investment in Information & Communications Technology (both hardware and software) to ensure that the Council has fit for purpose and secure tools and infrastructure to support operations generally and transformational programmes where there are suitable business cases to support such investment.
 - d. Items where - following provision of external grant support (principally from Government, Government Agencies or the West Midlands Combined Authority) - specific resources are provided to the Council by to complete or partially complete certain specified schemes that support the Council's objectives or wider regional ambitions such that match funding is required. Such match funding must be affordable to the Council and decisions made must demonstrate the Council's duty to achieve VFM in the decisions made.

- e. Any schemes that can be shown to be wholly funded from external resources (e.g. Government Grants, external contributions) without implying additional cost burdens for the Council.
 - f. Where proposals are estimated to return a measurable revenue saving; for example, leasing of the Council's commercial property portfolio which may require modest upfront capital investment and which then return a beneficial income stream to the revenue budget.
 - g. Schemes for which there may be a perception of compelling need but where such schemes are wholly dependent on Council funding. In these cases, a rigorous business case must be prepared which demonstrates that additional cost pressures can be assuaged by alternative savings or removal of capital programming. This approach will ensure that the Council seeks to enhance the approaches already in play in forming the Council's Capital Programme in the years ahead.
49. For the avoidance of doubt, on grounds of affordability there will be no other new borrowing for capital purposes in the General Fund during the period of the MTFs.

Reserves

50. In previous years the Council has sometimes used significant contributions from Reserves to support service delivery. In taking this approach the Council – as has happened in certain other local authorities – may face the future prospect of compromising its ability to manage strategic risks at some future point. Accordingly, unless in case of grave exigency, or in respect of use of reserves that has been previously planned, the Draft Budget 2024/25 has reduced to less than £0.5m the call on reserves to achieve balance in that year.

Fees & Charges

51. In line with Guiding Principle (1) the Council's portfolio of Fees and Charges has been updated using a figure of 5% unless charges are specified by Government or there are other relevant constraints. In a small number of cases charges have been raised beyond this adjustment factor. The detail appears at Annex 12 to this report.

Debt Service in the General Fund

52. The Council's General Fund holds a current debt portfolio of £123m for which the annual debt service costs are currently estimated at c. £15m per annum which represents less than 4.7% of the Net Budget in 2023/24. In 2024/25 the forecast figure is c. 6%. The fact that this percentage is relatively modest compared with similar authorities is a significant factor in the budget shortfall in Sandwell being lower compared with such authorities. The position with regard to the Housing Revenue Account is discussed within the separate HRA Budget Report 2024/25 which appears at Appendix F to the report setting the Draft Budget 2024/25.

The Finance Settlement 2024/25: Key Points

53. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 was received on 18 December 2023 and the Final Finance Settlement was published on 5 February 2024.

The Council's forecasts with regard to the content of the Settlement proved to be remarkably accurate.

54. The key points of briefing in relation to the Settlement and matters arising are:

- a. New Homes Bonus: Government has been considering reform or phasing out of New Homes Bonus for some years but for 2024/25 has resolved to continue the existing methodology for a further year. The amount received is £0.776m compared to £0.111m in the current year which reflects the construction activity in the Borough presently.
- b. Controls on use of packaging and waste volumes – the Government is planning to establish a system where the producers of packaging waste are charged a levy related to the waste volumes that result such that the proceeds - net of regulatory costs - are passed on to local Councils. The Government has deferred implementation until 2025/26.
- c. Planning Fees – as announced in the Autumn Statement Government has re-set planning fees which is expected to provide a benefit of £250,000 to the Council in 2024/25.
- d. Council Tax: Government has confirmed is that the referendum limit for Council Tax will increase by 2.99% in 2024/25 and as is standard across the Local Government sector this is the present planning assumption throughout the term of the MTFP.
- e. The Collection Fund in respect of Council Tax is currently estimated to be in deficit at end of 2023/24 and a charge to the General Fund of £0.5m has been included in the current MTFP to account for this.
- f. The Adult Social Care Precept – contrary of expectations within the sector – has once again been made available to Councils at the level of 2% in 2024/25.
- g. The NNDR Pool - it has been clarified that the Council will continue to be a member of the West Midlands Business Rates Pool in 2024/25 and for the 9 years following under the auspices of the Devolution Deal negotiated by the WMCA.
- h. The Provisional Social Care Grants allocation saw increases locally and nationally with the Social Care Grant increasing to £42.8m for Sandwell, being an increase of £7.0m (nationally allocation of £4.5bn being a £692m increase); the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund increasing by £2.1m to £5.4m (national increase of £200m to take total allocation to £500m); and the Adult Social Care Market Sustainability Improvement Fund increasing by £3.8m resulting in Sandwell's grant being £8.1m for 2024/25 (the national allocation was £1.05bn). The Final Settlement included the additional £500m of national funding as announced on 24th January 2024. This resulted in an additional £3.849m being made available to Sandwell.

Other Planning Assumptions

55. Further planning assumptions made in the Medium Term Financial Plan appear at Annex 6.

Budget Savings

56. The Council has assembled a list of savings opportunities to the value of £18m and has undertaken consultation and engagement on these; as a result of this process savings of

c. £12m are recommended for implementation and these are set out in Annex 5 of the MTFS.

Delivery of Savings in 2023/24

57. A review of savings has been undertaken to assess whether the targeted savings were delivered in 2022/23 and 2023/24 as planned. Should this not have been the case, the additional cost this implies would remain within the forward years of the MTFP as a pressure. At the present time there is evidence to suggest that the great majority of savings for 2023/24 are set to be delivered by the end of the year or are capable of delivery in the near future.

Flexible Use of Capital Receipts

58. The Council will wish to make use of the facility - if offered by Government - to use capital receipts to fund revenue expenditure incurred to further business change and transformation. For this reason, a draft plan has been produced and included at Annex 11 to this report, following which – after further amendment - the plan will be shared with the Government Department (DLUHC) as required in recent guidance from Government.

Property

59. The holding and management of property assets is a significant activity for the Council and as previously described in this report work is proceeding on a number of strands to form a transformation programme in this service area. The principal components are considered to be:
- a. Operation of the Corporate Landlord model which is expected to drive efficiency by unified management of all property assets within the Council; this to release revenue savings in the cost of management of these assets and also to reduce significantly the property holding costs in the revenue budget.
 - b. The Council holds some 4,000 property assets including buildings and parcels of land of various kinds. This includes a number of properties for which the Council has no economic use and which drive a cost stream including maintenance, security, business rates and others which can only be assuaged through the disposal of the surplus property. This is complicit with the need to deliver savings targets already agreed by Council in setting the budget for the current financial year (2023/24) and for which delivery needs to continue.

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

60. The Council's MTFP (MTFS Autumn 2023/24), is shown in Table 1. The MTFP is the product of (i) detailed technical analysis (ii) detailed discussion with the Directorates and their respective management teams regarding the pressures identified and (iii) further engagement to assist the Directorates to identify savings to bridge the Budget shortfall identified.

61. The full detail of the MTFP is shown in Annex 7 and the movements between the original figures and those now presented are shown in Annex 8.

Table 1: Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Opening Net Budget	317.103	351.996	370.954	386.220	400.338
Budget pressures and technical adjustments	52.661	18.958	15.266	14.118	13.899
Changes in government funding within services	(17.768)	-	-	-	-
Revised Net Budget	351.996	370.954	386.220	400.338	414.237
Funding	(333.008)	(340.530)	(350.942)	(361.725)	(372.894)
Net Deficit before savings	18.988	30.424	35.278	38.613	41.343
Savings Proposals	(11.988)	(17.924)	(19.570)	(19.570)	(19.570)
Other short term reductions	(7.000)	-	-	-	-
Net Budget (Surplus)/ Deficit	-	12.500	15.708	19.043	21.773

The MTFS & MTFP: Governance & Reporting

62. The MTFP will continue to be updated on a rolling basis from this point forward and will be reported periodically to Cabinet, Scrutiny Management Boards, Full Council, and the Commissioners. This will enable stakeholders to receive regular briefing on observed changes to the forecasts that are from time to time observed.

Risk Assessment & Management

63. The Council has a need to develop structured arrangements to manage risk with regard to strategic and operational dimensions of its operations. The principal risks associated with maintenance of the Council's services within the financial constraints identified in the MTFS and associated MTFP together with headline mitigations are set out in Annex 9.

Summary

64. This document has set out the MTFS and the embedded MTFP and the acceptance and application of these documents can be summarised as follows:

- a. The Council has identified a set of Guiding Principles which will assist in shaping responses to future revenue budget shortfalls.
- b. The Council is aware of the challenging financial pressures that bear on the 2024/25 Budget and beyond and has understood the issues that this presents.
- c. The Council has taken effective action to identify a portfolio of potential savings opportunities in the order of £18m which may be considered in order to balance the 2024/25 Budget shortfall of which £11.988m ongoing savings are recommended to be taken to balance the Draft Budget 2024/25 together with temporary short term reductions of £7m.

- d. It will be key across the years of the MTFS for the Council to maximise funding streams including Council Tax and this should continue – as in previous years – to inform planning assumptions in the MTFS and MTFP.
- e. MTFP Planning assumptions will continue to be refined and reviewed on an ongoing basis; accordingly, the figures contained in this report will continue to change in the Medium term as the forecasts are updated.
- f. The Council has also identified *Capital Planning Principles* to inform capital planning moving forward and has acknowledged a need to review its capital programme methodology in the period ahead.

Recommendations

65. It is recommended that Cabinet.

- a. Approve the MTFS and embedded MTFP as an estimate of the Council's current financial position at January 2024.
- b. Approve the Guiding Principles as framework for financial planning for the period of the MTFS.
- c. Approve the Capital Planning Principles to guide the preparation of the Capital Programme in the years ahead.
- d. Note the planned development of the Transformation Programme to date and through 2024/25 and endorses the extension of the transformational approach to other services of the Council.
- e. Note the Budget Timetable set out in this report.
- f. Approve the submission to DLUHC of a proposal to use flexible use of capital receipts in financial year 2024/25 and to delegate the amendment and final approval of this proposal to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Interim Director of Finance together with the Assistant Chief Executive.
- g. Approve the onward submission of the Winter 2024 update of the MTFS to the next meeting of Full Council.
- h. Approve the adjustments to fee and charges as set out in Annex 12.
- i. Approve the savings proposals set out at Annex 5.

The Role of Commissioners

On 22 March 2022 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced an [intervention package](#) and a set of [Directions](#) to ensure Sandwell Council was able to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. These Directions were in-part influenced by the Grant Thornton report following their [Value for Money Governance Review of December 2021](#). The Directions remain in force until 22 March 2024 unless amended by the Secretary of State.

In response to the Directions, the council developed a single [Improvement Plan](#) that combined the actions to address not only the Grant Thornton Review, but also the findings of the [CIPFA Financial Management Review \(January 2022\)](#) and the [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge \(February 2022\)](#). Robust programme management and assurance arrangements are in place to manage the delivery of the Improvement Plan and ensure that it remains a live document. A [revised Improvement Plan](#) was approved by Cabinet in March 2023 to incorporate recommendations from follow-up reviews by [Grant Thornton](#) and the [LGA](#). An [Annual Report](#) was approved by Cabinet in June 2023, setting out the council's improvement journey over the preceding 12 months and the priorities for further improvement during the intervention period.

The Directions of the Secretary of State (March 2022) enable the Commissioners to exercise the following functions:

1. All functions associated with the governance and scrutiny of strategic decision making by the Authority.
2. All functions relating to the appointment and dismissal of persons to positions the holders of which are to be designated as statutory officers, and the designation of those persons as statutory officers, to include:
 - a. The functions of designating a person as a statutory officer and removing a person from a statutory office.
 - b. The functions under section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972 of:
 - i. appointing and determining the terms and conditions of employment of an officer of the Authority, insofar as those functions are exercised for the purpose of appointing a person as an officer of the Authority principally in order for that person to be designated as a statutory officer; and
 - ii. dismissing any person who has been designated as a statutory officer from his or her position as an officer of the Authority

The Commissioners submit a report to the Secretary of State every six months on Sandwell Council's progress in addressing the issues that led to government intervention. In their [letter of June 2023](#), the Commissioners noted that they had seen "*significant progress on the single improvement plan*" since their last report, and that "*substantial progress has also been achieved on nearly all*" of the priorities highlighted in their previous report. In the same letter, the Commissioners stated that they believed the council needed to give particular focus to the following four areas:

1. Developing the strategic capacity of the organisation.
2. Further work on implementation of the culture and values work.
3. A comprehensive transformation programme linked to delivering the Council's MTFs.
4. The 2020/21 accounts approved by auditors and a clear timetable for the approval of the 2021/22 accounts.

The Budget Timetable for 2024/25 Budget

Timeline	Activity	Status
August '23	Budget Consultation feedback received; Star Chambers conducted	Completed
Early October '23	Business case development and review	Completed
15 November '23	Autumn 2023 MTFS report to Cabinet and commencement of next phase consultation	Completed
Nov 2023 –Jan '24	Consultation period on savings opportunities to include residents, businesses and communities.	Completed
January 2024	Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board to consider Draft Budget 2024/25	<i>Completed</i>
February 2024	Cabinet to receive recommendations from B&CSMB and to approve Draft Budget 2024/25 for submission to Full Council	<i>Cabinet scheduled for 7 February and Full Council for 20 February 2024.</i>

Sandwell Council Budget Survey report

Key Findings Report July 2023



Research objectives and method



In June and early July 2023 M·E·L Research interviewed a randomly selected sample of 1,100 Sandwell residents.

Following last year's budget consultation, in which residents stated that rationalising buildings and assets would be the preferred method to achieve required savings, Sandwell Council set itself savings targets and examined ways to reduce running costs.

This survey offered the opportunity for residents to provide input on their local priorities, and preferences for delivering further council savings going into the budget setting process for 2024/25.



A stratified random locational sampling approach was used. In each ward, Census Output Areas (COAs) were ranked by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). COAs were then selected at random as sampling points. The number of sampling points selected was proportional to the interviewing target for each ward. All addresses for each COA sampling point were made available to interviewers, with a target of 10 interviews set per sampling point.

At ward level quotas were set by age and gender to ensure that the sample reflected the characteristics of the borough's population. Quotas were set using Census 2021 data.

Spatial Analysis

The sample size of this research does not allow robust analysis at ward level. In order to analyse the data at a more statistically robust geographies, wards have been grouped into towns. These towns, as defined by the table on the right, will be used throughout the analysis.

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Towns and Wards in Sandwell



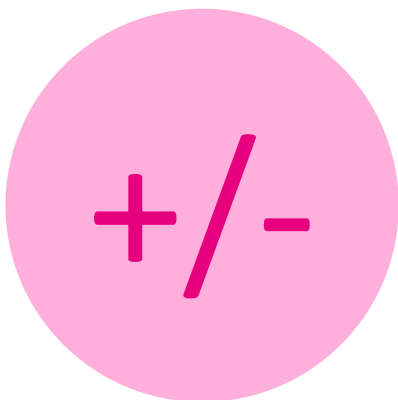
Contains Ordnance Survey data. © Crown copyright and database right 2018.

Town	Ward
Oldbury	Bristnall
	Langley
	Old Warley
	Oldbury
Rowley Regis	Blackheath
	Cradley Heath and Old Hill
	Tividale
Smethwick	Rowley
	Abbey
	Smethwick
	Soho and Victoria
Tipton	St Pauls
	Great Bridge
	Tipton Green
	Princes End
Wednesbury	Friar Park
	Wednesbury North
	Wednesbury South
West Bromwich	West Bromwich Central
	Hateley Heath
	Greets Green and Lyng
	Newton
	Great Barr with Yew Tree
	Charlemont with Grove Vale

Data weighting and confidence level



In total 1100 interviews were completed. While the application of quotas at ward level ensured a diverse mix of residents were interviewed, the final dataset was weighted. This weighting eliminated the effect of differential response rates by geography and between demographic groups so that the resulting data is fully representative of the borough. The final data has been weighted by ward, age and gender, using 2021 Census population data.



The sample size of 1,100 means that this dataset has a maximum confidence level of +/- 2.95 at the borough level (at a 95% level of confidence). This means that we can say with 95% confidence that the responses reported will be no more than 2.95 percentage-points different than if all residents of the borough were interviewed.

Sub-group analysis i.e., comparing responses from particular resident groups or from specific locations within the borough will have higher confidence intervals.

Note on analysis of priorities

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- A number of questions within the research design asked respondents to rank priority issues or to place possible council strategies in rank order. In our analysis we have shown the top three choices selected, plus a mean score across the rankings given.
- For the latter the first choice has been given the highest score. So from a list of 5 choices the first choice has a score of 5, the second a score of 4 and so on, with a mean score calculated for each issue/proposal.
- The higher the mean score the greater the public support for that option.
- Please note that because for certain strategic themes a different number of options were presented to respondents (between 4-6) the mean a scores per question/topic should not be compared.



Budget priorities



Contextual information given to respondents

In last year's budget consultation residents said their preferred way for us to achieve the required savings was to rationalise our buildings and assets, we have taken this on board and set a target saving in 2023/24 to look at ways we can reduce the running costs of the buildings that we currently operate from. This includes sharing our space with partners to generate more income and looking at running services from fewer buildings, especially where we have multiple buildings close together.

The Council is facing similar pressure to residents from inflation and rising costs. The cost of living crisis is also creating more demand for some council services. This means that difficult decisions need to be made when the Council sets its budget.

We have identified and delivering savings of over £30m in the last two years and our current Medium Term Financial Plan shows that further savings of around £8m will be needed for next year.

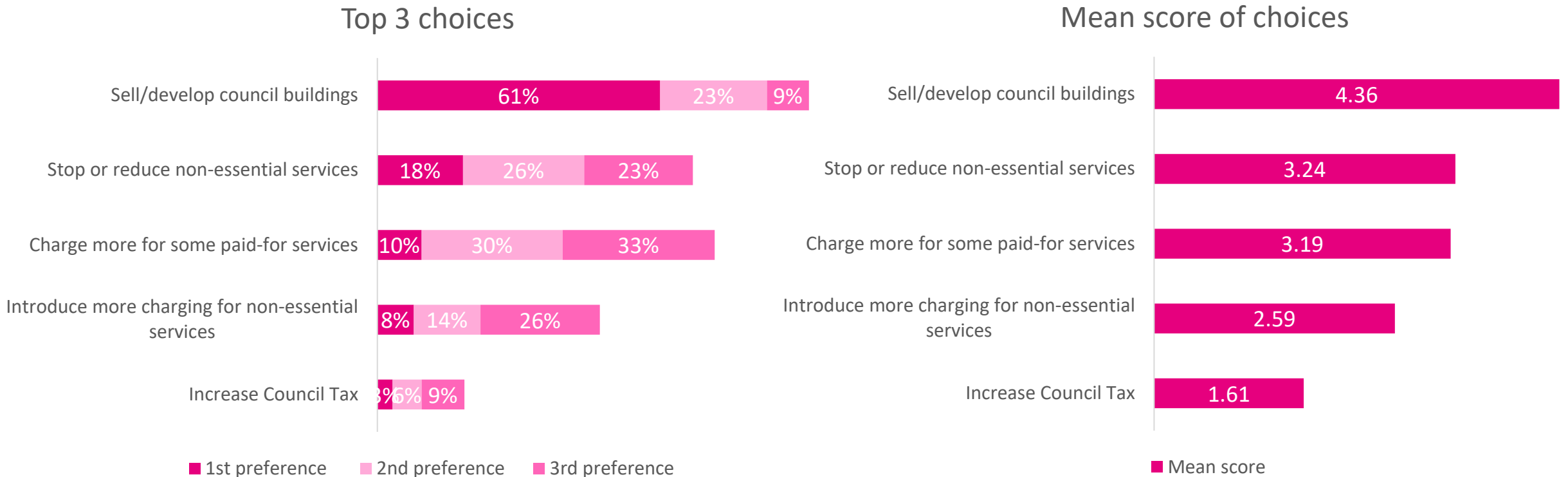
The Council spends around £318m on our day-to-day services, such as refuse collections, street cleansing, providing libraries and leisure centres and our adult and children's social care services. We must meet all our legal requirements but can make choices in how we deliver some of these services.



Preferred approach for delivering the Council savings needed

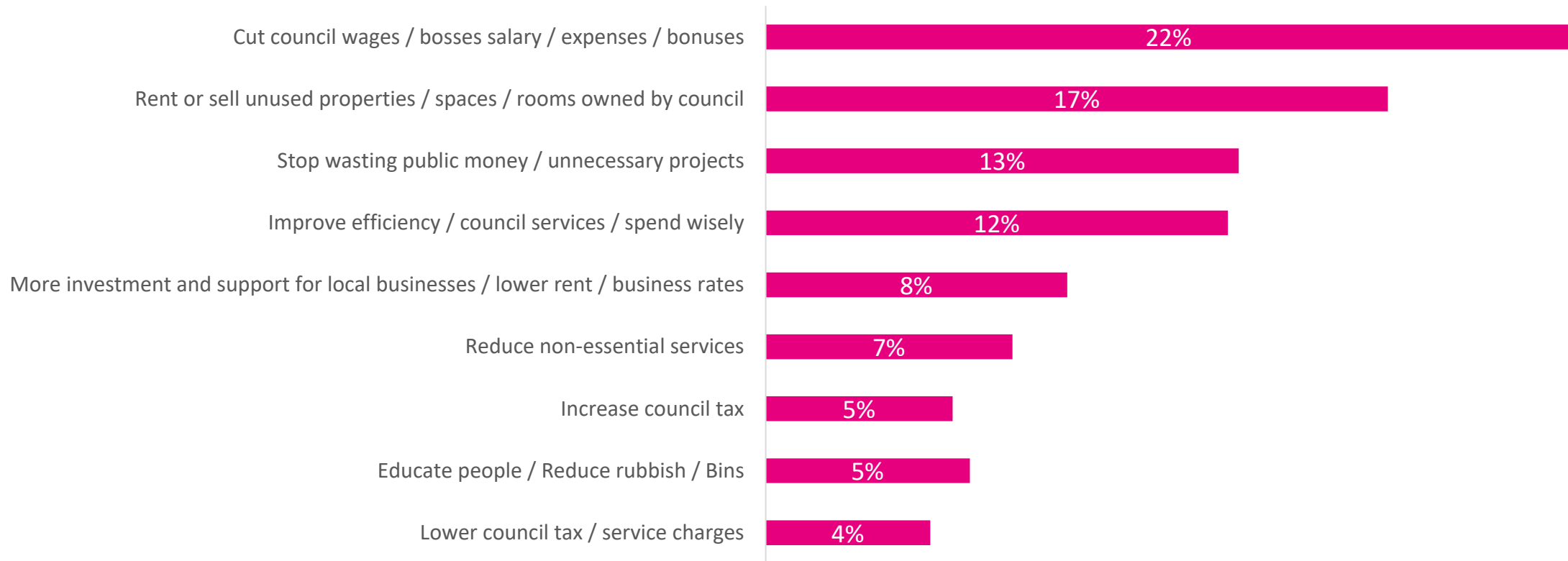
Selling or developing council buildings is the most preferred method of achieving Council savings goals rather than making changes to services or their cost at point of use. Increasing Council Tax, the option that would most directly affect residents financially is the least commonly favoured option.

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Suggested approaches for delivering the Council savings needed

Page 56
Of the 120 residents who provided alternative suggestions as to how budget savings can be achieved, 22% suggested cutting wages of council workers, including reducing bonuses and expenses. 17% proposed renting or selling unused properties and spaces which go unused by the council and 13% suggested the council should be more stringent when deciding which projects to fund.



All residents were presented with the Council's six strategic outcomes and were asked to consider how important these are to them...

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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



ONE COUNCIL ONE TEAM

Priorities when considering strategic outcomes

The best start in life for Children and Young People (Theme 1) is the strategic priority most commonly selected as important by residents (34%), followed by strong, resilient communities. Theme 1 is significantly more likely to be chosen by those aged 18 – 34 (44%), those who are struggling financially (35%) and women (38%). The best start in life is however less likely to be a top priority for those 55 -74 (26%) and 75+ (12%). These older age groups are significantly more likely to select Theme 2, People Living and Aging well as a top priority (26% and 48% respectively).



Residents' priorities for Sandwell: detailed analysis

- **Theme 1: The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People** – this theme is most likely to be selected by those aged 18-34 (44%), females (38%), and residents who are economically active (38%) This could be a reflection of these demographics being the most likely to be those who have young families. There is evidence of this within the explanations residents gave for their choices (examples in the next slide). Residents living in Tipton are significant less likely to prioritise Theme 1 (25% cf. 34%), along with older residents (55-74: 26%; 75+: 12%).
- **Theme 2: People Living Well and Aging Well** – This theme appears to be a more prominent priority in Wednesbury (26%) and among those who are economically inactive (perhaps as a result of being retired – 24%) and understandably, those aged 55-74 (26%) and 75+ (48%). Young people (18-34: 11%; 35-54: 12%) are less likely to prioritise spending in this area, along with those who are financially struggling (14%). Those who prioritised this theme, cited relevance to them as an ageing person as their primary reason for doing so, along with there being an ageing population in their area.

"I'm from that age group"
Theme 2

"I HAVE A CHILD AND SUPPORT SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO HELP GET A GOOD START IN LIFE"
Theme 1

"I have children my own and it's good for our area"
Theme 1

"They should look after the younger generation and for this community too"
Theme 1

"Older generation needs some help and support"
Theme 2

"A lot of cut backs older people need company and somewhere to go and beat loneliness for their own mental health"
Theme 2

"It's good for the health of this community"
Theme 2

"They need a good start especially if they are coming from a different background"
Theme 1

"Young people are the future of this country"
Theme 1

"People are not living well because of the cost of living crisis"
Theme 2

“We have some safety issues, so they should concentrate more for safety and security in this area”
Theme 3

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“All are important but safety is more I don't want to be scared in my area”
Theme 3

“There are poor condition of homes currently and need new improved homes”
Theme 4

“Affordable housing is important for this borough”
Theme 4

“The streets were clean and safe years ago they are not anymore and people get mugged”
Theme 3

“They need to spend on the safety and security of this area”
Theme 3

“Safe place leads to safe place for kids, infrastructures will follow”
Theme 3

“We never have had quality homes”
Theme 4

“We need affordable and quality housing services”
Theme 4

“Everything starts at home and having a good home”
Theme 4

“Safe and clean living environment is very important for everyone”
Theme 3

“It's important to feel happy safe and comfortable where we live”
Theme 3

Residents' priorities for Sandwell: detailed analysis

- **Theme 3: Strong, Resilient Communities – A safe, clean and green place to live** – This theme is significantly more likely to be selected as a priority by residents in Tipton (31%) and Smethwick (29%), more so than the overall and the other towns. Those in Rowley Regis are significantly less likely to prioritise Theme 3, (16%). Amongst tenure types, there is little significant variation in the priority given to this theme. The theme is also prioritised by a similar proportion of each age cohort.
- **Theme 4: Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods** – Theme 4 is the lowest priority theme for residents of Sandwell (7% selected this). Residents in Wednesbury are more likely to consider Quality Homes and Neighbourhoods a priority than residents of other areas (9%), though not significantly so. Residents in Oldbury are the least likely to indicate that Theme 4 is the most important to them.

Residents' priorities for Sandwell: detailed analysis

- **Theme 5: A Connected and Accessible Sandwell – good quality public transport and road networks. Good internet connectivity for residents and businesses** – There is no significant variation between towns in the proportion of residents who prioritise this theme, with between 6% and 8% selecting it as the most important to them. Selection of this theme was done consistently by age.
- **Theme 6: A strong and Inclusive Economy– spending money locally to grow the local economy -** Residents aged 35 -54 are significantly more likely than the survey average (16% cf. 11%) to value a strong and inclusive economy. Male residents are significantly more likely than women (14% cf. 9%) to rate a strong and inclusive as important to them. Perhaps surprisingly, those who are concerned about the cost of living crisis are significantly less likely to consider the economy as the most important theme, as mentioned, prioritising instead giving children and young people the best start in life.

“We need a good network routes”
Theme 5

“Good quality public transport will enable people to get around without congestion and associated air pollution”
Theme 5

“The way the economy is at the moment something needs to be done”
Theme 6

“Continuous growth if we haven't got that how are we going to live”
Theme 6

“It will benefit everyone locally”
Theme 6

“Good road network is very important for a better economy”
Theme 5

“It means we are able to our of Sandwell for work and education more easily”
Theme 5

“Mainly because the community will be a better place”
Theme 5

“We can build a strong economy it's going to help children”
Theme 6

“Money will stay in this area and can use for the local community”
Theme 6

“Encourages people to invest and look after property”
Theme 6

“We need a better condition of roads and a bigger network of buses”
Theme 5

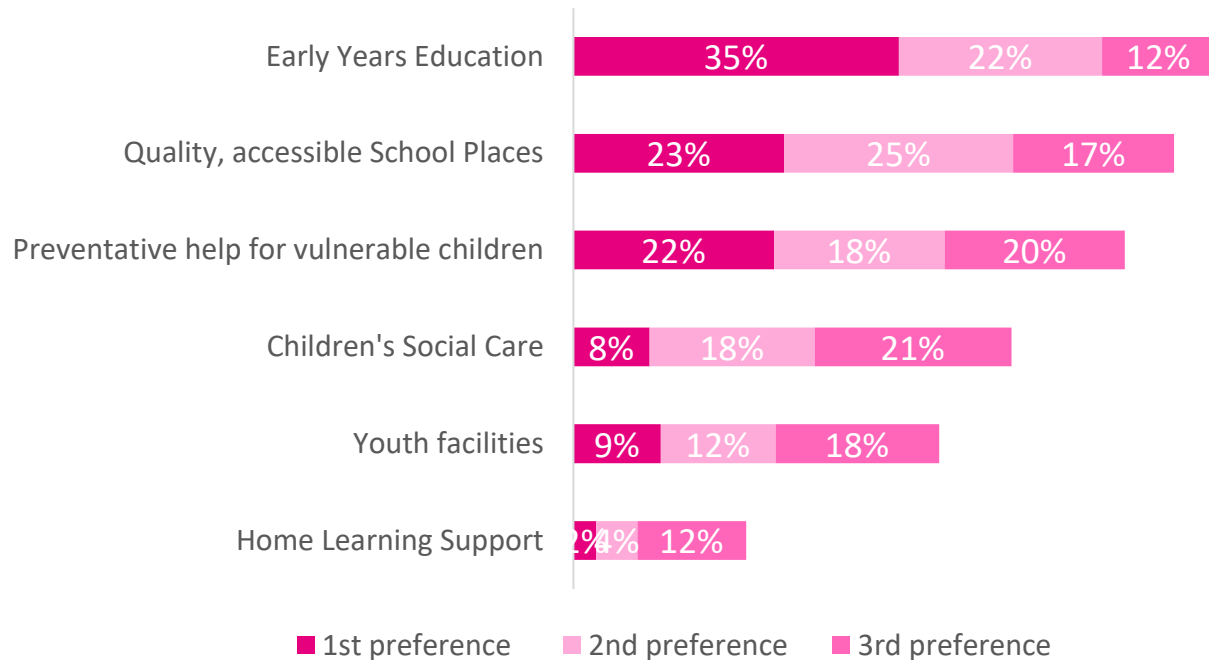
Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people



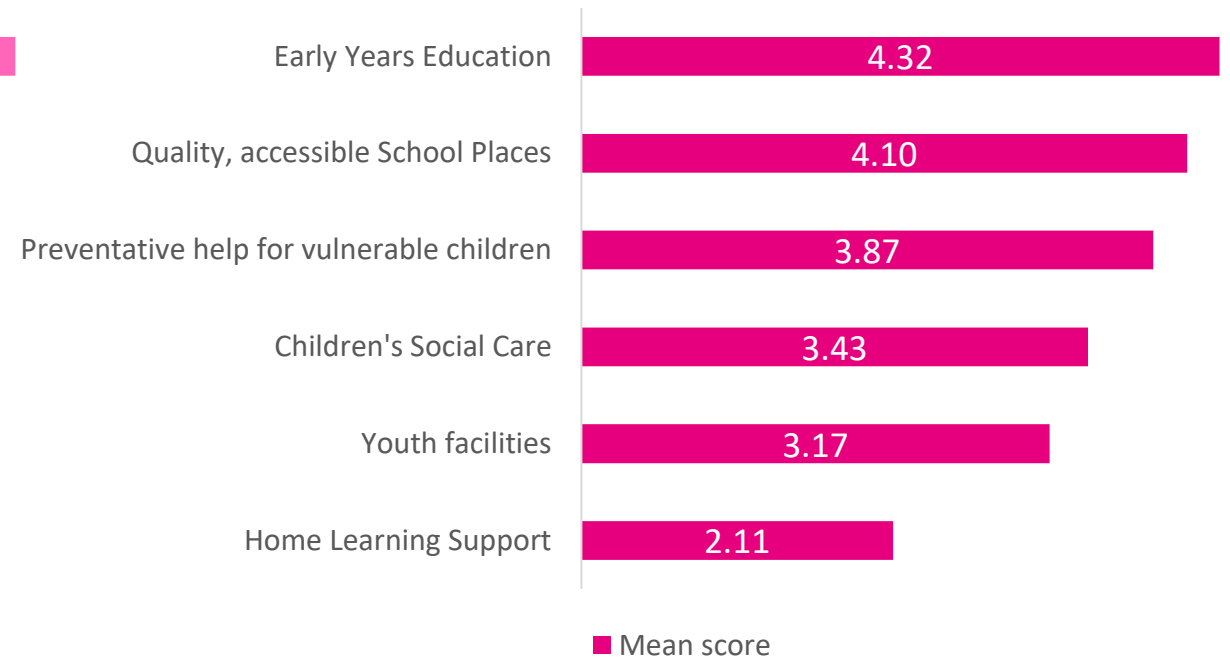
Priorities within Theme 1: the best start in life for children and young people

All residents were asked for their top priorities within each strategic theme, regardless of which theme they considered to be most important. Within Theme 1, early years education (4.32), quality and accessible school places (4.10) and preventative help for vulnerable children (3.87) are the service areas most commonly favoured. Home learning support was least commonly chosen as a priority by residents.

Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people – notable variations in opinion

Page 67

Theme
1

Looking specifically at those who earlier selected Theme 1 as most important, this group are even more likely than the total sample to rank early years education as their 1st priority (41% cf. 35%). Otherwise, the Theme 1 priorities among this sub-group of residents is similar to the overall sample, with home learning support least commonly prioritised along with youth facilities.



Those aged **18 to 34** are significantly more likely than the total sample to select early years education as their top priority (44% cf. 35%). This age group are also more likely than the overall to prioritise home learning support, though this is still their lowest priority.



Early years education is consistently the first choice in residents living in all five towns. However, beneath this there is slightly stronger support for quality and accessible school places being the top priority within Smethwick and Tipton.

Theme 2: people live well and age well

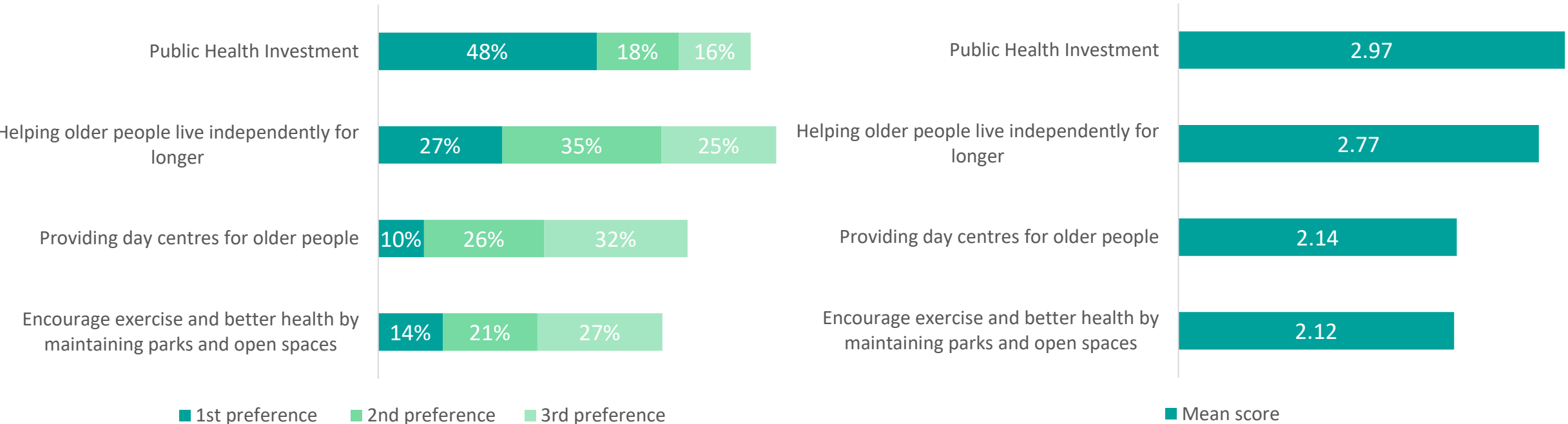


Priorities within Theme 2: people live well and age well

When asked for their priorities within Theme 2, residents most commonly chose Public Health Investment in their top 3, followed by helping older people to live independently for longer and providing day centres for elderly people. Public Health Investment is almost twice as likely to be chosen as a top priority than helping older people live independently for longer (48% and 27% respectively). Encouraging exercise and better health via parks and open spaces is the lowest priority for residents, with only 14% considering this the top priority.

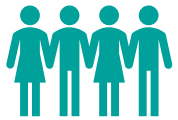
Top 3 choices

Mean score of choices



Theme 2: People Live Well and Age Well – notable variations in opinion

While public health investment has the most support overall within this Theme, among residents who consider **helping residents to live and age well as the most important theme**, the top priority based on mean is ‘helping older people to live independently’ (2.95). 35% of this group consider this as the top priority, significantly higher than the overall population (27%).



Younger residents are significantly more likely than older residents to prioritise public health investment (18 – 34: 3.27; 75+: 2.57). Older residents are more likely to support budget spending on helping older people to live independently ahead of public health investment. Men and women prioritise the options similarly, with the exception of men being significantly less likely than women to prioritise providing day centres for elderly people (men: 2.09, women: 2.20).



Residents in **Smethwick** have slightly different priorities to the overall, considering encouraging exercise as a higher priority than providing day centres (2.39 compared to 2.12 in the overall).

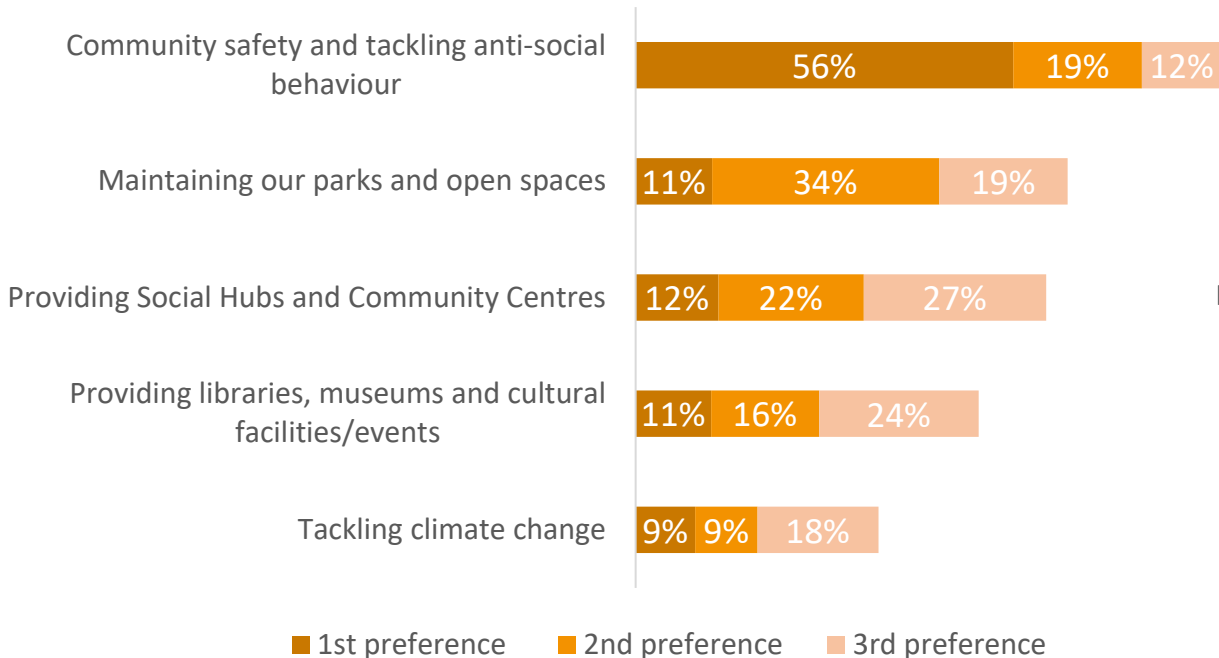
Theme 3: strong, resilient communities



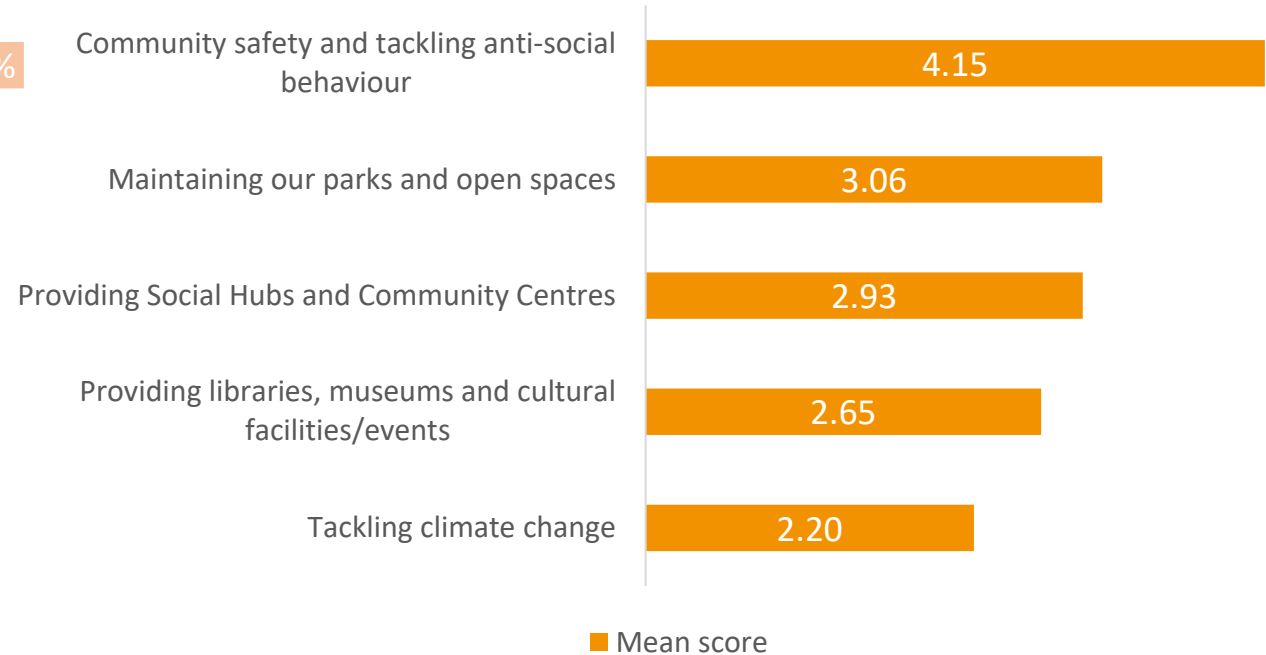
Priorities within Theme 3: strong, resilient communities

When considering detailed choices within Theme 3, community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour is most likely to be considered a top priority by residents (4.15). Over half chose (56%) this as their first choice, providing a clear message that this is a priority issue. In the context of this Theme, maintenance of parks and open spaces is a priority, whereas this did not seem to be the case in the context of improving public health (see slide 22).

Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 3: Strong, Resilient Communities – notable variations in opinion

Among residents who **selected Theme 3 as most important to them** community safety is the key priority, with 69% of this group selecting this as their top priority compared to 56% of all residents. Residents who consider Theme 3 as most important rank the options in the same order as the total sample.



Ranking of priorities is largely consistent across different demographic groups, mirroring the overall results, with community safety and tackling ASB the top priority and tackling climate change the lowest priority. **Residents aged 35 and above** are likely to feel more strongly that community safety should be a priority with approximately 60% of each of these cohorts selecting this as the top priority compared with 49% of those **aged 18 – 35**.



Whilst community safety is consistently the top priority across towns in Sandwell, there is some spatial variation in the lower order priorities. **Oldbury, Wednesbury and Tipton** residents consider Providing Social Hubs and Community Centres as a higher priority than the survey average (with this the second highest scoring priority by mean for these areas, above maintaining parks). Whilst **Smethwick** residents chose a ranking of priorities that was consistent with those chosen by all residents, they are more likely to consider community hubs the lowest priority (23% cf. 14%).

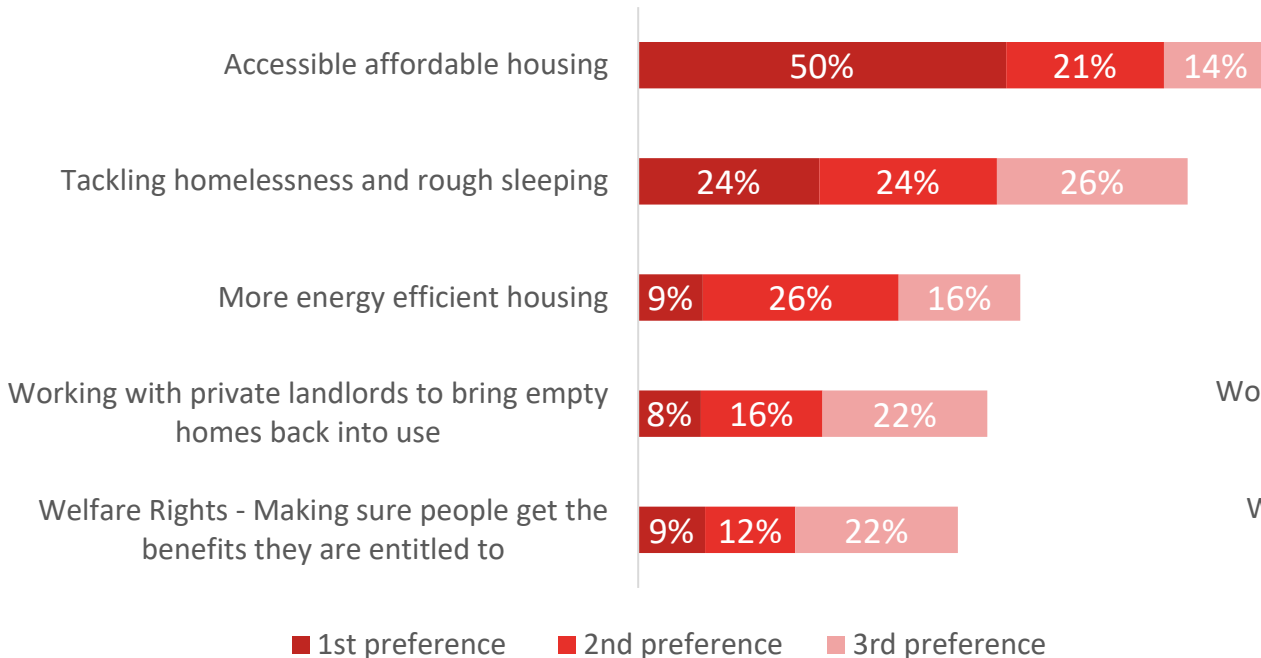
Theme 4: quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods



Priorities within Theme 4: quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

Within Theme 4 accessible affordable housing is the top priority for Sandwell residents, with approximately 85% considering this a top 3 choice, and 50% considering this the ultimate priority. Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is also important to residents, though to a lesser extent than affordable housing. Welfare rights are much less of a priority. More energy efficient housing and working with private landlords on empty homes are considered to be of relatively similar importance to residents.

Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 4: Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods - – notable variations in opinion

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Theme 3

The priorities of residents who earlier **selected Theme 4 as the most important** mirror those chosen among the overall population. Among this group affordable housing is the top priority, even more so than among all residents (64% selected this as their first choice cf. 50%).



The ranking of priorities within Theme 4 is largely consistent across demographic groups, with accessible affording housing a priority for all. **Those aged 18 to 34** are likely to feel more strongly that accessible affordable housing is the ultimate priority (57% cf. 50%).



Residents in **Oldbury** are less likely to rank more energy efficient housing as a priority, with this being considered a priority by a lower proportion of residents in this area than working with private landlords and welfare rights. Residents in **Rowley Regis** are more likely to consider homelessness and rough sleeping a top priority compared to the total sample (31% cf. 24%).

Theme 5: A connected and accessible Sandwell

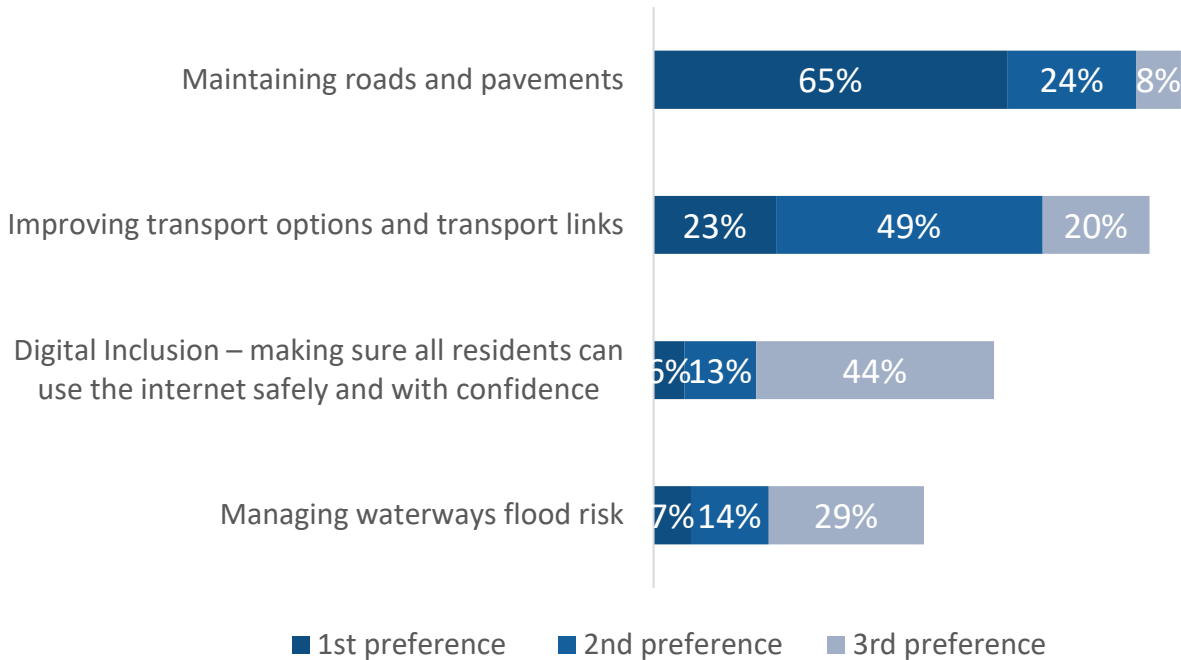


Priorities within Theme 5: a connected and accessible Sandwell

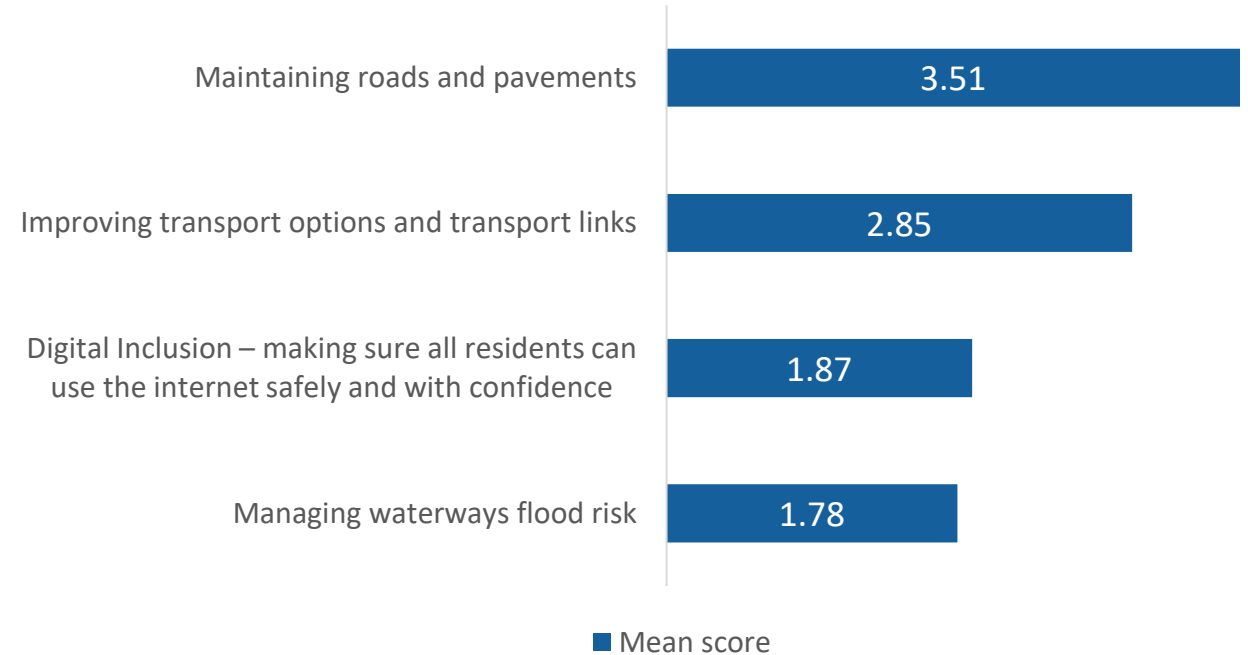
Within Theme 5 maintenance of roads and pavements is the dominant priority, with nearly two-thirds (65%) choosing this as their highest priority. Improving transport links is the second highest priority, with nearly half of residents (49%) choosing this as their second priority. Managing waterways flood risk is least commonly considered a priority within this Theme.

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Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 5: A Connected and Accessible Sandwell – notable variations in opinion

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Theme 5

Residents who earlier **selected Theme 5 as the most important** chose maintaining roads and pavements as the top priority (43%), albeit to a significantly lesser extent than the all residents (65%). Those suggesting a connected and accessible Sandwell is the key strategic priority for them, are equally likely to consider improvement of transport options and links as their ultimate priority (44%) alongside the maintenance of roads and pavements.



Residents' **aged 75+** are less likely to consider digital inclusion a priority, with 51% of these residents ranking it as the lowest priority, the highest proportion of any age cohort to do so.



Improved transport options are most commonly chosen as a top priority by residents of **Wednesbury** (57%) and **Smethwick** (54%). Residents in **Tipton**, consider managing waterway flood risk as a top priority more often than those in other areas (15% cf. 7%), suggesting that this may need to be considered more in relation to this town, despite being the lowest ranked priority overall.

Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy

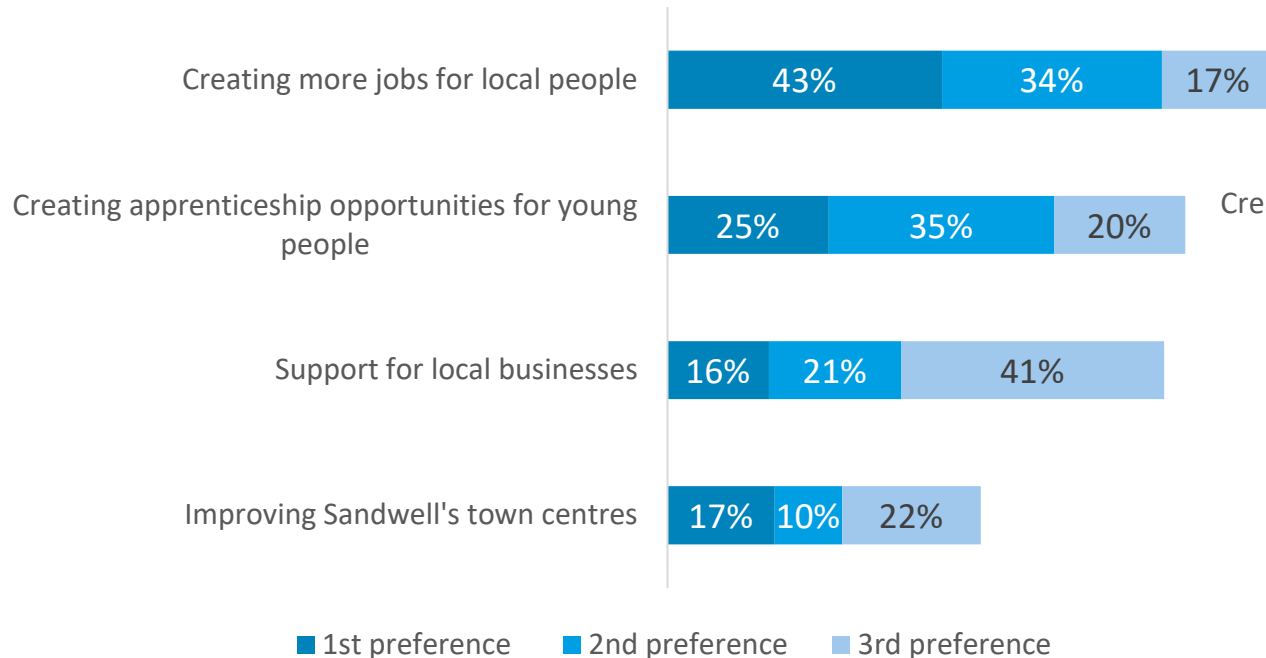


Priorities within Theme 6: a strong and inclusive economy

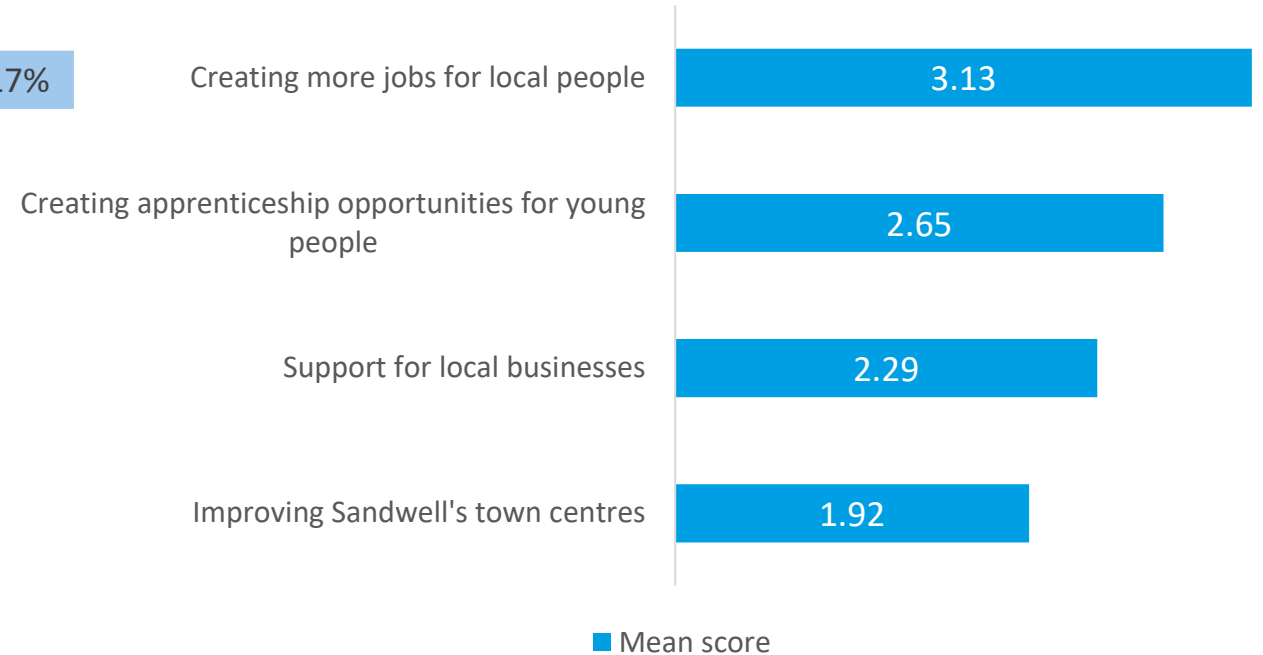
Within this Theme creating jobs for local people is the highest priority for Sandwell residents, with two in five (43%) selecting this as their top priority and a further third ranking this second. Improving Sandwell's town centre is the lowest priority in this question context of improving the local economy.

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Top 3 choices

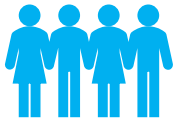


Mean score of choices



Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy – notable variations in opinion

Residents who earlier said that **Theme 6 was the most important to them** most commonly prioritise job creation followed by creating apprenticeship opportunities.



Residents aged between 55 -74 are significantly more likely to prioritise the improvement of Sandwell’s town centres with 24% considering this their top priority (cf. 17%). This age group are significantly less likely to consider creating jobs as their top priority (34% cf. 43%). This pattern is reversed amongst **those aged 18 – 34** who are significantly more likely to prioritise job creation (47%) at the expense of improving town centres (12%).



By area, **Tipton** is most likely to advocate for supporting local businesses (2.38), significantly more so than the average and **Wednesbury** (1.87) and **Oldbury** (1.62). Across all areas, creating more jobs is consistently a top priority, indicating a desire for this to be area of focus.

Alternative energy

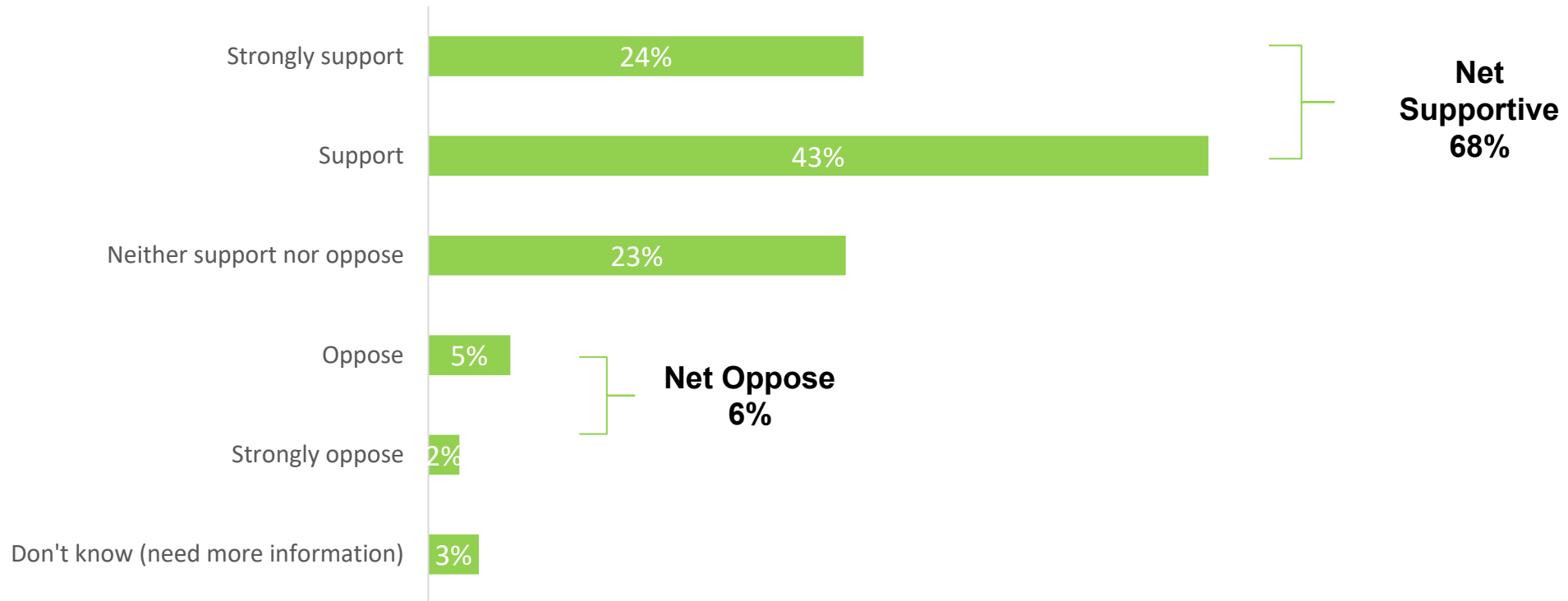


Support for renewable energy generation...

Two-thirds (68%) of residents actively support Sandwell Council exploring renewable energy generation opportunities, with a quarter (24%), strongly supporting such measures. Opposition is low with only 6% stating they are opposed. Please note that the question wording mentioned both energy security and tackling climate change as the rationale for this approach.

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Support for renewable energy



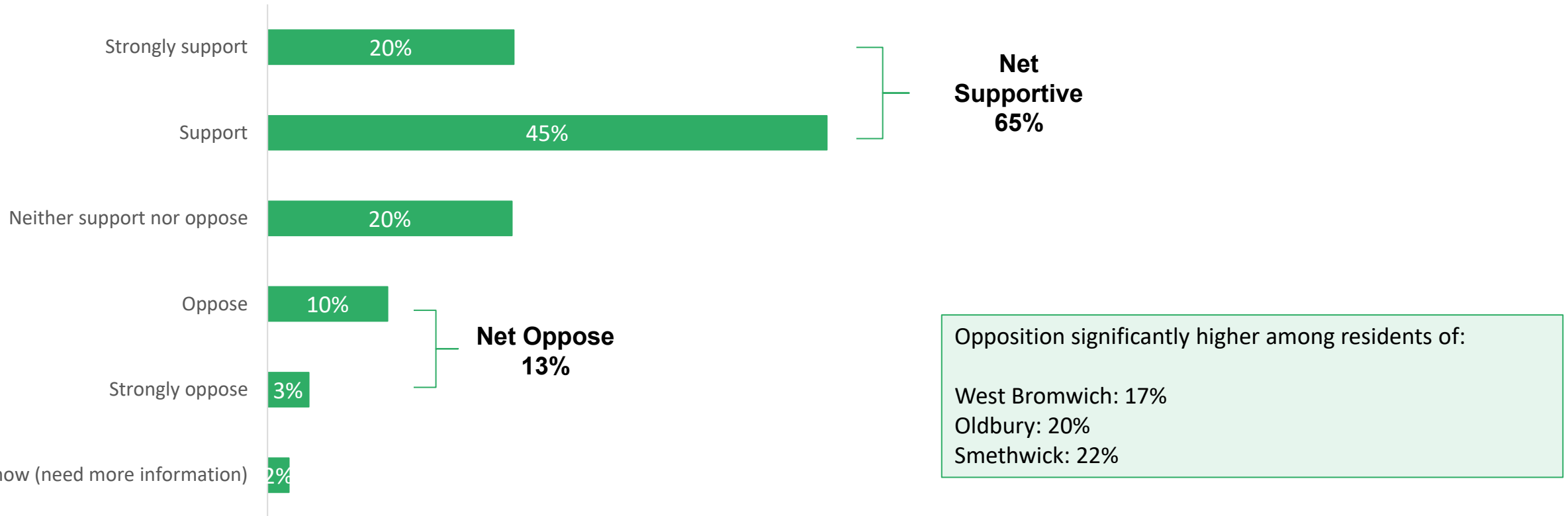
Rewilding



Residents' support for rewilding

Support for rewilding some areas of Sandwell's parks and open spaces is expressed by two-thirds of residents (65%), including one in five (20%) who strongly supporting this approach. In total 13% oppose rewilding in Sandwell's parks and open spaces.

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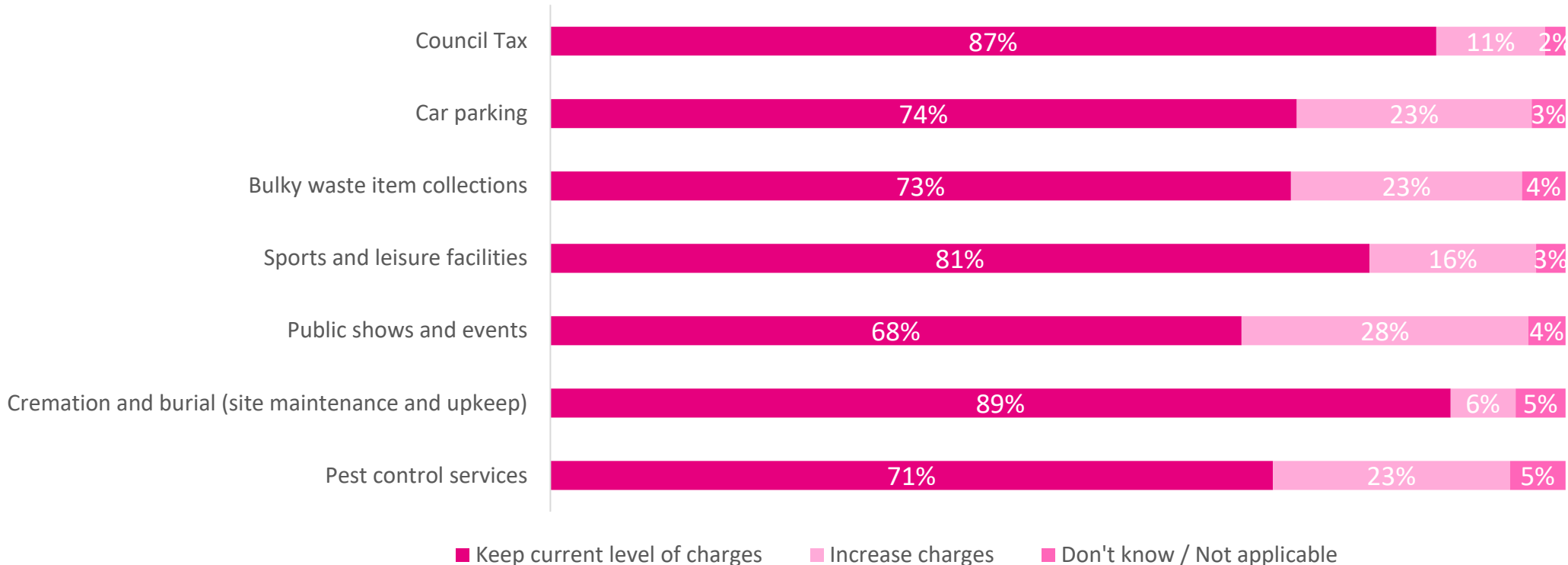
Service Changes



Paying more for Council services

Generally speaking, the majority of residents would prefer not to see changes to service related charges, with more than two-thirds stating that current charges should stay the same for each service. The most acceptable increases to service charges would be for public shows and events (28%) and for use of pest control services (23%), although even for these a majority remain opposed.

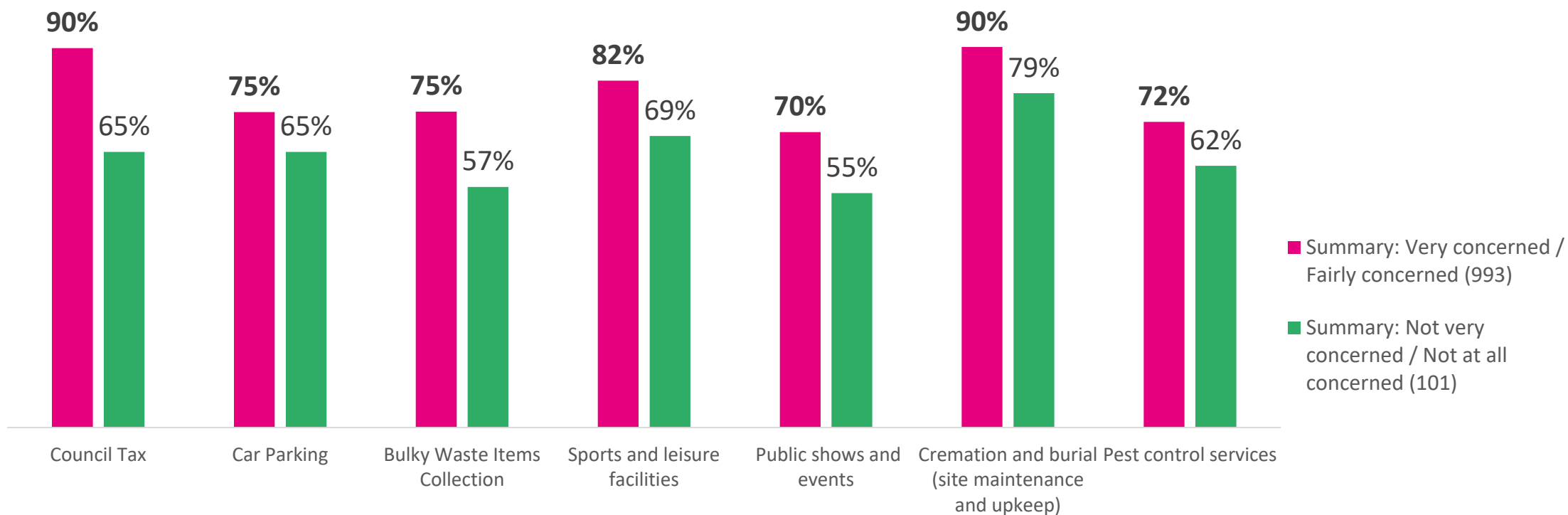
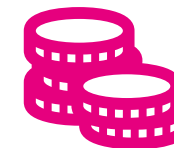
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Views on charging for services based on current financial circumstances

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the current cost of living crisis, those who are **fairly or very concerned about their financial situation** are more likely to **oppose the increase of service charges**.

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Summary: Q12. Taking into consideration the financial challenge the Council is facing, and in order to set a balanced budget and limit any reductions to services, which of the below would you be prepared to pay more for?
Base Sizes in Chart Legend

Views on Council Tax increases

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87%
Keep the Same

11%
Increase Charges

2%
Don't Know / Not
Applicable

Support for keeping the same higher among:

- Social Renters – 93%
- Private Renters – 91%
- Females – 90%
- Fairly / very concerned about cost of Living – 90%

Support for an increase is higher among:

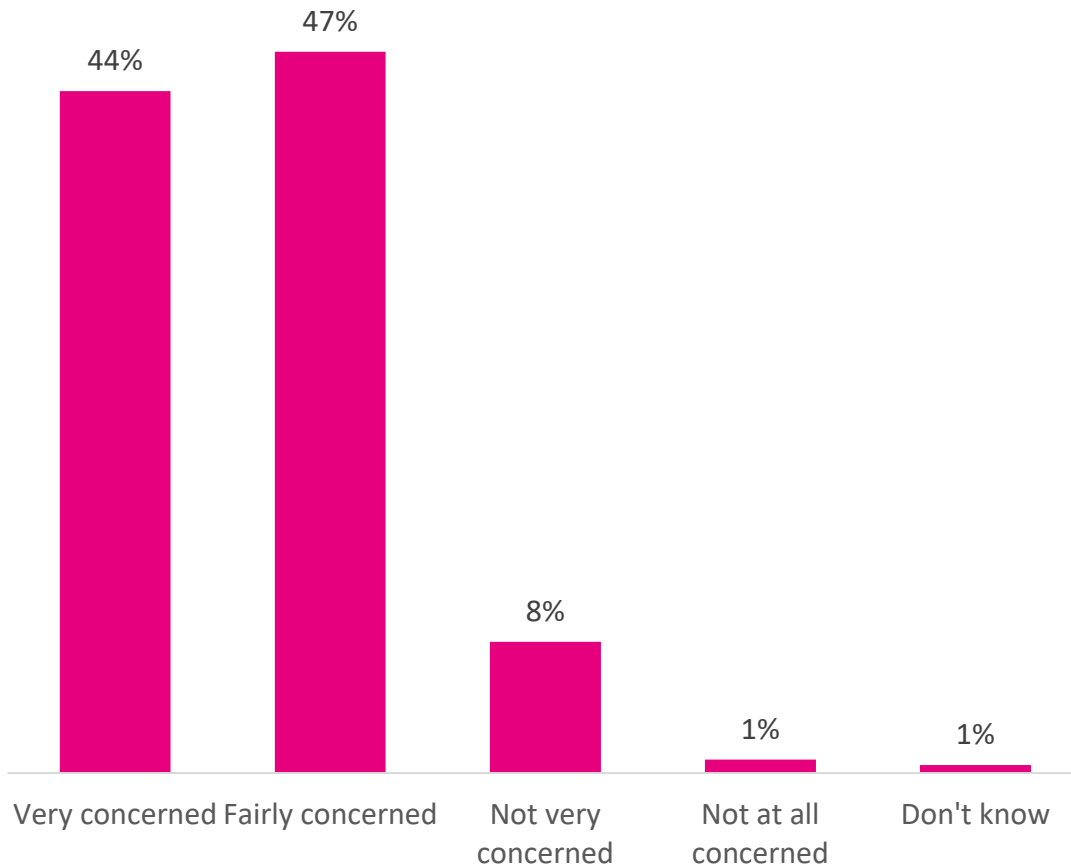
- Those not very concerned about the cost-of-living crisis – 33%
- Those aged 75+ - 19%
- Homeowner - 17%
- Male – 15%

- Council Tax is the thing that residents most emphatically want to stay the same (87%).
- Younger cohorts are less supportive of increases in Council Tax charges than those aged 75+. Residents who are aged 75 and over are significantly more likely than the average to be willing to accept council tax increases (17%).

Financial Security

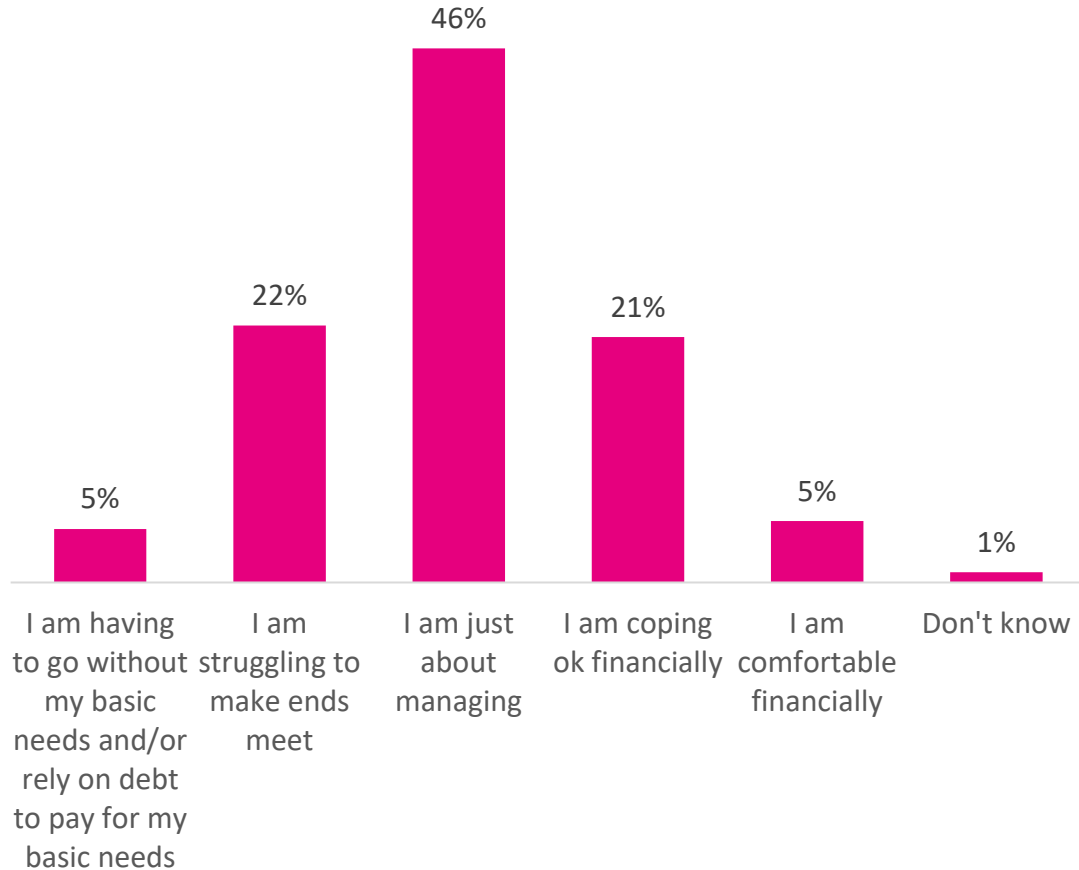


Concerns about the cost of living



- To put residents' views on how Sandwell Council sets its budget in 2024/25 into context, two questions were asked regarding personal financial circumstances.
- Nine in ten residents in Sandwell are at least fairly concerned about the current cost of living. Within this, two in five residents (44%) give the most extreme response of 'very concerned'. This demonstrates that the council's choices will have to be made when there is a heightened sensitivity to impacts upon household budgets.
- Concern about the cost of living is prevalent in all age groups, although older residents more commonly state that they are not very or not at all concerned about the current cost of living (75+: 18%; 55 -74: 13%).

Residents' financial security



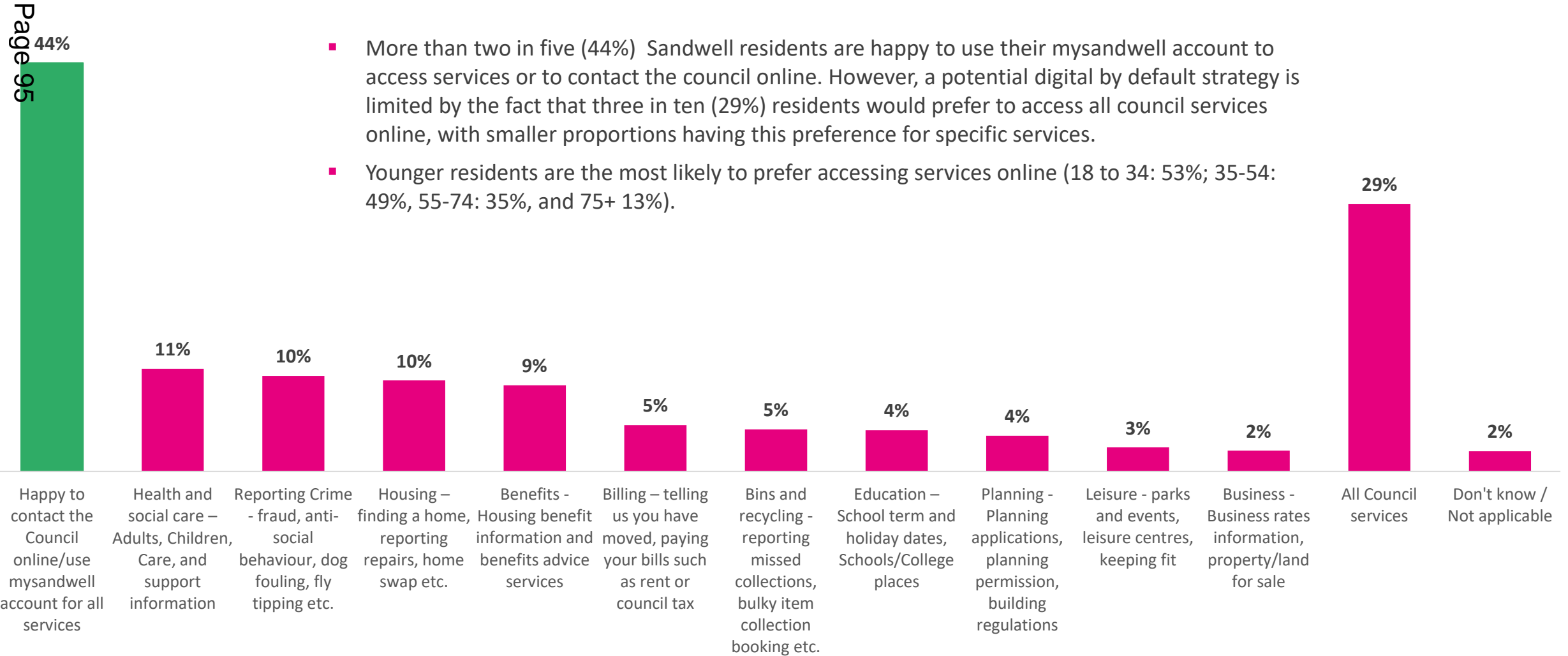
- Approximately one quarter of Sandwell residents say that they are currently struggling to make ends meet (22%) or are having to go without basic needs (5%).
- This level of financial vulnerability has potential implications not only for the potential of the council to leverage extra revenue from Council Tax and service related charges, but also on future service demand.
- Regarding the strategic themes discussed in this report, residents who are going without or struggling are significantly more likely to prioritise Theme 1 – providing the best start in life for children and young people (42% chose this).

Contact Preferences



Preferred methods for accessing services

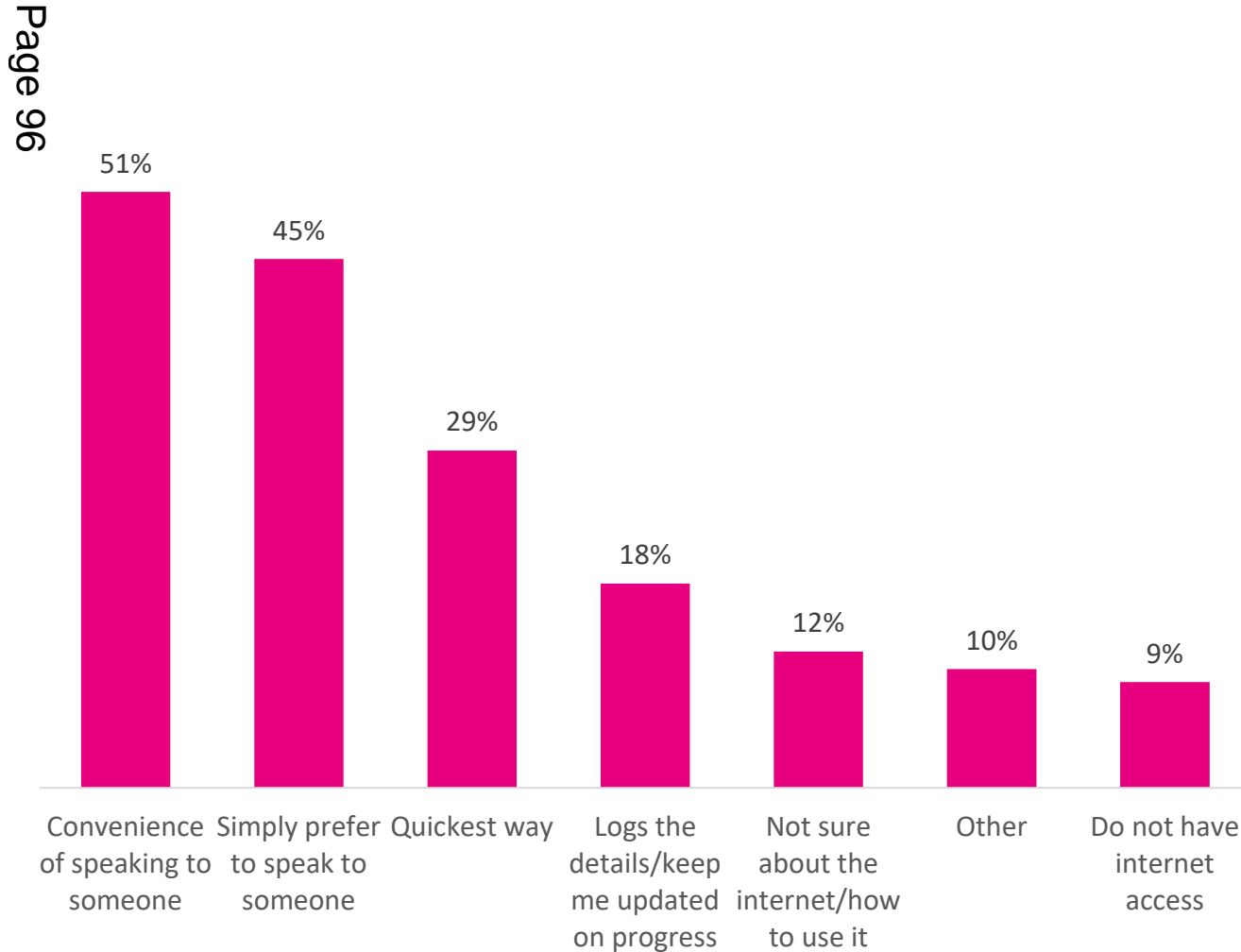
Are there any services that you would prefer to access in-person or on the telephone, rather than online/using mysandwell account?



- More than two in five (44%) Sandwell residents are happy to use their mysandwell account to access services or to contact the council online. However, a potential digital by default strategy is limited by the fact that three in ten (29%) residents would prefer to access all council services online, with smaller proportions having this preference for specific services.
- Younger residents are the most likely to prefer accessing services online (18 to 34: 53%; 35-54: 49%, 55-74: 35%, and 75+ 13%).

For those who would prefer to contact by telephone or in-person...

Why would you prefer to contact the Council in-person or by telephone?



- Residents who prefer to contact by telephone or speak to someone face to face, most frequently cite the convenience of speaking to someone (51%) and simply preferring to speak to someone as the reason why they prefer to do so (45%). On the basis of these responses, it is service quality, ease and speed that drive these preferences much more so than a lack of digital skills (12%) or internet access (9%).

Diversity and inclusion issues



Variations in response by ethnic origin

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Within the budget survey residents were asked to state their ethnic origin. Looking at the responses given by those who are White, those who have a Mixed ethnic origin, those who are Asian/Asian British and those who are Black/Black British there is no consistent variation in the responses given/the priorities chosen.

- The order of strategic properties chosen is largely consistent among each ethnic group. Whilst Theme 1 remains the top priority for Asian/Asian British residents, this group are significantly more likely to prioritise Theme 3: Strong, Resilient Communities – A safe, clean and green place to live (34% cf. 23%), and as a result significantly less likely to prioritise Theme 2: People Living Well and Aging Well (9% cf. 18%).
- Black/Black British residents are significantly more likely to prioritise Theme 4: Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods (15% cf. 7%). This shows that there is some variation in priorities in different communities, which the council must be sensitive to when making budgeting choices.
- Non-white residents are significantly more likely to oppose Council Tax increases. This may be related to their higher concern about the current cost of living crisis. That 95% of Asian / Asian British and 94% of Black British residents' feel fairly or very concerned about the cost-of-living crisis suggest that financial resilience may be lower among these communities.

Formal Consultation Undertaken for Potential Changes to Discretionary Services

Summary of Responses

Purpose

This report sets out the methodology used to capture the views of residents and representatives of communities across Sandwell on the savings options put forward by the Council to address the anticipated budget shortfall of £13m (as at 15 November 2023). The report also sets out the results of the consultation activity, with a summary of key headline views from across all focus groups before setting out the detailed responses from each group.

Methodology

A basket of savings options totalling £18m for 2024/25 was set out in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy Autumn 2023 Update as reported to Cabinet on 15 November 2023. These savings options were shared with focus groups which represented residents and communities across Sandwell, and their views sought on whether the Council should adopt these options and what impact they could have.

The focus groups were held as follows:

Focus Group	Date	In person / online	Number of Participants
Residents	21 and 27 November 2023	Online (at preference of participants)	9
Children and Young People (SHAPE Forum)	30 November	In person	7
Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations	7 December 2023	In Person	9
Business Ambassadors	11 January 2024	In Person	13

An online survey was also conducted during this period, open for responses from 20 November 2023 to 2 January 2024. At close of the survey, the Council had received 416 responses.

Key Headlines

Whilst the number of participants in the focus groups and online survey do not represent a statistically representative sample of Sandwell's, the comments made by the different groups provide a useful insight into the views of different communities across the borough. The following points are a summary of the consistent themes which arose in the focus groups and online survey:

- Residents and representatives of the business community who participated in this exercise were largely unaware of budget challenge facing the Council, but accepted savings needed to be made.
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations were more aware than residents of the Council's financial position, and also recognised savings are required.

- Selling or renting out assets was supported as good way to make savings, as per the previous budget consultation activities. Communities expressed a preference for being more involved in determining the future of locally important or culturally significant assets.
- There was support for reducing the number of leisure centres in the borough, as long as easy access to centres was retained
- Increases in charges for businesses and development or where there is choice in using the service were supported, more so than increases in charges for services to vulnerable people
- Respondents would like to see events covering their costs rather than being subsidised by the council, as well as sponsorship by local businesses being explored
- There was strong support for improving efficiency of support services, use of Council fleet and focus on prevention and early intervention across all focus groups
- Green spaces in Sandwell are popular and valued – residents would like to see improvements in grounds maintenance, especially in parks and street cleansing
- Concerns shared that changes to waste management approaches will see an increase in littering, anti-social behaviour and fly tipping
- Support for savings from promoting independence and transformation of adult social care, providing care needs were met
- Respondents were keen that cuts across the board did not adversely affect residents who may be vulnerable, elderly or on low incomes
- There is a need to communicate more with residents on what changes will be made and the impact on residents.

Residents

Two focus groups were conducted in November 2023 – participants were invited from the respondents to the Budget Consultation Survey conducted in Summer 2023. Participants were contacted by email and phone to boost recruitment, and an incentive was offered for participating in the focus group. The events were conducted online at the request of the participants to encourage attendance. In total nine residents participated - six female residents and three male residents of varied ages, ethnic origins and employment status. Residents were from Tipton, Wednesbury, West Bromwich, Smethwick and Rowley Regis. No residents from Oldbury attended the focus groups.

Key messages

- Residents were largely unaware of the budget challenge facing the council, and whilst as one resident admitted, everyone would prefer no changes in services, it was recognised that there would need to be changes to make the required savings.
- Reflecting the budget survey findings (May 2023), residents in the focus groups agreed that selling assets was a good way to make savings, if there are other council buildings that can be used in the area, this included selling older leisure centres with the provision of newer centres in the borough.
- There were discussions however, as to whether it would be better to rent out unused buildings for a more sustained income. Here, residents were typically thinking of more medium and longer term income, rather than the need to make savings for the 2024/25 budget.
- Residents in the group were most open to changes in charges where a service was seen as “optional” such as marriage registration or attending events; or where a service suggested a higher level of income for example planning costs or private rented sector fees.

- For the medium and longer term, the council may also wish to consider (if it hasn't done so already) aspects of commercialisation it can undertake through The General Power of Competence, enshrined in the 2011 Localism Act.
- Participants were also more receptive to increased charges for businesses including building regulation fees and development and commercial property rates, as businesses are seen as more able to accommodate price increases.
- In order to further save costs, residents in the groups suggested that the council outsource (e.g. via sponsorship) high-cost events to local business to make savings – using the example of firework displays to exemplify this.

However, some saving measures were rejected completely, including changes to waste collection or services that vulnerable people may depend upon.

- Suggestions to change the frequency of bin collections were rejected on a whole by residents. Most often due to concerns about increased anti-social behaviour, including fly-tipping, and pests as a result of decreased cleanliness that residents predict will stem from reduced waste collection.
- Whilst residents agreed that the council could make savings by reducing reliance on Sandwell's adult social care infrastructure and promoting independence, whether this by more closely assessing needs or increased digitalization; making sure cuts did not adversely affect residents who may be vulnerable, elderly or on low incomes was a priority for all.
- Many agreed savings or agreed costs were accepted by residents provided that services were maintained at concessionary rates for the elderly or those with low incomes.
- Increased charges for services such as meals on wheels or birth and death registrations, that are seen by residents as essential or unavoidable, were vehemently rejected.
- A consistent trend was a clear need to communicate with residents what changes will be made, what impact these are likely to have on residents and how these will help make the budget savings needed; as some felt that they were brought into the conversation "too late".

Online Survey

An online survey was hosted on Sandwell Consultation Hub from 20 November 2023 to 2 January 2024. It was promoted via residents' newsletters, internal staff newsletters, on front page of website and on social media. The survey asked respondents if they were responding as a resident or on behalf of a business or voluntary/community sector organisation operating within Sandwell.

The total responses to the survey numbered 416: 93.8% residents; 1.2% VCS organisations; 4.8% 'other'

The demographic profile of respondents was as follows:

- Gender: 51.7% female; 37.9% male; 10.3% prefer not to say.
- Age: Responses were received from all age groups between 20-24 and 90+; most responses from 50-54 group (14.7%), followed by 55-59 (13.2%), 60-64 (11.1%) and 35-39 (9.9%). Just under 10% of respondents preferred not to say. In total, the 50-64 age group represented 38.9% of responses, compared to 17.9% of Sandwell's population being in this age group at the 2021 Census.
- Ethnic Group: Highest proportion of responses were from respondents who identified themselves as White British at 70.2%, followed by 14.7% 'prefer not to say'. In total, only 15% of respondents identified themselves as belonging to a Black, Asian or

Minority Ethnic group; this is significantly below the borough's demographic profile at the 2021 Census of 49.7% of the population.

- Geographic spread: the highest response rate was from the Oldbury (7.2%), West Bromwich Central (6.73%) and Rowley (6.5%) wards. At a town level, most respondents came from Rowley Regis (18.9%), followed by West Bromwich (17.5%) and Oldbury (14.9%); Wednesbury had the lowest proportion of respondents to the survey at 9.7%.

Summary of results:

- Top five savings options that respondents were most in favour of:
 - Reducing cost of Christmas Lights events programme (98.3%)
 - Making better use of the council's vehicle fleet / being smarter in how we procure ICT contracts (both 90.4%)
 - Smarter internal HR and business management processes / making cash handling more efficient (both 82.5%)
 - Increasing Building Regulation Fees (73.6%)
 - Maximising use of external grants and contributions (70.7%)
- Top five savings options that respondents did not support:
 - Reducing cost of Green Spaces Services – 67.3% of respondents to this question did not support this savings option; comments focused on improving performance in this area
 - Increases to charges over 5% for Garden Waste Subscription (56.3%) or Meals on Wheels (54.6%). Comments focused on ensuring valued services were maintained for vulnerable residents
 - School Crossing Patrols – 55.1% of respondents did not support changes to how the service was funded/delivered, with 35.3% in favour.
 - Closure of Shop Mobility – 51% of respondents to this question did not support the proposal; 35.3% of respondents were in favour.
 - Reviewing the approach to waste management services (47.6%)

Respondents were invited to submit comments on the savings proposals. Many respondents requested further information on the impact that the proposal would have on the resident/service user. From an analysis of the comments made, the following themes are apparent:

- Residents suggested that income generating events should breakeven
- Income could be generated by increasing categories of fines and related enforcement
- Green Spaces are popular, and residents want to see improvements in maintenance rather than cuts
- Increased use of technology to improve efficiencies in Adult Social Care was supported, and there was recognition that the transition from Child to Adult Services needs reviewing. There was strong support for ensuring that care needs continue to be met throughout.
- Improving contract monitoring to ensure compliance and enforcing contract penalties

Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations

A focus group of representatives from voluntary and community organisations operating in Sandwell was held in early December 2023. Participants were invited from 18 organisations

ranging from borough-wide to operating in specific localities and from a range of disciplines. Representatives of nine organisations attended the focus group; the following points are a summary of the comments made on the savings options:

- Participants recognised that savings need to be made.
- Highlighted a general concern about the unintentional impact of reducing services on vulnerable people and the increased demand on VCS organisations to provide support, e.g. increasing charges for meals on wheels may lead to already-vulnerable people skipping meals
- There was a challenge to the council on how deliverable/achievable savings proposals are (e.g. transitions from children's services to adult social care)
- Strong support for the council's focus to be on prevention and early intervention. Therefore, VCS organisations challenged whether the reduction or removal of support to vulnerable young people and their families would save money in the long run.
- Reminder to the council that facilities in Sandwell should be for all residents, especially those who cannot afford to travel to facilities (e.g. parks, Christmas lights events) in other boroughs/cities

Children and Young People

The SHAPE Youth Forum is part of Sandwell's child's voice initiative, the SHAPE Programme. It is a valuable tool to involve young people in continuing development of the borough of Sandwell. Members provide a voice for young people across Sandwell and have been consistently used as a consultative body for various initiatives concerning young people. At the meeting of the SHAPE Forum on 30 November 2023, members were invited to identify whether they supported the savings options or not, and comments on impact of the options from their perspective. Some seven young people of ages 14-19 and from a range of ethnicities attended the session.

Overall, SHAPE Forum members who attended showed support for proposals including:

- Generating income through increasing fees and charges or being more 'commercial' in our approach to cost recovery
- Reducing cost of discretionary services
- Reviewing delivery models for some services, including Appointeeship Unit, Customer contact centres, community sports plans, better use of council's fleet, part-night street lighting, support to families with NRPF.

Participants in this session wanted to see improvements in grounds maintenance in parks and street cleansing before making savings from these areas and waste management services. This comment is in line with the results from the SHAPE Survey 2023 which showed that litter was the key issue that children and young people wanted the council to improve.

The SHAPE Survey 2023, conducted across primary and secondary schools, identified that, as well as school work and exams, the key issues affecting children and young people were vaping, gangs and youth violence, knife crime, drugs, and prospects after GCSEs. The survey also asked if they were in charge of Sandwell Council for a day, what problem would they solve; respondents from both primary and secondary schools identified cost of living, littering, crime and bullying as key areas that they would address.

Business Community

The Business Ambassadors are a collective of business people in the Sandwell area with the aim of supporting the Sandwell Business Community. The Ambassadors are independent of the council, but do receive a small level of council funding for marketing and communications. At the meeting of the Business Ambassadors on 11 January 2024, representatives of 13 businesses received a briefing on the council's financial position and Medium-Term Financial Plan, including savings proposals to address the anticipated budget gap for 2024/25.

The Business Ambassadors welcomed the briefing to gain a deeper understanding of the council's financial position and plans, which provided context for the decisions required by the council. Discussion of the group focused on the following points:

- Proportion of the council's budget allocated to staff costs
- Productivity of staff who are able to work at home
- Opportunities to use savings to invest in front-line services, such as in adult social care services, or to work in collaboration with other partners to provide a holistic approach to service delivery
- The proportion of council income generated through business rates, and what this was spent on

Overall, the view from the group was that Sandwell Council have 'managed the budget well'. However, as per the findings from other groups consulted on the 2024/25 budget, it is clear that this group would benefit from further communications on the council's budget position and how the funding generated from council tax and business rates contributes to the overall delivery of council services.

Proposed Savings to Balance the 2024/25 Budget

Summary – Directorate Totals	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Organisational/Corporate/Transformational	-8,349	-3,049	-4,249	-4,249	-4,249
Children & Education	-2,099	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140
Adult Social Care	-4,358	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763
Borough Economy	-2,101	-2,987	-3,237	-3,237	-3,237
Regeneration, Growth & General Fund Housing	-1,296	-2,390	-2,390	-2,390	-2,390
Finance, Law, ACE & Public Health	-785	-1,595	-1,791	-1,791	-1,791
Total	-18,988	-17,924	-19,570	-19,570	-19,570

Detailed list of savings by Directorate:

Theme	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Maximising Income & Commercial Opportunities	-1,099	-2,299	-3,499	-3,499	-3,499
Smarter Support Services	0	-500	-500	-500	-500
Sustainable Delivery Models	-250	-250	-250	-250	-250
Funded Vacancy Freeze	-7,000	-	-	-	-
Total: Council Wide	-8,349	-3,049	-4,249	-4,249	-4,249

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
System review of SEND Transport – outline scoping paper under development with PWC. Mitigations captured in a service report. Service transformation will require Council Policy change.	-700	-700	-700	-700	-700
Central Services Budget – Legacy Human Rights cases, Long Service Awards, Vacant Post	-317	-317	-317	-317	-317
Learning and Advisory Support (SIAs) – re-direct of DSG funding	-47	-47	-47	-47	-47
Early Years and Childcare – income from workforce development activities	-60	-60	-60	-60	-60
Planning Performance and Business Support Services – reduction in head count through vacancy/retirement	-58	-88	-88	-88	-88
Data Team – increase income from Academies to cover costs	-25	-25	-25	-25	-25
School Benefits – removal of vacant post and reduction in supplies and services budget	-49	-49	-49	-49	-49

Attendance and Safeguarding – increase Penalty Notice Income	-34	-34	-34	-34	-34
Youth Service – reduce vacant posts; relocate Tipton Youth Club to Coneygree	-43	-43	-43	-43	-43
SRES – increase commercial activity to generate surplus income (commercialisation opportunity under development)	-24	-24	-24	-24	-24
Play and Holiday Activity Fund – reduction of grants	-70	-70	-70	-70	-70
No Recourse to Public Funds	-58	-58	-58	-58	-58
Connexions – removal of vacant post	-51	-68	-68	-68	-68
Employment and Skills – removal of vacant post, reduce Supplies and Services, further reduce VCS grant	-90	-90	-90	-90	-90
Connexions	0	17	17	17	17
Employment & Skills	-12	-23	-23	-23	-23
Efficiencies and Value for Money Initiatives across Children’s Services	-461	-461	-461	-461	-461
Total: Children & Education	-2,099	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of the transition between Children and Adult Social Care	-50	-50	-50	-50	-50
Reduction in high cost services through Transformation Programme (in development)	-1,000	-2,000	-2,000	-2,000	-2,000
Assistive technology and reablement	-200	-500	-500	-500	-500
Review the in-house Day Services Transport in conjunction with Children’s Services	-145	-250	-250	-250	-250
Meals on Wheels - Increase charge by 20% (£4.02 to £4.82)	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32
Shared Lives – expansion or outsourcing of our current service offer, focus on alternative to residential and respite provision for younger adults with a LD.	-86	-86	-86	-86	-86
Savings identified from project efficiencies	-132	-132	-132	-132	-132
Increase Better Care Fund funding to cover 2023/24 pay award	-1,800	-1,800	-1,800	-1,800	-1,800
Mobilisation and delivery of strategic commissioning and transformation plan	-913	-913	-913	-913	-913
Total: Adult Social Care	-4,358	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of Pest Control delivery model	-50	-100	-100	-100	-100
Reducing cost of discretionary services: Green Spaces, Parks, Grounds Maintenance, Events and Sandwell Valley	-736	-736	-736	-736	-736
Leisure Facilities – review of facilities provision	0	-536	-536	-536	-536

Community Sports – reduce Community Sports Plan	-135	-135	-135	-135	-135
Waste Management – increase Green Waste Subscription Fee	0	-200	-400	-400	-400
Libraries – vacant posts, supplies and services	-256	-256	-256	-256	-256
Visitor Services and Events	-140	-140	-140	-140	-140
Highways Street Lighting - Part night lighting	-40	-140	-140	-140	-140
Highways - School Crossing Patrols	-198	-198	-198	-198	-198
Highways - Christmas Lights	-0	0	-50	-50	-50
Highways - Reallocation of eligible Revenue cost to Streetworks Permit charges to offset a reduction in Permit Charges otherwise required by Regulations	-40	-40	-40	-40	-40
Public Protection - Removal of grant budget	-15	-15	-15	-15	-15
Public Protection - Use of Domestic Abuse grant funding (% of administration costs funded from New Burdens Funding)	-60	-60	-60	-60	-60
Public Protection - Use of Domestic Abuse grant funding (services built into New Burdens Funding)	-75	-75	-75	-75	-75
Public Protection - Reduce Community Safety post to 0.5	-18	-18	-18	-18	-18
Public Protection - Reduce Regulatory Compliance office capacity	-23	-23	-23	-23	-23
Remove surplus budget held in Directorate Management cost centre	-240	-240	-240	-240	-240
Reduce posts in Green Spaces	-60	-60	-60	-60	-60
Reduction in Arts café budget	-15	-15	-15	-15	-15
Total: Borough Economy	-2,101	-2,987	-3,237	-3,237	-3,237

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Asset Rationalisation Strategy	0	-840	-840	-840	-840
Aquatic Centre Utilities Budget	-360	-360	-360	-360	-360
Wednesbury Heritage Action Zone Project	-50	-50	-50	-50	-50
Funding of Business Growth Team through contributions from grants	-54	-54	-54	-54	-54
Development and Commercial Property Rates – Budget no longer required	-28	-28	-28	-28	-28
Planning Fees - 35%/25% increase in Fees (<i>subject to parliamentary approval</i>)	-250	-250	-250	-250	-250
Planning Fees - Pre App Fees 10% Increase	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3
Building Regulation Fees - 5% Increase	-27	-27	-27	-27	-27
Deletion of Land Charges Assistant Post (vacant)	-14	-14	-14	-14	-14
Reduction in Dangerous Structures Budget	-100	-100	-100	-100	-100
Climate Change Budget – funding from Public Health Grant	-67	-67	-67	-67	-67
Reduction in Court House premises budgets no longer required	-138	-138	-138	-138	-138

Reduction in supplies and services budgets in Planning and Policy	-10	-10	-10	-10	-10
Reduction in supplies and services budgets in Regeneration directorate management budgets	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9
Total Regeneration & Growth	-1,110	-1,950	-1,950	-1,950	-1,950

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Purchase of properties for use as temporary accommodation to reduce subsidy loss	0	-250	-250	-250	-250
Executive Support – removal of post	-33	-33	-33	-33	-33
Increase in Private Rented Sector Fee Budget (income from enforcement)	-20	-20	-20	-20	-20
Closure of Shop Mobility	-53	-106	-106	-106	-106
Floating Support – remove General Fund funding, continue with Disabled Facilities Grant	-80	-31	-31	-31	-31
Total: Housing	-186	-440	-440	-440	-440

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of Appointeeship Unit	-100	-200	-200	-200	-200
Cashless Strategy	0	-190	-190	-190	-190
ICT - Enterprise Services savings relating to hardware contract savings	-70	-70	-70	-70	-70
ICT – Alternative provision on GDPR and Cyber Security training (Meta Compliance)	-10	-10	-10	-10	-10
Finance - Review of Audit, Risk, Insurance and Fraud Services	-11	-11	-11	-11	-11
Reduction of supplies and services budgets and deletion of vacant posts	-124	-124	-124	-124	-124
Total: Finance	-315	-605	-605	-605	-605

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Registration Services - 7% increase in fees and charges over the next two years and inclusion of additional Met Hospital (Registrations)	-119	-246	-246	-246	-246
Organisational design within Law and Governance	-112	-112	-112	-112	-112
Deletion of a post within Law and Governance	-40	-40	-40	-40	-40
Reduction in supplies and services budgets across Law and Governance	-28	-28	-28	-28	-28
Total: Law & Governance	-299	-426	-426	-426	-426

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of contact centre model	0	-313	-313	-313	-313
Human Resources – streamlined services	0	-35	-134	-134	-134
Human Resources - Oracle Fusion - streamlining Transactional Services	0	-35	-142	-142	-142
Human Resources - Bring first aid training in-house	0	-10	-10	-10	-10
Strategy and Performance - Deletion of post within Adult Social Care Performance Analysis & Intelligence	-35	-35	-35	-35	-35
Strategy and Performance - Citizenspace - additional funding from Public Health grant	-10	-10	0	0	0
Deletion of Digital Transformation Officer post	-35	-35	-35	-35	-35
Deletion of HR Consultant post	-25	-25	-25	-25	-25
Reduction of supplies and services budgets in Service Improvement	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2
Total: Assistant Chief Executive	-107	-500	-696	-696	-696

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Increase use of Public Health grant to fund entire Public Health directorate costs	-64	-64	-64	-64	-64
Total Public Health	-64	-64	-64	-64	-64

Grand Total	-18,988	-17,924	-19,570	-19,570	-19,570
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General Budget Planning Assumptions

The key points of briefing in relation to the Provisional Finance Settlement and the implications arising are:

- a. New Homes Bonus – The Government has been considering reform or phasing out of New Homes Bonus and currently the grant is calculated on a one-off annual basis. It is assumed that the Council will receive a commensurate sum in 2024/25 only due to uncertainty.
- b. Collection Fund – the working assumption is that Council Tax is assumed to increase by 2.99% throughout each year of the MTFP, the maximum permitted under current Government guidance for core tax increases. The Collection Fund is currently estimated to be in deficit at the end of the current financial year and therefore £0.5m has been included in the MTFP as a charge to account for the Council's share of that deficit.
- c. NNDR Income – the assumption is that Sandwell will continue to retain 99% of its business rates (with 1% being provided for West Midlands Fire). From 2024/25 it has been agreed that the Council will be part of the new Devolution Deal which is effectively a continuation of the current retention arrangements. At this time, it is considered unlikely that there will be a reset of the business rates baseline and therefore future income in the MTFP is a continuation of current baseline levels with no growth assumptions due to the current economic climate.
- d. Social Care Grants saw increases locally and nationally with the Social Care Grant increasing to £42.8m for Sandwell, being an increase of £7.0m (nationally allocation of £4.5bn being a £692m increase); the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund increasing by £2.1m to £5.4m (national increase of £200m to take total allocation to £500m); and the Adult Social Care Market Sustainability Improvement Fund increasing by £3.8m resulting in Sandwell's grant being £8.1m for 2024/25 (the national allocation was £1.05bn). No further increases have been included in future years within the MTFP. An additional £3.849m was provided within the final Local Government Finance Settlement; the associated spending power is complicit with the Draft Budget 2024/25.

Other Assumptions:

- e. Controls on use of packaging and waste volumes – the Government is planning to establish a system where the producers of packaging waste are charged a levy related to the waste volumes that result such that the proceeds - net of regulatory costs - are passed on to local Councils. Government has confirmed that implementation will be deferred until 2025/26.
- e. Inflation is only provided on key contracts (e.g. SERCO waste management, Sandwell Children's Trust and utilities). Other inflationary pressures are to be managed within existing service budgets.
- f. Pay inflation is provided for at an estimated level, with year 1 of the MTFP taking into account an adjustment for the difference between budgeted and actual pay awards in the current year (i.e. 2023/24). Future estimated pay awards are currently calculated on a 4% increase in 2024/25 and 4% thereafter as core CPI inflation is brought back to target levels.
- g. In financial year 2024/25 Council Tax is recommended to increase by 2.99% and the Adult Social Care Precept by 2% to an overall total of 4.99%. Throughout the MTFP Council Tax has been modelled with an increase of 3% per annum.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 – Winter 2024

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Opening Net Budget	317.103	333.008	353.030	366.650	380.768
Pay Inflation	9.601	6.336	6.590	6.736	7.006
Technical Adjustments (debt financing & investment income)	2.636	1.964	-0.500	1.100	0.600
Other Technical Adjustments	-4.631	-1.784	0.010	0.008	0.009
Total Pay and Technical Adjustments	7.606	6.516	6.100	7.844	7.615
Other Service Pressures:					
Growth	4.969	0.709	0.158	-	-
Demographic Changes	3.662	3.262	3.262	2.447	2.446
Inflationary Increases	18.021	10.320	6.746	3.827	3.838
Unachieved saving	0.490	-	-	-	-
Loss of Funding	0.189	-0.189	-	-	-
Changes in recharges	0.621	-	-	-	-
SEND Transport	12.500	-1.000	-1.000	-	-
Budget corrections	4.603	-0.660	-	-	-
Total Service Pressures	45.055	12.442	9.166	6.274	6.284
Revised Net Budget Subtotal (1)	369.764	351.966	368.296	380.768	394.667
Changes in Government funding within services	-17.768	-	-	-	-
Agreed Savings Proposals	-18.988	1.064	-1.646	-	-
Revised Net Budget Subtotal (2)	333.008	353.030	366.650	380.768	394.667
Funded by:					
Non Ringfenced Government Grants	-1.424	-	-	-	-
Retained Business Rates (including Section 31 and top-up grant)	-194.607	-198.499	-202.470	-206.520	-210.651
Council Tax Income	-135.870	-142.031	-148.472	-155.205	-162.243
Collection Fund (Surplus)/ Deficit	-1.107	-	-	-	-
Total Funding	-333.008	-340.530	-350.942	-361.725	-372.894
Net Budget -Surplus/ Deficit	-	12.500	15.708	19.043	21.773

The MTFP Change Log

Movement of Savings Target from June 2023 MTFP Report

	2024/25 £m
Shortfall reported in June 2023	8.859
Changes in Council Net Expenditure:	
Reduction in Pressures:	(5.892)
Removal of assumed increase in ASC Service Grant pending autumn statement announcements and provisional local government finance settlement	10.009
Total Changes in net expenditure	4.117
Changes in Funding:	
Revised council tax base generating additional council tax income	(0.513)
Estimated Council Tax Deficit to be charged to the General Fund	0.500
Total Changes in Funding	(0.013)
Total Changes	4.104
Shortfall reported in November 2023	12.963
Changes in Council Net Expenditure:	
New/ Increased Pressures	14.393
Reduction in existing pressures after review	(1.374)
Business Change Contingency Reserve	2.500
Increase in Government grants to services (provisional financial settlement) net of conditional spend requirements	(10.780)
Changes in Treasury Management costs/ income to fund Prudential Borrowing	2.336
Other technical adjustments	(0.456)
Net increases in council net expenditure	6.619
Changes in Funding:	
Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement – reduction in non-ringfenced grants	2.803
Income from 2% Adult Social Care Precept	(3.397)
Total Changes in Funding	(0.594)
Net Shortfall	18.988
Savings Proposals (Annex 6)	(18.988)
Net (Surplus)/ Deficit	0

Risks: Principal Risks to the MTFS & Headline Mitigation

Risks	Headline Mitigation
Failure to constrain expenditures within relevant budget targets.	The Council's financial reporting arrangements including the chart of accounts, budget management approaches, and forecasting are under review. This will be completed in financial years 2023/24 & 2024/25.
Failure to prepare for balancing the 2024/25 Budget shortfall.	The preparation of this MTFS at this point in the financial year, the generation of savings options, the planned launch of consultation and engagement and the promulgation of the Budget Timetable incorporating two meetings of Full Council to take decisions on savings.
Failure to increase Reserves.	The Council has a medium term intention to maintain essential reserves at a level to maximise assurance that strategic exigencies can be met within the term of the MTFS. Accordingly, there are presently no plans to employ significant reserves to balance the 2024/25 Budget shortfall.
Failure to assure Commissioners that sufficient progress has been made in building a robust MTFS	The preparation and endorsement of this MTFS and MTFP by the Statutory Officers, Leadership Team and Cabinet, together with the development of a robust approach to consultation and review by the Scrutiny function is relevant here.
Failure to deliver savings.	The Council has reviewed savings delivery in 2023/24 and is enhancing monitoring for the Leadership Team, Cabinet and the Scrutiny function.
Failure to arrange cover for expected cost increases	The Council has set in place a process whereby the MTFP is updated quarterly, and the thoroughness of review and analysis will be enhanced on each occasion as additional information becomes available and insight gained. In addition, the Council will adjust its fees and charges annually in the future to ensure that the net cost of services is moderated where it is equitable to do.
Inability to Fund the Capital Programme arising from continued rises in interest rates and higher cost of borrowing.	Capital Principles to set down a clear and affordable framework for capital planning have been recommended to Cabinet. Further work to develop an affordable Capital Programme will be undertaken for inclusion in the Draft Budget to be received by Full Council in February 2024.

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CREATING A COUNCIL FOR THE **FUTURE**



Purpose and Vision

We are fortunate to work in a Council that has an ambitious and determined vision to create a modern and agile organisation, that is laid out in clear terms in the Strategic Outcomes of our plan. At the heart of the Plan, and front and centre of everything we do is to ensure we improve our Borough by investing in what matters for the positive benefit of the residents of Sandwell.

In such uncertain and turbulent times, we should be proud of the enormous amount that has already been achieved in the last two years. The Council now feels stable, safe and has a clearer appreciation of what it needs to achieve, building on the foundations of our Improvement Plan. And with that clarity also comes an understanding that there is still much more to be done, not only to invest in the vital services that our residents need, but to also make the Council sustainable and relevant for the future. We must challenge ourselves to ensure everything we do has real measurable impact, because to deliver everything we want to do affordably and effectively we will need to have a clear focus on how and why we do things and how we work together with each other and in partnership with the community to codesign services for the future. We will need to do more of the things that matter and reduce or stop the things that do not.

We must not forget that these are not easy times for our residents and thousands of them are living with poverty and hardship, but together we have a real opportunity to address these challenges and deliver the outcomes that will make a real difference.



Where We Are Now

Page 116
To achieve the impact that we want needs a step change in how we do business. We face critical funding and growth pressures and the way that our budgets are currently constructed means that our planned level of future expenditure leaves significant challenges to deliver savings in the later years of the MTFs that can only be met through transformation. It should be clear that whilst the Council was not put into statutory intervention because of its financial position at the time, it is likely that without a plan for transformation and a steadying of the finances it is highly likely that we would have been.

We cannot afford to reduce the pace of the change needed as delivery of some savings will take time to embed. We also cannot meet this challenge through incremental and marginal savings – often described as ‘salami slicing’ – to all areas of expenditure. Instead, there needs to be a clear focus on the services we provide now and want to provide in the future, taking a standard approach to managing our projects and programmes of change. We need a fresh look at the contribution that everything we do has to the outcomes that we want to achieve as part of our vision. Rather than a threat or a burden, we need to treat this as an opportunity to ‘reset’ ourselves and re-imagine our Council for the future.

The transformation needs to be challenging but achievable and capable of being delivered in the timescales we say it can. Without this level of commitment and focus on evidence to show impact, we cannot be certain of moving out of intervention.



Customer
focused



One
Team



Accountable



Ambitious

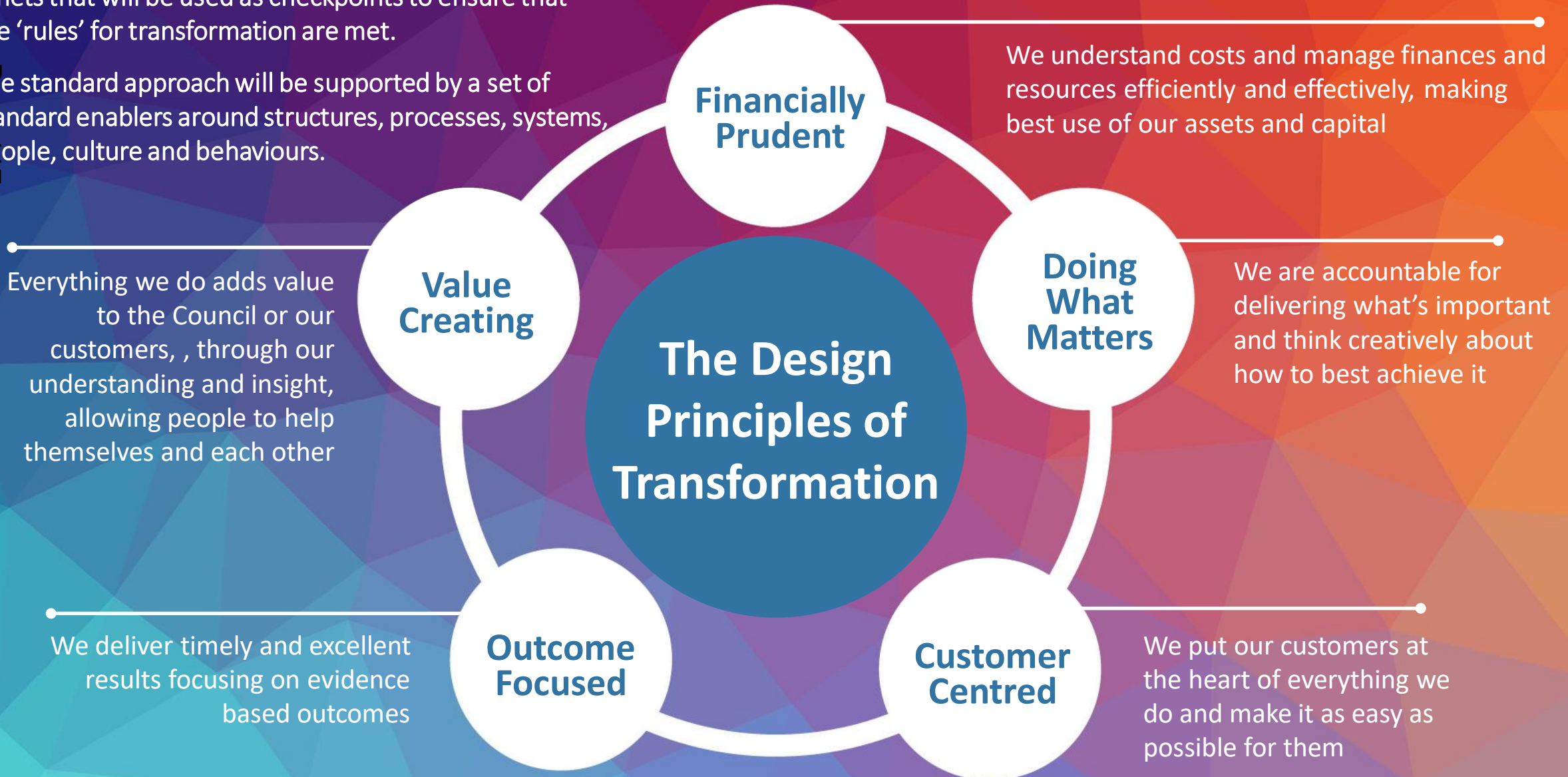


Inclusive

The Design Principles for Transformation are the guiding tenets that will be used as checkpoints to ensure that the 'rules' for transformation are met.

The standard approach will be supported by a set of standard enablers around structures, processes, systems, people, culture and behaviours.

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Everything we do adds value to the Council or our customers, through our understanding and insight, allowing people to help themselves and each other

We deliver timely and excellent results focusing on evidence based outcomes

We understand costs and manage finances and resources efficiently and effectively, making best use of our assets and capital

We are accountable for delivering what's important and think creatively about how to best achieve it

We put our customers at the heart of everything we do and make it as easy as possible for them

Transformation Fundamentals – The Brilliant Basics

The starting point for our transformation is a blend of key Directorate projects prioritised to deliver in the next year and some critical cross cutting projects.

Page 118

Key Directorate projects include...

SEND Service Transformation
SEN Transport

Transitions

Community Hubs, Enforcement
Leisure Review, Waste Review

Housing Repairs Transformation
Housing Asset Mgt System

Major contracts & commissioning review

Asset & Estate Rationalisation Strategy,
Neighbourhood Working

Governance & Decision Making

Key Corporate projects include...

A **business support** project is underway which aims to provide a single professional service with consistent standards, staff training and career prospects; gaining greater efficiencies by utilising new technology and applying lean business processes across the organisation.

Ensuring the best customer experience is a critical element of our improvement journey and our **customer journey** programme will ensure we deliver on this so we add maximum value to our customer in everything we do, making it as easy as possible for them to interact with us.

Developing a comprehensive **digital strategy** means embedding the new tools currently under development, such as Oracle Fusion, which will allow for improved processes and more self-service. It also means ensuring all our other systems are optimised to allow us to work intelligently and seamlessly across the organisation for the benefit of our customers.

Ongoing Transformation – Sustainability

Page 119
The key to the delivery of a sustainable transformation programme to ensure that we can link everything we do to the outcomes we want to achieve. As part of this we will have a Framework that ensures a clear link between...

Purpose

Inputs

Outputs

Outcomes

Impact

It is a way to show the direct relationship between *what we do* and the *difference we make*.

Projects that are considered to form part of the programme will be tested against the design principles and then assessed to ensure they have positive impact, either on our customers, or our finances, or both. They will also be looked at in terms of risk – and issues such as capacity to deliver addressed.



What it will mean for staff

Page 120
To deliver this kind of transformation there will need to be positive leadership at all levels of the Council. This means having a mindset that is open to the possibilities of thinking what the Council can be in the future. They will uphold the agreements of the transformation and help their staff to deliver the change, providing the opportunities, the moral conviction and the learning.

The transformation cannot be seen as a distraction from current priority programme of delivery. On the contrary, it must be recognised as the critical enabler for our future success. We will continue to invest in and develop our people as we know they are our greatest asset and continue to work hard to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our workforce, so they represent our community.

We value our people and want to see them thrive. Whilst this transformation means we will see a change in what people do and how they do it and this may mean that we stop, reduce or re-think how we do many things, equally there will be new things to do and new opportunities. We will also look at how we are structured in terms of our hierarchies and spans of control, and how each person contributes to our outcomes, ensuring synergies with performance management.



As we change, grow and develop, we will invest in staff – in their learning and development - to help them achieve new things for the maximum impact of Sandwell and for themselves.

THE TIMELINE FOR CHANGE

2023/2024

**Brilliant
Basics**

2024/2028

**Sustainable
Transformation**

Beyond

**Continuous
Improvement**

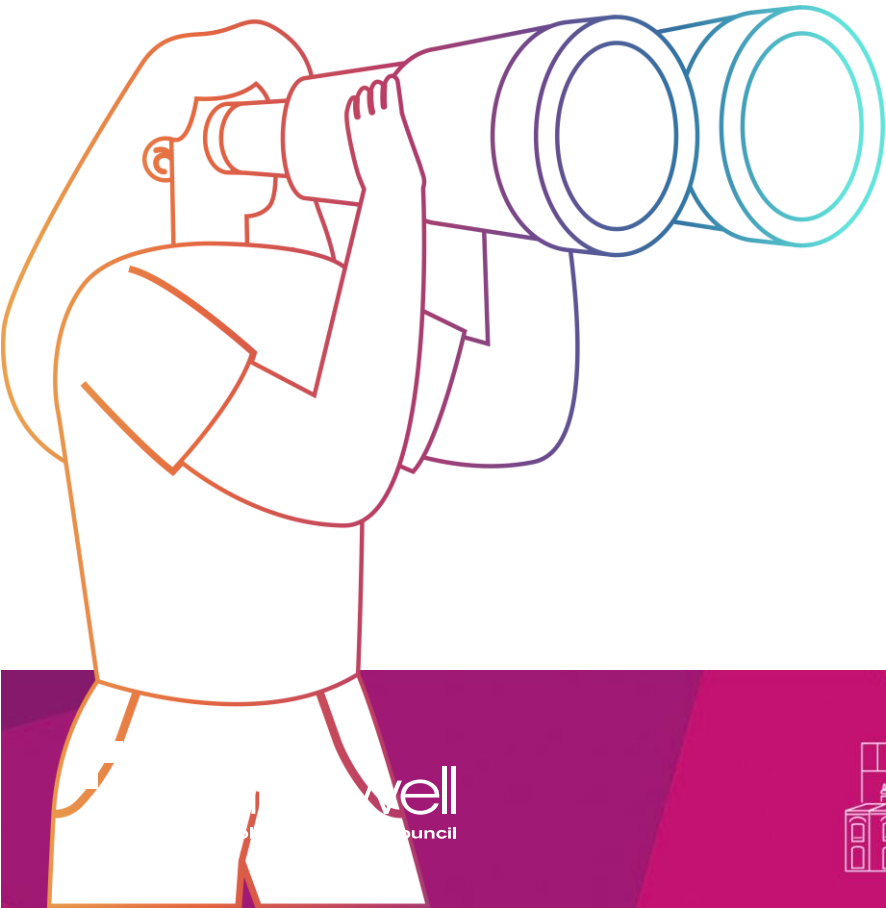
To make such a fundamental shift in how we do business is a long-term commitment, not an overnight fix, with a new model that may emerge from the work that will not only be around process and structure, but also culture and behaviours. That is not to say there will not be short- and medium-term changes in how we do business, focused around our Brilliant Basics programme - and we will take every opportunity that arises, as long as it aligns to our long-term vision and strategic outcomes.

Our Brilliant Basics programme will commence immediately – in fact the majority of projects are already in hand. So, this is our focus for 2023/24. And whilst work will also commence on the longer-term sustainable transformation programme, this will be our focus from 2024 onwards. As we move forward, there will of course be new challenges and opportunities and our programme will adjust to reflect that, as well as continuing to improve everything else we do. We will ensure we measure, manage, test and learn from all projects as we go along, ensuring we focus our efforts on what works.

How will this be delivered in practice



Alignment to the Vision



Our Vision is

‘to create a modern, outstanding council,
one where our organisational structure,
business systems, process and people and
cultural working practices are fully aligned
to deliver our strategic outcomes’.



Strategic Outcomes Framework

Page 125
Our Strategic Outcomes are the basis on which we deliver our services:

- 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
- One Council, One Team

The development of a Strategic Outcomes Framework ensures a coherent linkage between purpose, inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact. It is a way to show the direct relationship between what we do and the difference we make.



Design Principles

These are the 'rules' we will apply to ensure all change is aligned to the Transformation Vision.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

We put our customers at the heart of everything we do and make it as easy as possible for them

Customer Centred

Everything we do adds value to the Council or our customers, through our understanding and insight, allowing people to help themselves and each other

Value Creating

We deliver timely and excellent results focusing on evidence-based outcomes

Outcome Focused

We understand costs and manage finances and resources efficiently and effectively, making best use of our assets and capital

Financially Prudent

We are accountable for delivering what's important and think creatively about how to best achieve it

Doing What Matters

TRANSFORMATION VISION

To create a modern, outstanding council, one where our organisational structure, business systems, process and people and cultural working practices are fully aligned to deliver our strategic outcomes.



The enabling mechanisms

Design Principles

Customer Centred

Value Creating

Outcome Focussed

Financially Prudent

Doing what matters

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

One Council, One Team

Structures

Systems

Processes

People

Culture & Behaviours

The Enabling Mechanisms

Vision

To create a modern, outstanding council, one where our organisational structure, business systems, process and people and cultural working practices are fully aligned to deliver our strategic outcomes.

Understanding the Enabling Mechanisms

Mechanism	Structures	Systems	Processes	People	Culture & Behaviours
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Governance PMO & Gateways

Approach	Spans of Control and contribution to outcomes	Digital Blueprint and improved self service	Redesign Toolkit and methodology	Workforce Strategy and succession planning	Behaviour framework and Organisation Development approach
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Overview	Structures ensure there are the right people in the right place	Systems ensure the right technology is there to deliver on the programme	Processes ensure the right work is being done in the most efficient way	People ensures that we have a sufficient capacity of people with the right skills and capabilities	Culture cuts across all themes and without it none of the other enablers will deliver
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The Strategic Outcome-led Transformation Portfolio



Assessing the Significance

Page 131

The council has adopted a system that uses a number of inputs to consider the level of support and assurance required. A PM Threshold Tool has been created and based on the inputs the project will be identified as level 1, 2, 3 or 4 – this can then be the basis of a discussion with the PMO in terms of resourcing and requirements. This is illustrated below:

Thresholds	Tiering		Menu of PMO Support	Scoring
Value	1	Intense	Full range of support including project management	1
Complexity	2	High	Project officer support working alongside service on delivery	1
Risk	3	Medium	Oversight of the project giving advice and guidance	1
Capacity	4	Reporting	Templates and tools available for services to use	1



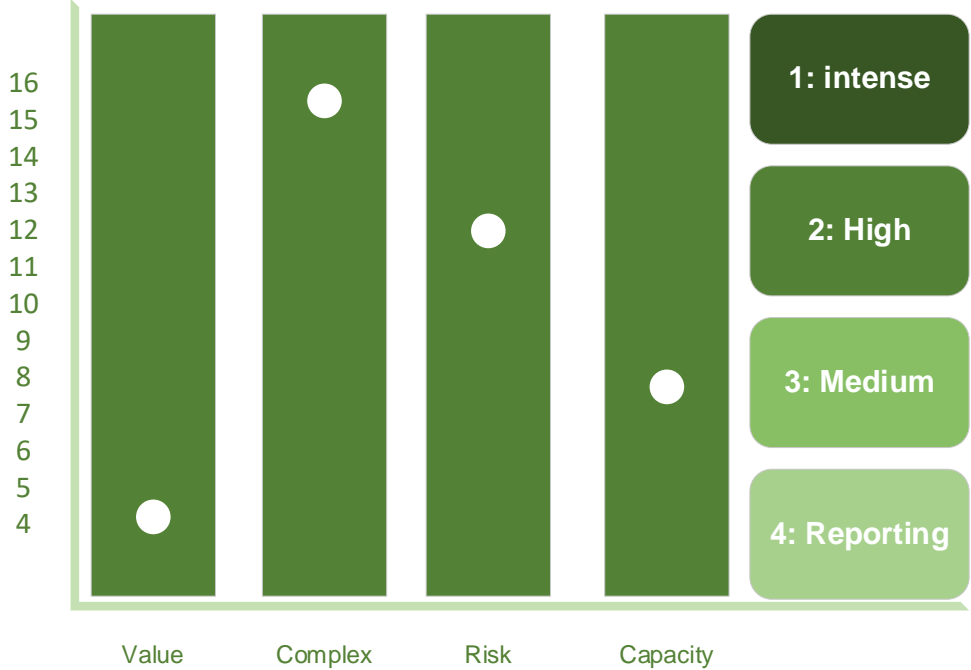
Assessing the Significance

The threshold inputs cover the following:

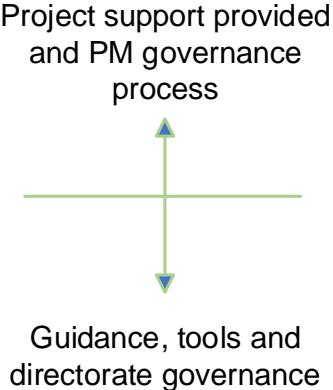
- Value and status
- Complexity
- Risk
- Capacity

The scoring will result in an overall rating.

This is illustrated as follows:



Total overall score:



A PHASED APPROACH

2023/2024

Brilliant Basics

Brilliant Basics:

- Portfolio Structure
- Design Principles and Strategic Framework
- Existing Transformation aligned to Outcome-led Portfolio
- Strategic Outcome Mapping and Service Planning

2024/2028

Sustainable Transformation

Sustainable Transformation:

- Outcome-led Portfolio
- Long-Term Planning

Beyond

Continuous Improvement

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

One Council, One Team

Brilliant Basics Portfolio

SEND Service Transformation
SEN Transport

Transitions

Community Hubs, Enforcement
Leisure Review, Waste Review

Housing Repairs Transformation
Housing Asset Management System

Major Contracts and Commissioning Review
Asset and Estate Rationalisation Strategy

Customer Journey, Digital Blueprint
Neighbourhood Working

Oracle Fusion, Business Support,
Governance and Decision-Making



Informing Sustainable Transformation and Outcome-led Decision Making

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Strategic Outcome	What this means	Activity	VfM	Service Plan Actions
The best start in life for children and young people	Remove barriers to education & learning, prioritise consistent support to families, check in with all children			
People live well and age well	Offer healthy choices for health & social care, respectful treatment in safe, clean environments			
Strong, resilient communities	Offer safe, non-threatening places, encourage outdoor activities			
Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods	Provide fair & efficient assessments to provide homes to those in need			
A strong and inclusive economy	Incentivise local businesses and recruit & train locally based staff			
A connected and accessible Sandwell	Maximise location, transport network, promote alternative transport in schools			
One Council, One Team	Streamline processes, staff training & support & encouragement			

EFFECTIVE

Is what we are doing contributing to the outcomes? First pass

EFFICIENT

Are we delivering the best outcomes for the resources being input? Second pass

ECONOMIC

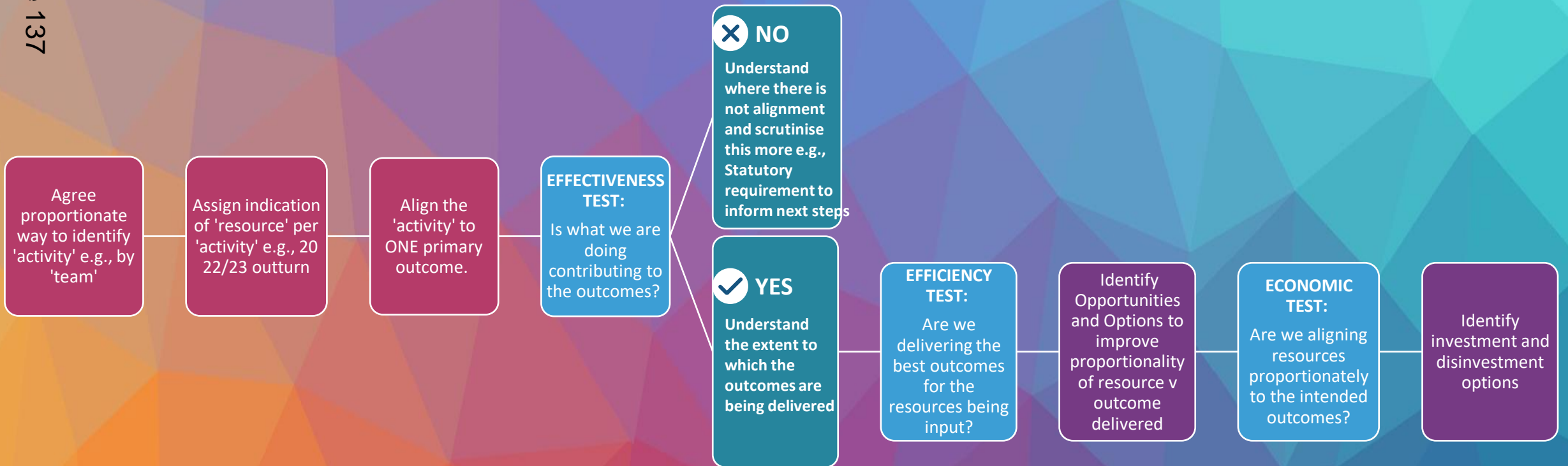
Are we aligning resources proportionately to intended outcomes? Strategic Pass

Applying Value for Money tests to Sustainable Transformation

<p>EFFECTIVE</p> <p>Is what we are doing contributing to the outcomes? First pass</p>	<p>EFFICIENT</p> <p>Are we delivering the best outcomes for the resources being input? Second pass</p>	<p>ECONOMIC</p> <p>Are we aligning resources proportionately to intended outcomes? Strategic Pass</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service and activity identification. ▪ Collaborative alignment to the interpretations of the Strategic Outcomes. ▪ Gap Analysis. ▪ Opportunity Identification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding of Impact (e.g., KPIs, customer feedback). ▪ Benchmarking. ▪ Cost vs benefit analysis. ▪ Opportunity Identification. ▪ Opportunity Quantification (BAU/ Transformation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prioritisation of cost & impact. ▪ Benchmarking. ▪ Opportunity Identification. ▪ Opportunity Quantification (BAU/ Transformation). ▪ Collaboration with SLT. ▪ Transformation Portfolio. ▪ Service Plan inputs.



The Approach



WE ARE SANDWELL!



Flexible Use of Capital Receipts

Background

1. In the 2022/23 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement the following was announced:
Extension of the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund transformation projects
2. We are also announcing a 3-year extension from 2022-23 onwards of the existing flexibility for councils to use capital receipts to fund transformation projects that produce long-term savings or reduce the costs of service delivery. We will provide further details on the extension in due course.
3. On 4 April 2022, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) confirmed this extension and published Guidance and a Direction. The Direction and Guidance were subject to a revision published on 2 August 2022 which included clarifications on the exclusion of receipts generated from the sale of assets to group companies.
4. The Council has previously not looked to make use of this flexibility, however with an increased number of transformational projects underway and being developed to improve service delivery and efficiency, this strategy has been developed to enable potential use of this flexibility to fund eligible expenditure. The Medium Term Financial Strategy Update Autumn 2023 that was taken to Cabinet on 15th November 2023 referred to the Council's intention to now make use of this flexibility.
5. An initial draft of 2023/24 projects that could be funded from capital receipts was submitted to DLUHC in December 2023 and this builds on that to include potential areas for 2024/25.

Objectives and Purpose

6. This Strategy is intended to enable the Council to potentially take advantage of the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund transformation costs if appropriate.
7. The Strategy will form part of the delivery of the Council's revised Corporate Plan (June 2023 Cabinet) assisting in the 'making the most of resources' strand of the One Council One Team strategic outcome. It will also support several areas within the Corporate Oversight theme of the Corporate Improvement Plan.
 - a. The objectives of this Strategy are to:
 - Identify projects that are considered to be eligible, and which could be funded by this method;
 - Identify actual and potential capital receipts that could be utilised to fund transformation projects;
 - In subsequent years, report on the progress of projects approved in previous years.

Projects Considered Eligible for Funding from use of Flexible Capital Receipts

8. A summary of projects identified included in this Strategy as being potentially eligible for capital receipts funding is summarised below, with a description of the project, project objectives, and potential planned use of receipts.

Project	Description	Service Transformation / Savings	Saving Type	Planned Use of Receipts	
				2023/24 £000	2025/25 £000
Implementation of Oracle Fusion	Oracle Fusion system implemented across finance, HR, payroll, projects	More efficient payroll, HR, and finance services with targeted savings of at least £500k from 2025/26	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	2,700	1,000
Financial Accounting Process Redesign	Improvements in working practices and working papers for financial accounts. Finance element of asset system implemented	Standard processes and working papers in place to enable year end accounts to be produced efficiently and to appropriate external audit standards	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	430	
Transactional Finance Redesigns	Working with an external partner to review and redesign how cash payments are streamlined, the management of appointee/deputyships and business support	Savings being identified relating to the following areas Cashless strategy £190k Brokerage /Appointeeship £200k	Funding the cost of service reconfiguration, restructuring or rationalisation where this leads to ongoing efficiency savings or service transformation	340	
Implementation of an Asset Rationalisation Strategy	The adoption of a corporate landlord model with all building assets being managed centrally combined with an active disposals programme of surplus assets	Improved efficiencies and consistency in managing buildings with targeted savings of £1.6m	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	32	
Adult Social Care Transformation – digital / assistive technology	Engagement of an external strategic partner to redesign how residents access services alongside partner organisations and improve workforce recruitment and retention. Investment in digital and assistive technology to improve independence	The reduction in direct care costs due to improvements in support from digital technology have targeted savings of £200k rising to £500k from 2025/26	Driving a digital approach to the delivery of more efficient public services and how the public interacts with authorities	95	1,000
Visitor Services Business Plan Review	Review of the Sandwell Valley business planning documents with an external partner to identify risks to delivery and test financial assumptions	Delivery of additional visitor services income to improve the financial sustainability of the visitor services offering	Setting up commercial or alternative delivery models to deliver services more efficiently and bring in income	30	
Grounds Maintenance	Overall review of Grounds Maintenance	Delivery of service efficiency savings in this area	Investment in service reform feasibility work	15	
Waste Collection Review	Review of waste collection services including garden waste collection	Delivery of additional income related to garden waste collection and service efficiencies in waste collection service	Setting up commercial or alternative delivery models to deliver services more efficiently and bring in income	50	

Vehicle Fleet Review	Review to identify rationalisation and/or alternative delivery options of fleet vehicles used in waste collection	Review to identify rationalisation and/or alternative delivery options of fleet vehicles used in waste collection	Investment in service reform feasibility work	25	
Contract Management Improvements	Review of contract management arrangements	Delivery of corporate contract management training to 170 staff, standard templates, and guidance	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	20	
Various commercialisation projects	Corporate transformation project support to services on commercialisation	Reviewing service delivery models to identify commercial opportunities and deliver additional income or maximise existing income streams	Setting up commercial or alternative delivery models to deliver services more efficiently and bring in income	70	
Staff Exit Costs	Costs of restructures to deliver savings/service changes	Realisation of ongoing savings from reduced staffing costs	Funding the cost of service reconfiguration, restructuring or rationalisation where this leads to ongoing efficiency savings or service transformation	1,000	
Adult Social Care - STAR	Change to Adult Social Care STAR service	Reduced Service costs realised in 23/24 financial year	Funding the cost of service reconfiguration, restructuring or rationalisation where this leads to ongoing efficiency savings or service transformation	18	
Customer Service Transformation	Review of customer journey and current contact centre model	Increased efficiency of customer interactions and improved use of new technology with savings realised from 25/26	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery		1,000
Total				4,825	3,000

Fees and Charges

The general approach has been to increase fees & charges by 5% (unless otherwise directed/constrained by Government or regulation) or where there are compelling reasons for increasing beyond these factors as set out below.

Directorate	Service	2024/25 % Fee Increase	Rationale for Increase
Adult Social Care	Community Meals (excluding Meals on Wheels), Community Alarms	7%	In line with inflation
Adult Social Care	Community Meals	20%	Aiming to reduce subsidy and move closer to achieving cost recovery
Children's Services	Sandwell Residential Education Service	5%-8%	Standard increases, with the exception of high season charges at Ingestre Hall, Edgmond Hall and Frank Chapman Centres, where the aim of higher increases is to drive occupancy in mid and low seasons, aiming to have centres occupied for as much of the school year as possible, increasing attendance and positive outcomes for Sandwell children
Children's Services	Adult and Family Learning Course Fees	9% (where fees currently charged)	Aiming to reduce subsidy and move closer to achieving cost recovery
Children's Services	Youth Services	10%-100%	Aiming to reduce subsidy and move closer to achieving cost recovery
Borough Economy	Community Facilities, Green Services, Green Spaces, Visitor Services, Events	5%	Standard increase
Borough Economy	Museums and Arts (excluding fees on next slide)	5%-7%	In line with inflation
Borough Economy	Pest Control (excluding missed appointments) and Transit Sites	5%	Standard increase
Borough Economy	Bulky Waste Collections (excluding Fridge/Freezers)	11%+	To bring fees closer into alignment with local authority neighbours
Borough Economy	Allotments	12%	Fees not increased for over 10 years
Borough Economy	Libraries	7%-43%	Cost recovery. Larger increases relate to photocopying, printing and postage, and are due to increased costs of materials and postage

Borough Economy	Highways Act Permits, Licences, Traffic Orders and Inspections	10%	Benchmarked with other West Midlands local authorities and increased accordingly
Borough Economy	Off Street Car Parking	5% -33%	Revised car parking charges agreed by Cabinet on 21 June 2023 (following original report on 20 th July 2022)
Borough Economy	Car Parking Waivers, Parking Permits, Event Parking and Regulation Charges	15%	To encourage use of sustainable transport methods, to offset increased costs, and to bring into line with other local authority charges
Borough Economy	Museums - Adult Tours, Handling Collections and Living History Events at Oak House Museum, and Use of Large Room at Haden Hill House,	10%-43%	Aiming to recover costs, and to bring room hire charges into line with Libraries
Borough Economy	Environmental Protection – Fixed Penalty Notices	50%-233%	Increased to upper limit set by DEFRA to discourage antisocial behaviour
Borough Economy	Scrap Metal Licences and Mobile Trading Consents	5%	Standard increase
Borough Economy	Animal Licences, Skin Piercing Premises Licences, Food Safety Inspections/Certificates, Sex Establishment Licences	8%-14%	Cost recovery
Borough Economy	Pest Control – Missed Appointments	44%	Fee aligned with advisory visit fee, as cost incurred by the Council is the same in either circumstance
Housing	Community Facilities, Mobility Service, Garages	5%	Standard increase
Housing	Private Sector Housing	7%	In line with inflation
Law and Governance	Legal Services	5%	Standard increase
Law and Governance	Registration Services	7%	In line with inflation
Public Health	Landfill Location Checks / Contaminated Land	5%	Standard increase
Regeneration and Growth	Building Control, Property Searches, Land Charges, Markets (excluding West Bromwich Indoor Market)	5%	Standard increase
Regeneration and Growth	Facilities Management	10%	Cost recovery (taking into account significantly increased utility costs over previous two years)
Regeneration and Growth	Planning Pre-Application Fees	10%	Cost recovery (taking account of significantly increased staff costs)
Regeneration and Growth	Planning Fees	25%+	Statutory fees (set by Government)

SANDWELL MBC - GENERAL FUND BUDGET SUMMARY

	Current	Draft	Forecast Draft Budgets			
	Budget	Budget				
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Service Directorates						
Corporate Management	(183.0)	469.2	483.4	498.2	513.5	529.5
Finance	19,500.0	22,015.2	23,250.0	24,186.9	25,161.2	26,174.5
Legal & Governance	7,303.0	7,465.2	8,053.0	8,581.9	9,097.6	9,633.9
Adult Social Care	85,831.0	86,448.1	96,515.5	102,447.5	106,914.6	111,459.5
Children's Services	91,455.0	104,354.8	111,083.7	112,829.3	115,104.7	117,411.2
Public Health	64.0	-	190.4	388.4	594.3	808.5
Regeneration & Growth	11,389.0	10,310.7	11,082.5	12,034.7	12,681.0	13,353.1
Housing & Assets	2,303.0	3,017.8	2,910.8	3,262.4	3,602.8	3,956.8
Assistant Chief Executive	7,550.0	8,186.1	8,925.9	9,322.5	9,938.8	10,579.8
Borough Economy	69,875.0	73,477.4	77,924.0	81,449.4	84,402.5	87,393.7
Council Wide	-	-	(1,700.0)	(2,900.0)	(2,900.0)	(2,900.0)
Total Service Directorate	295,087.0	315,744.5	338,719.2	352,101.2	365,111.0	378,400.5
Capital Charges	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)
Central Items	9,462.0	10,493.0	10,778.0	11,061.0	11,061.0	11,061.0
Contingency	8,812.0	2,671.0	2,931.0	2,941.0	2,955.2	2,963.7
Total Council Service Costs	286,900.0	302,447.5	325,967.2	339,642.2	352,666.2	365,964.2
External Interest Payments	15,000.0	20,136.0	22,100.0	20,600.0	21,700.0	22,300.0
Interest and Dividend Receipts	(7,500.0)	(10,000.0)	(10,000.0)	(9,000.0)	(9,000.0)	(9,000.0)
Contribution to/ (from) Earmarked Reserves	2,315.0	5,893.2	-	-	-	-
Revenue Contributions to Capital Expenditure	6,282.0	-	-	-	-	-
Contribution to/ (from) General Balances	521.0	-	-	-	-	-
Net Cost of Borough Services	303,518.0	318,476.7	338,067.2	351,242.2	365,366.2	379,264.2
West Midlands Integrated Transport Levy	13,977.0	14,396.0	14,828.0	15,273.0	15,273.0	15,273.0
West Midlands Magistrates Courts	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0
Environment Agency (Flood Defence Levy)	88.0	94.0	94.0	94.0	94.0	94.0
Net Borough Expenditure	317,624.0	333,007.7	353,030.2	366,650.2	380,774.2	394,672.2
Funding						
Non-Ringfenced Grants						
New Homes Bonus	(111.0)	(776.0)	-	-	-	-
Services Grant	(3,953.0)	(648.0)	-	-	-	-
Non-Domestic Rates						
Retained Business Rates	(109,560.0)	(114,106.0)	(116,388.0)	(118,716.0)	(121,090.0)	(123,512.0)
Section 31 Grants	(38,188.0)	(38,123.0)	(38,885.0)	(39,663.0)	(40,456.0)	(41,265.0)
Top-up Grant	(38,701.0)	(42,378.0)	(43,226.0)	(44,091.0)	(44,973.0)	(45,872.0)
Collection Fund (Surplus)/ Deficits						
Non-Domestic Rates	(52.0)	(1,607.0)	-	-	-	-
Council Tax	(50.0)	500.0	-	-	-	-
Amounts Raised from Council Tax	(127,009.0)	(135,869.7)	(142,031.0)	(148,472.0)	(155,205.0)	(162,243.0)
Projected (Surplus)/ Deficit	-	-	12,500.2	15,708.2	19,050.2	21,780.2

SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL TAX

2024/25

Band	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council			Fire	Police	Total
	Core Council Tax	Adult Social Care Precept	Sandwell Total			
A	£990.33	£167.72	£1,158.05	£50.13	£143.70	£1,351.88
B	£1,155.39	£195.67	£1,351.06	£58.49	£167.65	£1,577.20
C	£1,320.44	£223.63	£1,544.07	£66.84	£191.60	£1,802.51
D	£1,485.50	£251.58	£1,737.08	£75.20	£215.55	£2,027.83
E	£1,815.61	£307.49	£2,123.10	£91.91	£263.45	£2,478.46
F	£2,145.73	£363.39	£2,509.12	£108.62	£311.35	£2,929.09
G	£2,475.83	£419.30	£2,895.13	£125.33	£359.25	£3,379.71
H	£2,971.00	£503.16	£3,474.16	£150.40	£431.10	£4,055.66
NOTE: The Council Tax levels shown above apply to properties with 2 or more adults. Single person households will pay 25% less than this.						
2024/25	Increase					
2024/25	Band D Amount		£1,737.08	£75.20	£215.55	£2,027.83
2023/24	Band D Amount		£1,654.52	£73.02	£202.55	£1,930.09
2024/25	£ Increase		£82.56	£2.18	£13.00	£97.74
2024/25	% Increase		4.99%	2.99%	6.42%	5.06%
Amount to be Raised			£135,869,698	£5,881,939	£16,859,733	

DSG and Schools Funding 2024/25Recommendations

1. In respect of the 2024/2025 schools funding formula for Sandwell schools, consider the outcome of the consultation proposals following review by the Schools Forum, as shown in Annex A as follows and that approval be given to:
 - (a) adopting the minimum transition option for calculating schools funding in 2024/25
 - (b) setting the Growth Funding at £1.60m
 - (c) The introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund in 2024/25
 - (d) the transfer of £0.512m funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) to fund the attendance service
 - (e) the CSSB, De-delegated and Education Function proposals as set out in Annex A (with the exception of Schools in Financial Difficulty).
 - (f) Adopt the allocation by block per paragraph 5 of this Appendix; and
 - (g) That Cabinet note the details of the Schools Funding Settlement.

Schools Funding Settlement

2. The Schools Revenue Funding 2024/25 Operational Guide requires the Council to engage in open and transparent consultation with maintained schools and academies in their area, as well as with their school's forum about any changes to the local funding formula, including the principles adopted and any movement of funds between blocks.
3. The Council is responsible for making the final decisions on the formula and for ensuring there is sufficient time to gain political approval before the funding is distributed to schools - deadline 28 February 2024.
4. The contents of this report were considered by Schools Forum at their meeting of 11th December 2023.
5. As part of the budget process the Council also allocates the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to schools in consultation with the Schools Forum. The government has announced the gross 2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), for all Sandwell schools in the sum of £466.2m. This represents an increase of 9.64% from corresponding amount in 2023/24. This is before recoupment for Academies and Free Schools which will be calculated later and therefore the amount available for distribution by the Council will be lower than this headline figure. The significant increase in Early Year's Block is due mainly to the expanded Early Years entitlements. Any grant amount unspent will probably be recouped back by government. A summary of the 2024/25 DSG by block is shown below:

DSG Block	Allocation prior to Adjustments	Adjustments	Allocation after adjustments
	£m	£m	£m
Schools Block	349.852	(3.276)	346.576
Central School Services	2.381	0	2.381
High Needs	75.436	(4.490)	70.946
Early Years	38.535	0	38.535
Total	466.204	(7.766)	458.438

Context and Key Issues

6. There have been a few changes announced by the DfE/ESFA in the Summer 2023 on the way schools will be funded from 2024/25 and these are summarised below.
7. In 2024/25, each local authority will continue to be required to bring their own formulae closer to the schools direct National Funding Formula (NFF). There is an expectation that the full move to the NFF will be completed by 2027/28.
8. The Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) is being rolled into the schools NFF from 2024/25. To ensure schools do not lose funding as a result of this change, additional funding has been added to each school's MFG baseline. The amount added reflects the number of pupils included in the school's MFG baseline.
9. Split sites funding is now mandatory and is calculated using the DfE formula.
10. The Minimum Funding Guarantee will continue in 2024/25 to be between +0.0% and +0.5% without the need for a disapplication request to the DfE.
11. The basic structure of the high needs NFF for 2024/25 is not changing.
12. Local authorities will continue to be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their schools block to other blocks of the DSG, with Schools Forum approval. A disapplication request is required for transfers above 0.5%, or for any amount without Schools Forum approval. The authority will once again be requesting a movement of funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block.

Background/Context

13. There were 7 proposals/questions asked in the schools funding consultation 2024/25 (5 to academies). Questions asked and responses to each are detailed in Annex A.

- a. Question 1: At the request of Schools Forum three modelling options were pulled together in order to demonstrate what a school's funding could potentially be if they chose to move 10% closer to the NFF, 20% closer and if they chose to move directly to the NFF.
- b. It was stressed that the funding that was modelled in each option was to be a guide only and did not represent the actual amount each school would get. This was due to the following large number of assumptions made which were not known at the time of the consultation:
- The data used in the modelling is from the October 2022 census data and the final funding model will be based upon and updated with the latest October 2023 census.
 - The Mainstream Schools Grant (MSAG) was a separate grant in 2023/24 but will be rolled into the 2024/25 schools block.
 - An assumption at this stage that Growth Fund will make use of the brought forward balances and so will be set at £1.60m (see Question 2)
 - An assumption at this stage that £0.512m will be transferred from the Schools Block to Central Schools Services Block (see question 3)
 - The final DSG will not be announced until December 2023
- c. It was important that schools noted the context of the question and provide their views on how quickly they would wish to move towards the National Funding Formula: There were 3 possible answers/options given:
- Option 1: Minimum Transition
 - Option 2: Accelerated Transition
 - Option 3: Move directly to the NFF.
- d. Question 2: Schools and School Forums were asked how much growth fund they would like to see top sliced from their DSG with 2 response options being the full £1.9m or making use of the brought forward thereby reducing this to £1.6m.
- e. Growth fund has been part of the school's consultation for a number of years and is used to support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need, additional classes need, infant class size regulation and to meet the costs necessary for new schools.
- f. Question 3: Schools and School Forums were asked if they would support the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund.
- g. Question 4: Schools and School Forums were asked if they would support the movement of funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block to the value of £0.512m in order that the attendance and safeguarding service could provide services to both the maintained and academy sector.
- h. Question 5: Schools were asked if they supported the proposals outlined in the Central Schools Services Block which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Annex A).
- i. Question 6: Maintained Schools were asked if they supported the De-delegated proposals which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Annex A).

- j. Question 7: Maintained Schools were asked if they supported the Education Functions proposals which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Annex A).

Alternative Options

14. The consultation with schools resulted in the option to move their funding closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF) by 10% as a minimum. The primary sector predominantly chose to move to the NFF at this slower pace. The secondary sector preference however was to move directly to the NFF in 2024/25.
15. There is an alternative option whereby cabinet can overrule schools' overall preferences and approve the move where funding, in 2024/25, immediately mirrors the NFF.
16. Moving to the NFF in 2024/25 will mean Sandwell schools will be funded consistently as part of the Governments plan for fair funding for all at a much faster pace. However, and as can be seen at Annex A below, majority of Sandwell's schools are not in favour of this option. In addition, it will result in more turbulence (the number of gainers and losers) within the system.

Implications

Resources:	This report will affect the funding received by individual schools in 2024/25. The schools block of the DSG is £349.852m and all of this will be distributed to schools via the Schools Funding Formula.
Legal and Governance:	The Authority must adhere to the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2022
Risk:	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.</p> <p>As set out in paragraph 4.1 the LA has undertaken its duty to ensure all schools and interested stakeholders have been consulted on around the changes to their funding allocations from previous years. The recommendation by School Forum members to adopt option 1 will see schools moving another 10% closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF).</p> <p>Despite the Government providing additional funding schools will continue to experience budget pressures from rising costs and inflation. There are an increased number of small and Primary schools who will find it difficult to set balanced budgets as we move to the NFF. The council do not have the power to mitigate these risks as this sits with the Governing Body. The LA closely monitors school budgets through submission of budget plans and termly monitoring reports.</p>
Equality:	The DfE has undertaken an equalities impact assessment of the national funding formula for schools and high needs. The analysis is also based on the assumption that local authorities will fund their schools in accordance with the national funding formula.
Health and Wellbeing:	The proposals in this report have no impact on health and wellbeing
Social Value:	Sandwell is committed to providing a first-class education for all children, irrespective of their backgrounds, and to level up opportunity so that all children can realise their potential, preparing them for a fulfilling and successful adult life.
Climate Change:	There are no climate change implications
Corporate Parenting:	There are no Corporate Parenting implications

Annex

Annex A - Consultation Questions and Responses

Background Papers

Schools Operational Guide 2024/25

Responses

The table below compares responses from the previous 4 years:

	Primary	%	Secondary	%	TOTAL	%
2020-21	56/94	60%	9/18	50%	65/112	58%
2021-22	60/95	63%	10/20	50%	70/115	61%
2022-23	43/94	46%	10/20	50%	53/114	46%
2023-24	55/94	59%	6/20	30%	61/114	54%
2024-25	55/94	59%	10/20	50%	65/114	57%

Question 1

Please indicate the option you prefer to use for calculating schools funding for 2024/25? There were 3 possible responses which were:

- OPTION 1 - Minimum transition
- OPTION 2 - Accelerated transition
- OPTION 3 – National Funding Factor (NFF) values

Q1: Overall Responses	Total	%
OPTION 1 - Minimum Transition	51	78%
OPTION 2 - Accelerated Transition	5	8%
OPTION 3 - National Funding Formula Factor	9	14%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q1: Detailed Responses	Total
Minimum Transition	51
Primary	47
Secondary	4
Accelerated Transition	5
Primary	4
Secondary	1
National Funding Formula Factor Values	9
Primary	4
Secondary	5
Grand Total	65

Question 2

Do you agree to the use of the Brought Forward of £0.282m to set the Pupil Number Growth Fund?
There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q2: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – Utilise the Brought Forward	56	86%
NO – Do NOT use the Brought Forward	9	14%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q2: Detailed Responses	Total
YES - Utilise the B/F	56
Primary	47
Secondary	9
NO – Do not utilise B/F	9
Primary	8
Secondary	1
Grand Total	65

Question 3

Do you agree to the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund (FRF)? There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q3: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – Agree with the introduction of a FRF	44	68%
NO – Do NOT agreed with the introduction of a FRF	21	32%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q3: Detailed Responses	Total
YES – introduce a FRF	44
Primary	38
Secondary	6
NO – Do NOT agree with a FRF	22
Primary	18
Secondary	4
Grand Total	66

Question 4

Do you agree to the top slice of £512,000 from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) to fund the Attendance Team? There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q4: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – agree to £512k top slice	57	88%
NO – Do NOT agree to £512k top slice	8	12%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q4: Detailed Responses	Total
YES – agree to £512k top slice	57
Primary	47
Secondary	10
NO – do NOT agree to £512k top slice	8
Primary	7
Secondary	1
Grand Total	65

Question 5

Do you agree with the indicative allocation of the CSSB?

Q5: Responses	YES	NO
CSSB1 – Statutory & Regulatory /Welfare and Asset Man	57	8
CSSB2 Admissions Service	57	8
CSSB3 Historical Commitment Pensions Administration	57	8
CSSB4 Schools Forum	57	8

Question 6 and 7

Please indicate YES / NO if you agree with the De-delegated and Education Functions Proposals?
There were 2 possible responses which were either Yes or No to each of the proposals.

De-Delegation

Q6: Responses	YES	NO
DD1 Health & Safety Licences	43	8
DD2 EVOLVE	50	1
DD3 Union Facilities Time	33	18
DD4 School Improvement	44	7
DD5 Schools in Financial Difficulty	31	20

Education Functions proposals

Q7: Responses	YES	NO
EF1 Education Benefits Team	45	6
EF2 Children's Clothing Support Allowance	32	19

General Fund Capital Programme

2023/24 to 2027/28

Summary General Fund - 5 Year Approved Capital Programme						
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	TOTAL
Service	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	329	763	-	-	-	1,092
Borough Economy	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465
Finance	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333
Children's Services	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	3,610	-	-	-	3,807
Regeneration & Growth	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546
Grand Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903
Financing	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	93,516	46,254	21,339	21,339	231,613
Total Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283
Total Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300
Total RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707
Grand Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

Summary General Fund - Pipeline Capital Project Requests

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	TOTAL
Service	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	0	563	-	-	-	563
Borough Economy	0	20,522	37,337	39,884	-	97,743
Finance	0	1,216	-	-	-	1,216
Children's Services	0	8,155	8,135	935	-	17,225
Housing	0	-	-	-	-	-
Law & Governance	0	1,625	-	-	-	1,625
Regeneration & Growth	0	2,998	4,732	-	-	7,730
Grand Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102
Financing	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Grant Funded Schemes	-	25,896	42,183	32,963	-	101,042
Total Prudential Funded Schemes	-	9,183	8,021	7,856	-	25,060
Total Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total RCCO Funded Schemes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	-	35,079	50,204	40,819	-	126,102

Summary General Fund - 5 Year Approved Capital Programme & Pipeline Capital Project Requests

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	TOTAL
Service	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	329	1,326	0	0	0	1,655
Borough Economy	25,661	40,374	63,621	48,218	8,334	186,208
Finance	9,305	3,644	1,200	1,200	1,200	16,549
Children's Services	7,732	20,455	18,135	10,935	10,000	67,257
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	5,235	0	0	0	5,432
Regeneration & Growth	26,553	59,726	15,797	2,100	2,100	106,276
Grand Total	75,289	144,476	103,553	67,253	26,434	417,005
Financing	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	119,412	88,437	54,302	21,339	332,655
Total Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	21,504	13,016	10,851	2,995	74,343
Total Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300
Total RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707
Grand Total	75,289	144,476	103,553	67,253	26,434	417,005

SMBC 5 YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME - GENERAL FUND

Approved Capital Programme

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	
Service / Scheme	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget		Funding Source
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Adult Social Care							
ASC Capital Grant - Harvest View	0	763	-	-	-	763	Grant
ASC System Development	260	-	-	-	-	260	Grant
Contaminated Land Grant	8	-	-	-	-	8	Grant
Swift Impress System	61	-	-	-	-	61	Prudential
Adult Social Care Total	329	763	-	-	-	1,092	

Borough Economy							
Environmental Improvements to Neighbourhoods	17	-	-	-	-	17	Prudential
Forge Mill Farm	2	-	-	-	-	2	Prudential
Lightwoods Park	16	-	-	-	-	16	Prudential
Lightwoods Park HLF	379	-	-	-	-	379	Grant
Manor House - Phase 2	12	-	-	-	-	12	Prudential
Manor House Conservation Plan	241	-	-	-	-	241	Prudential
Oakhouse Barns Resoration Project	10	-	-	-	-	10	Prudential
Oakhouse Barns Resoration Project	125	-	-	-	-	125	Grant
Total Birchley Island	2,685	-	-	-	-	2,685	Grant
Total Birchley Island	0	3,190	-	-	-	3,190	Prudential
Total Local Network Improvement Plan (LNIP)	2,756	2,809	1,798	1,798	1,798	10,959	Grant
Total Main Programme (Council Resources) (Excl Birchley Island)	8,077	2,131	295	295	295	11,093	Prudential
Total Highways Maintenance & Structures	5,481	4,741	4,741	4,741	4,741	24,445	Grant
Total Self Financing Schemes (Excl TT)	3,330	1,211	-	-	-	4,541	Grant
Vehicles	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	7,500	Prudential
LUF - Haden Hill Leisure Centre	640	3,410	15,950	-	-	20,000	Grant
LUF - Haden Hill Leisure Centre	0	-	2,000	-	-	2,000	Prudential
WMCA - PMF Play & Education Barn Project	190	360	-	-	-	550	Grant
WMCA - The Railer / Cracker improvement Projects	0	500	-	-	-	500	Grant
West Smethwick Park HLF	200	-	-	-	-	200	Grant
Borough Economy Total	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465	

Finance							
ICT - End User Computing	2,823	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	7,623	Prudential
Oracle Fusion ERP System	6,482	1,195	-	-	-	7,677	Prudential
Public Realm	0	33	-	-	-	33	Grant
Finance Total	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333	

Children's Services							
BSF - ICT Element	80	-	-	-	-	80	Prudential
Orchard Building Works (Primrose)	37	-	-	-	-	37	Grant
PLAY Pathfinder	6	-	-	-	-	6	Grant
Devolved Formula Capital	1,300	-	-	-	-	1,300	Grant
Devolved Formula Capital - PRU's	80	-	-	-	-	80	Grant
Devolved Formula Capital - School Contribution	1,200	-	-	-	-	1,200	Grant
Provisional Grant Allocation	0	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	40,000	Grant
Youth Centre Queens Way	5	-	-	-	-	5	Grant
Schools Capital Programme Schemes:							
Brades Lodge	344	1,000	-	-	-	1,344	Grant
Bristnall Hall Academy	10	-	-	-	-	10	Grant
Connor Education Centre	40	-	-	-	-	40	Grant
ESFA Shireland Primary Free school	61	-	-	-	-	61	Grant
Feasibility Work Expansion of Secondary	300	-	-	-	-	300	Grant
Great Bridge Primary	19	-	-	-	-	19	Grant
Health Futures UTC	1,476	1,300	-	-	-	2,776	Grant
New Oldbury Primary - Lightwoods	174	-	-	-	-	174	Grant

Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy (OSCA)	401	-	-	-	-	401	Grant
Priority Primary Expansion	15	-	-	-	-	15	Grant
Q3 Langley Phase 3	4	-	-	-	-	4	Grant
School Condition - LifeCycle property maintenance	1,877	-	-	-	-	1,877	Grant
School Kitchen Repairs	3	-	-	-	-	3	Grant
Shenstone (Evolve)	200	-	-	-	-	200	Grant
West Bromwich Collegiate Academy - Phase 2	100	-	-	-	-	100	Grant
Children's Services Total	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032	

Housing							
Charlemont Community Centre	37	-	-	-	-	37	Prudential
DFG	4,500	12,761	4,800	4,800	4,800	31,661	Grant
Empty Properties	100	585	-	-	-	685	Prudential
HMRA Ringfenced Receipts - Vulnerable Homeowners	373	-	-	-	-	373	Prudential
Housing Stock Condition Survey	0	29	-	-	-	29	Prudential
Self Service Customer Portal	115	-	-	-	-	115	Prudential
The Public	0	341	-	-	-	341	Prudential
Vulnerable Homeowners Improvements (Kick Start)	386	-	-	-	-	386	Prudential
Warm Homes Healthy People	1	-	-	-	-	1	Grant
Housing Total	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628	

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	
Service / Scheme	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget		Funding Source
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Law & Governance							
New Cemetery - West Bromwich	20	3,560	-	-	-	3,580	RCCO
Case Management System	50	50	-	-	-	100	Prudential
Rowley Cemetery	127	-	-	-	-	127	RCCO
Law & Governance Total	197	3,610	-	-	-	3,807	
Regeneration & Growth							
Access Fund	334	300	300	300	300	1,534	Prudential / Capital Receipts
Blackheath Library - Fit Out Costs	56	-	-	-	-	56	Prudential
Brindley II	21	-	-	-	-	21	Prudential
BSF - Schools for the Future	73	-	-	-	-	73	Grant
Childrens Trust Accommodation Works	145	-	-	-	-	145	Grant
Coroners Court Refurbishment - Jack Judge House	434	-	-	-	-	434	Prudential
King Street, Wednesbury Health Centre	1,467	-	-	-	-	1,467	Prudential
Mobile Working	0	41	-	-	-	41	Grant
PMA - The Central Sixth Form Building Works	500	-	-	-	-	500	Prudential
PMA Capitalisation	855	800	800	800	800	4,055	Prudential / Capital Receipts
Property Refurbishment - WPV Sandwell Council House	911	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	4,911	Prudential / Capital Receipts
Property Refurbishment - WPV Sandwell Council House	1,017	-	-	-	-	1,017	Prudential
PSDS Heat Pump Technology	247	-	-	-	-	247	Grant
Regeneration Reserve	1,109	-	-	-	-	1,109	Grant
Sandwell Aquatics Centre	4,514	468	-	-	-	4,982	Grant
Section 106 Schemes	204	2,615	-	-	-	2,819	Grant
UK Shared Property Fund	582	-	-	-	-	582	Grant
LUF - ASB & Crime in Wednesbury	0	400	-	-	-	400	Grant
LUF - Friar Park Urban Village	0	11,500	-	-	-	11,500	Grant
LUF - Greenspace Improvements	0	1,600	-	-	-	1,600	Grant
LUF - Millennium Centre	0	2,000	-	-	-	2,000	Grant
LUF - Public Realm Wednesbury Town Centre	0	4,500	-	-	-	4,500	Grant
Towns Fund:							
Rowley Regis - Blackheath Bus Exchange	27	2,688	1,020	-	-	3,735	Grant
Rowley Regis - Britannia Park Community Hub	793	1,203	-	-	-	1,996	Grant
Rowley Regis - Canal and River Trust	324	188	-	-	-	512	Grant
Rowley Regis - Connected	116	878	494	-	-	1,488	Grant
Rowley Regis - Satellite Education Hub	500	4,016	4,016	-	-	8,532	Grant
Smethwick - Connected	2,242	1,000	-	-	-	3,242	Grant
Smethwick - Midlands Met Learning Campus	2,600	8,711	-	-	-	11,311	Grant
Smethwick - Rolfe Street Regeneration	862	818	255	-	-	1,935	Grant
Smethwick - Grove Lane Regeneration	35	2,611	1,698	-	-	4,344	Grant
Smethwick - Ron Davis Centre Expansion	15	-	-	-	-	15	Grant
West Brom - Connected	291	421	314	-	-	1,026	Grant
West Brom - Retail Diversification Programme	1,828	4,795	1,168	-	-	7,791	Grant
West Brom - Sandwell MEC	2,005	-	-	-	-	2,005	Grant
West Brom - Town Hall Quarter	2,093	4,155	-	-	-	6,248	Grant
West Brom - Urban Greening	353	20	-	-	-	373	Grant
Regeneration & Growth Total	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546	
Total Capital Approved Programme	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903	
Financing							
Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	93,516	46,254	21,339	21,339	231,613	Grant
Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283	Prudential
Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300	Capital Receipts
RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707	RCCO
Total Capital Approved Programme Funding	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903	

Pipeline Capital Project Requests Not Yet Included Within the Approved Capital Programme

Pipeline Capital Project Requests	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	Funding Source
	Revised Budget	Revised Budget	Revised Budget	Base Budget	Base Budget		
General Fund	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Existing Projects:							
Additions Resources Required:							
Oracle Fusion Project - Additional		1,216	-	-	-	1,216	Prudential
Towns Fund - MMLC - Net Zero Building - Additional		-	2,724	-	-	2,724	Grant
West Bromwich Cemetery - Additional		1,625	-	-	-	1,625	Prudential
Highways Additional		1,902	-	-	-	1,902	Prudential

New Projects:							
Grant Funding Only							
CRSTS - Smethwick to Birmingham Growth Corridor		6,333	6,333	6,333	-	18,999	Grant
CRSTS - A461 WCB Corridor		4,167	4,167	4,167	-	12,501	Grant
CRSTS - A4123 WCB Corridor		400	400	400	-	1,200	Grant
CRSTS - Wednesbury to Brierly Hill Sustainable Access Measures		2,667	2,667	2,667	-	8,001	Grant
CRSTS - BC LC WIP		533	533	533	-	1,599	Grant
CRSTS - ULEV Black Country		800	800	800	-	2,400	Grant
Play Zones - West Smethwick Park		350	-	-	-	350	Grant
New Special School - Tipton - Feasibility		100	-	-	-	100	Grant

Grant & SMBC Funding							
Oak House Restoration		1,000	-	-	-	1,000	Grant
Oak House Restoration		250	-	-	-	250	Prudential
New Archive Centre		-	17,000	-	-	17,000	Grant
New Archive Centre		-	3,000	-	-	3,000	Prudential
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme - Phase 3		1,496	1,559	-	-	3,055	Grant
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme - Phase 3		-	449	-	-	449	Prudential
Causeway Green Primary School - Construction Phase		6,500	6,000	-	-	12,500	Grant
Causeway Green Primary School - Construction Phase		-	1,200	-	-	1,200	Prudential
LUF Round 3 - Grove Lane		-	-	18,063	-	18,063	Grant
LUF Round 3 - Grove Lane		-	-	2,007	-	2,007	Prudential
SCT - Residential Facility		800	-	-	-	800	Grant
SCT - Residential Facility		755	935	935	-	2,625	Prudential
Play Zones		750	-	-	-	750	Grant
Play Zones		250	-	-	-	250	Prudential

SMBC Funding Only							
Forge Mill Farm Shop, Toilet and Entrance		245	-	-	-	245	Prudential
Libraries: Self-Service Kiosks Phase 2		45	-	-	-	45	Prudential
Sandwell Valley Master Plan		505	2,437	4,914	-	7,856	Prudential
User Owned Fleet Replacement		263	-	-	-	263	Prudential
Fountain Court Kitchen		60	-	-	-	60	Prudential
Changing Places Facility - Stoney Lane		125	-	-	-	125	Prudential
Call Handling Terminals		28	-	-	-	28	Prudential
Digital Transformation		282	-	-	-	282	Prudential
Lap Tops		68	-	-	-	68	Prudential
PMA - Langley Library - Roof, Window & Other works		25	-	-	-	25	Prudential
PMA - Plas Gwynant - Roof works		50	-	-	-	50	Prudential
PMA - 160 Beeches Road - Roof works		250	-	-	-	250	Prudential
PMA - Wednesbury Town Hall - Roof works		60	-	-	-	60	Prudential
PMA - Brickhouse CC - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Fountain Court - Heating Replacement		200	-	-	-	200	Prudential
PMA - Fountain Court - Lighting Replacement		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Frank Chapman Centre - Fire Alarm		15	-	-	-	15	Prudential
PMA - Great Bridge Library - Fire Alarm		10	-	-	-	10	Prudential
PMA - Hadley Stadium - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Ingestre Hall - Re-wiring & Distribution Boards		200	-	-	-	200	Prudential
PMA - Ingestre Hall - Asbestos Removal		150	-	-	-	150	Prudential

PMA - King George V - Fire Alarm		12	-	-	-	12	Prudential
PMA - Langley Library - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Bromwich Hall - Fire Alarm		50	-	-	-	50	Prudential
PMA - Plas Gwynant - Boiler House Re-furbishment		200	-	-	-	200	Prudential
PMA - Sandwell Community PRU (Bridge Centre) - Fire Alarm		35	-	-	-	35	Prudential
PMA - Sandwell Community PRU (tidale Site) - Fire Alarm		10	-	-	-	10	Prudential
PMA - Tipton Sports Academy - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Victoria Park Skill Centre - Boiler Replacement		140	-	-	-	140	Prudential
PMA - West Bromwich Sure Start - Fire Alarm		10	-	-	-	10	Prudential
PMA - Wood Street Careers Centre - Boiler & Plant Replacement		60	-	-	-	60	Prudential
Allotment Site Fencing		62	-	-	-	62	Prudential

Adult Social Care		563	-	-	-	563	
Borough Economy		20,522	37,337	39,884	-	97,743	
Finance		1,216	-	-	-	1,216	
Children's Services		8,155	8,135	935	-	17,225	
Housing		-	-	-	-	-	
Law & Governance		1,625	-	-	-	1,625	
Regeneration & Growth		2,998	4,732	-	-	7,730	
TOTAL - Pipeline Capital Project Requests		35,079	50,204	40,819	-	126,102	

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	
Service / Scheme	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	£000	Funding Source
Pipeline Capital Project Requests - Financing							
Grant Funded Schemes		25,896	42,183	32,963	-	101,042	Grant
Prudential Funded Schemes		9,183	8,021	7,856	-	25,060	Prudential
Capital Receipts Funded Schemes		-	-	-	-	-	Capital Receipts
RCCO Funded Schemes		-	-	-	-	-	RCCO
Total - Pipeline Capital Project Requests Funding		35,079	50,204	40,819	-	126,102	
Approved Programme & Pipeline Capital Project Requests - Financing							
Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	119,412	88,437	54,302	21,339	332,655	Grant
Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	21,504	13,016	10,851	2,995	74,343	Prudential
Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300	Capital Receipts
RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707	RCCO
FUNDING GRAND TOTAL	75,289	144,476	103,553	67,253	26,434	417,005	

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Draft Budget 2024/25
– including HRA 30 Year Business Plan

Contents	Paragraph Number
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Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2024/25	10
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Establish Housing Transformation Programme	21
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30 Year Business Plan	27
Report to Cabinet on 6 th December 2023 entitled 'The review of council tenant rents and housing related property charges'	Annex 1
30 Year HRA Business Plan	Annex 2

Recommendations

- 1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - i. Note that Full Council on 12th December 2023 approved recommendations of the report entitled 'The review of council tenant rents and housing related property charges', as outlined in paragraph 8 and Annex 1 of this report.
 - ii. Approve the HRA Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as set out in Table 2 of this report.
 - iii. Note the HRA estimated working balances in 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 15 of this report.
 - iv. Approve the investment principles for the HRA Capital programme as set out in paragraph 19 of this report.
 - v. Approve the HRA Capital Programme control totals as set out in Table 3 of this report.
 - vi. Approve the HRA Treasury Management Strategy as set out in paragraph 4 of this report.
 - vii. Approve the 30 Year HRA Business Plan as set out in Annex 2.

Introduction

2. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is the budget operated by the Council which contains the income and expenditure of services connected with the Council's Housing Landlord role. The main source of income into the HRA is the rental income from the properties let by the Council. These rents are calculated by reference to a Government formula which provides a target rent for the Council's properties to charge.
3. Since April 2012 the HRA has been operating in a system known as Self Financing for local authorities which operate an HRA. Self-Financing changed the way the Council's housing stock is funded by ending the previous subsidy-based regime. In principle, it gives more local accountability and responsibility for the operation of the Council's housing stock.
4. The key elements of Self Financing are:

- i. The Government calculated a level of debt based on a 30-year assessment on expenditure, which was transferred to the authority to compensate the Government for the ending of the subsidy scheme. For Sandwell, this resulted in a loan settlement of £504million, which involved taking on additional debt of over £25million).
 - ii. Councils have full responsibility for the maintenance and development of the housing stock and also the servicing of the debt.
 - iii. A sum for depreciation of the stock is required to be included in the accounts.
- 5 The setting of rents is achieved using Government guidelines. From 2020/21 the Government proposed that rents would increase by CPI + 1% for the next 5 years until 2024/25. This proposal offers stability and certainty to the HRA to fund investment in existing stock as well as building more homes for the future.
- 6 This report looks to provide information on the Draft HRA Budget for 2024/25 and forward financial forecast through to 2028/29 together with the Draft Housing Capital Programme control totals. It also provides an update on the 30-year Business Plan.

Council Tenant Rents and Housing Related Property Charges

- 7 The Government announced that from 2020/21 rents can revert to the previous policy and be increased by CPI (at September of the previous year) plus 1%. This allows for a more optimistic forecast of the resources available to the HRA and continues the ability to reduce the level of debt, CPI at September 2023 was 6.7% thus allowing for a 7.7% increase in rents from April 2024.
8. Full Council on 12 December 2023 agreed to authorise the Interim Director of Housing to adjust Council rents and housing related charges with effect from 1 April 2024 as follows:
- i. That the housing rental charges is increased by 7.7% which is the consumer price index 6.7% (September 2023) plus 1%, which is equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
 - ii. That the housing service charges increase by the consumer price index (CPI)+ 1%, equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
 - iii. That housing service charge is implemented on properties not currently being charged but are receiving the service in line with similar properties receiving the service provision, including heating, water and laundry facility following consultation with residents.
 - iv. That subject to consultation with the residents of the site, to increase rent at the traveller's pitch in Hills View, Tipton by 7.7%.
 - v. That properties managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement receive a 7.7% rental increase and a 7.7% increase in service charges to match the council's rent and service charge increase.
 - vi. That the leaseholder annual management fee be increased by 7.7%, CPI + 1% in 2024/25 from £115.66 to £124.57.
 - vii. That the Director of Housing be authorised to implement adjustments to council rents and housing related charges as set out in this report with effect from 1 April 2024; and

- viii. That the Director of Housing be authorised to introduce associated service charges in respect of Building Safety Regulation requirements for Leasehold properties.
- 9 The rents and housing related charges for 2024/25 have therefore been increased in line with the recommendations approved by Full Council on 12th December 2023 (report attached as Annex 1). For 2025/26 to 2026/28 the treasury assumptions on CPI plus 1% has been used and then only CPI. These are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Council Tenant Rents and Housing Related Increases

2024/25	Treasury Assumptions for CPI plus 1%		Treasury Assumptions for CPI
	2025/26	2026/28	2028/29 Onwards (CPI only)
7.7%	3.5%	3.0%	2%

Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024/25 to 2028/29

10. The Council own over 28,300 properties for rent (974 of which are within the PFI scheme at Harvills Hawthorn, and are managed externally) and the freehold on over 1,252 leasehold flats across the borough in addition to over 2,700 garages (that we manage) and other buildings. These properties are managed through our own Housing Services.
11. Table 2 sets out the Draft HRA budget for 2024/25 and the forecast for the following 4 years. The budget for 2025/26 to 2028/29 is balanced subject to housing transformation savings being scoped and delivered in the Repairs & Maintenance and Supervision & Management budgets.

Table 2: Housing Revenue Account Draft Budget 2024/25 to 2028/29

Housing Revenue Account	Estimated Budget 2024/25 £'000	Estimated Budget 2025/26 £'000	Estimated Budget 2026/27 £'000	Estimated Budget 2027/28 £'000	Estimated Budget 2028/29 £'000
Repairs and maintenance	47,741	50,132	52,642	57,907	63,698
Supervision and management	48,708	50,971	53,539	58,879	64,753
Rents, rates, taxes and other charges	1,319	1,387	1,458	1,531	1,607
Special services	7,441	8,014	9,609	10,569	11,626
HRA - Provision for bad debts	882	926	972	1,021	1,022
Depreciation Charges	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369
Interest payable and similar charges	26,500	27,400	28,300	29,200	29,201
Savings required		(3,836)	(7,139)	(16,685)	(25,608)
Contribution to/from reserve	149	0	0		
Total Expenditure	151,109	153,363	157,750	160,791	164,668
Dwelling Rents	(138,868)	(141,016)	(145,246)	(148,152)	(151,856)
Dwelling Rents	(19)	(20)	(21)	(21)	(21)
Charges for Services and Facilities	(4,215)	(4,293)	(4,422)	(4,510)	(4,623)
Contributions towards expenditure	(2,294)	(2,320)	(2,348)	(2,395)	(2,455)
Government Grants	(5,713)	(5,713)	(5,713)	(5,713)	(5,713)
Total Income	(151,109)	(153,363)	(157,750)	(160,791)	(164,668)

Note – Budget at Outturn Prices

12. The Draft HRA budget for 2024/25 includes specific investment in respect of the following:
 - i. £47.7m in delivering repairs and maintenance.
 - ii. Contribution of £18.3m to the Major Repairs Reserve to fund the Decent Home Capital Programme.
 - iii. Provision to borrow £11m to fund the new build programme.
13. The introduction in 2012 of Housing Revenue Account Self-Financing has allowed decision making at a local level to drive planning for investment in housing stock and set spending priorities in line with local demand. The council will continue to consider:
 - i. Analysing our stock and the services we provide so that we can base our future plans on a robust and sustainable basis. To this end stock conditions surveys are being procured to bring our data up to date and to ensure that 20% of our stock is looked at every year on a rolling basis.
 - ii. Working up a range of plans for potential future investment in new homes which better match the needs of our communities.
 - iii. Thinking through how the new future for Council housing can help the borough to deliver our overall objectives.

HRA Reserves

14. The HRA working balance must continue to be managed so that it provides the flexibility to manage unexpected demands and pressures without destabilising the Council's overall financial position. The level of the Working Balance should provide a reasonable allowance for unquantifiable risks or one-off exceptional items of expenditure that are not covered within existing budgets.
15. The Working Balance can be used to correct inflation assumptions, increase capital spend, repay debt early or to fund new HRA capital projects. The estimated level of reserves in 2024/25 is £41.2m.
16. The Section 151 Officer has taken account the level of risk when advising on the level of balances that should be retained in the HRA.

Draft HRA Capital Programme

17. In line with regulatory standards it is essential to ensure that the stock is suitably maintained. The Capital Programme is a key input into the 30-year Business Plan, and both are reviewed annually. Modelling the resources available over a 30-year period demonstrates that the demands of the current and proposed programme can be fully met throughout the 30-year planning period.
18. The requirements placed on Landlords are changing significantly post Grenfell and the tragic death of Awaab Ishak with new standards being introduced for all Social Housing and more specifically around High Risk Residential Buildings such as Tower

Blocks. These details of these requirements are still evolving and secondary legislation is being introduced in the coming months so it is important that we retain the flexibility and financial capacity within the HRA to adjust our capital programmes as they emerge to ensure our stock is compliant to all regulatory standards.

19. Therefore, to ensure that the Capital Programme can be delivered within available resources for both new build and to invest in the current stock, investment principles have been established:
 - i. Prudential Borrowing to be prioritised for maximising delivery of New Build schemes (i.e. do not borrow to invest in current stock because there is no additional income to cover the debt charge). This will provide sufficient match funding to utilise the 1-4-1 receipts.
 - ii. The level of capital programming will not exceed the capital funding resources available in any year. These resources will include, RTB receipts (relevant portion), Major Repairs Reserve, Prudential Borrowing and Revenue Contributions.
 - iii. The level of reserves applied will be constrained in any one year in the interests of maintaining strategic resources in the medium term.
20. Accordingly, the control totals for the Draft Capital Programme is outlined in Table 3 which meet the criteria outlined in paragraph 18.

Table 3: HRA Capital Programme – Control Totals

Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme	Estimated Budget 2024/25	Estimated Budget 2025/26	Estimated Budget 2026/27	Estimated Budget 2027/28	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
New Build	28,945	27,857	25,541	21,086	103,429
Housing Improvements	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	120,000
Total Expenditure	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	223,429
Funding Source					
Grants	12,287	11,306	7,000	3,966	34,559
RTB (141) Receipts	5,658	5,551	7,541	6,120	24,870
MRR	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369	73,476
Capital Receipts	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	16,000
Borrowing	18,631	18,631	18,631	18,631	74,524
Total Funding	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	223,429

Establish Housing Transformation Programme

21. There are a number of significant changes required within the Housing Directorate to ensure that it can continue to deliver the landlord services to meet the needs of tenants, leaseholders and regulatory requirements. To ensure that the changes are delivered in a structured, cost effective and well governed way we have established a Housing Transformation Programme with the Housing Transformation Board as its Steering Group and Corporate Oversight provided by The Corporate Transformation Board. The deliverables are spread amongst a number of workstreams listed below

22. The systems used by Housing either need updating or in some instances do not currently exist and need to be procured and implemented. The current systems are not sufficient to meet the requirements of the regulator.
23. As well as the data from the Stock Condition Surveys, there is a need for an exercise to establish what data sets are required to be able to evidence compliance and performance and an analysis of existing data quality to ensure that reporting is accurate and transparent.
24. A lot of the processes used within Housing are manual and involve updating spreadsheet trackers or a manual intervention to transfer data from one system to another. These are all points of failure that need to be replaced with automated processes as part of the system and data implementation work.
25. The Regulator of Social Housing has been given the powers to set minimum competency levels for anyone working in Social Housing. These standards will be announced soon and so we will need to have a structured learning and development workstream to establish current competency levels with our own staff and those employed by our supply chain and a training plan to ensure that we are only using competent staff to deliver landlord services.

Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy

26. Please refer to the Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy report appended as part of the overall report.

30 Year HRA Business Plan

27. As with the budget and Capital Programme the 30-year financial forecast is reviewed annually and amended where appropriate and this is set out in Annex 2
28. The Business Plan demonstrates that the HRA is sustainable over a 30-year term.
29. When budget proposals are made to the Council, the Section 151 Officer will take these issues into consideration in their advice on the level of balances that should be retained within the HRA.

Report to Cabinet

6 December 2023

Subject:	The review of council tenant rents and housing related property charges
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Housing Councillor Laura Rollins
Director:	Dean Epton Interim Director of Housing
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Nigel Collumbell Assistant Director of Housing

1 Recommendations

That Full Council be recommended to authorise the Interim Director of Housing to adjust council rents and housing related charges with effect from 1 April 2024 as follows:


- 1.1 That the housing rental charges is increased by 7.7% which is the consumer price index 6.7% (September 2023) plus 1%, which is equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
- 1.2 That the housing service charges increase by the consumer price index (CPI)+ 1%, equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
- 1.3 That housing service charge is implemented on properties not currently being charged but are receiving the service in line with similar properties receiving the service provision, including heating, water and laundry facility following consultation with residents.
- 1.4 That subject to consultation with the residents of the site, to increase rent at the traveller's pitch in Hills View, Tipton by 7.7%.
- 1.5 That rental charges for garage sites be increased by 7.7% in line with other council fees and charges agreed by Cabinet and Council.
- 1.6 That properties managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement receive a 7.7% rental increase and a 7.7% increase in service charges to match the council's rent and service charge increase.
- 1.7 That properties that sit outside the Housing Revenue Account (including service tenants for Parks, Sandwell Valley and Caretaking) receive a 7.7% increase in rental charges and service charges equivalent to CPI plus 1%.

- 1.8 That the leaseholder annual management fee be increased by 7.7%, CPI + 1% in 2024/25 from £115.66 to £124.57.
- 1.9 That the Director of Housing be authorised to implement adjustments to council rents and housing related charges as set out in this report with effect from 1 April 2024; and
- 1.10 That the Director of Housing be authorised to introduce associated service charges in respect of Building Safety Regulation requirements for Leasehold properties.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Each year council tenants, leaseholders and other residents are notified of the rent and other related housing charges to be set from the following April. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to implement these charges for the new financial year 2024/25.
- 2.2 The council has to achieve the right balance between supporting tenants to mitigate the continued cost of living pressures and protecting the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to ensure we can continue to provide affordable social housing for our residents.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p> <p>Rental income is a key component of the financial wellbeing of the Housing Revenue Account. Funds support the council’s ambition to build more new and affordable council homes.</p>
	<p>Rental income contributes to the maintenance and repairs of existing housing stock to become a decent standard and meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022.</p>



A strong and inclusive economy

Funds from rental and housing related charges will maintain / increase the capacity to build more affordable housing.

Implementing a rental increase below the rate of inflation has a significant impact on our ability to deliver on new build schemes and maintain the quality of our existing housing stock.

The requirements of the Building Safety Act will put pressures on the HRA. The significant of this will be identified when the stock condition surveys are complete.

We will have fewer financial resources to deliver proposals within the 30year business plan. Every 1% 'lost' from rental income equates to a reduction in next year's rental income, estimated at £1.34m in year 1 (due to a 53-week rent year) and £39.57m over 30 years, based on 52/53 week rent year cycles).

4 Context and Key Issues

Background

- 4.1 In line with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, Sandwell Council reduced housing rents by 1% per year for four years, between 2016/2017 and 2019/20.
- 4.2 In 2019, the government set a rent policy for social housing that would permit rents to increase by up to CPI+1% per annum and made clear its intention to leave this policy in place until 2025.
- 4.3 From 2020 Sandwell Council has had control over its own rent setting in line with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Rents Standard, and Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing.
- 4.4 In 2023, CPI was 10.1%, which would have permitted social landlords to increase rents by 11.1% (CPI+1%). However, the government amended the rent policy for 2023/2024 and imposed a rent cap of 7% for social housing. Sandwell made the decision to set rent at 5% to help support residents during the exceptional time of inflationary pressures and cost of living. Due to the rising supplier costs, other stock owned local authorities and social landlords took the decision to increase rents by the maximum 7%.
- 4.5 There is a recognition that the council needs to maintain the existing housing stock to a good standard and cover operational costs and to achieve the right balance between protecting our tenants, protecting tax payers (by limiting the welfare costs

associated with housing rents) and ensuring the council can deliver on its commitments to build new social homes.

- 4.6 For 2024/25, the government have not announced a rent cap, therefore the council are permitted to increase rents by CPI+1% in line with the Rent Standard and Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing issued annually in April.

Rents

- 4.7 The Council applies two types of rents on its housing stock; Social Housing Rents (Formula) and Affordable Rent.

4.7.1 Formula rents take account various attributes such as post code area, type of property, local earnings and number of bedrooms; this ensures similar rents are charged for similar properties. The rents for new tenants letting existing stock are set using formula rent and it is proposed that this policy continues.

4.7.2 Affordable Rents are set at 80% of the market rent, inclusive of service charges. Affordable rent is charged on new builds under the affordable homes programme and any additional stock such as buy backs from previous Right to Buy or private acquisitions, or appropriated stock from the general fund. The proposal is to increase affordable rents by 7.7% in line with other rental increases.

- 4.7.3 Rents are charged for the following council properties and buildings:
- Council tenant properties
 - Properties managed by Riverside under the PFI
 - Travellers Pitch – Travellers at Hillside View, Tipton
 - There are a small number of properties that sit outside of the HRA and their income contributes to the General Fund

4.7.4 Appendix 1 sets out the proposed typical rent levels at 53 weeks for the main property types and sizes

4.7.5 It is estimated that 70% of our customers are full or partial benefits. This represents a mix of customers on Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

Table 1 shows that 30% of our customers pay their rent in full.

Table 1 Customers in Receipt of Housing related benefits for Rents and Service Charges

Overall Summary	No. Customers	% Customers
Total properties	26,616	
Customers on full benefits (UC/HB)	12,112	45.5%
Customers on partial benefits	6,532	24.5%
Customers that pay full rent	7,972	30.0%

4.8 Customers who pay all of their rent and those on partial housing benefits will be impacted by a rental increase, however 45.5% of our customers who receive full benefits will be unaffected.

4.9 To demonstrate the impact a 7.7% rental increase would have, Table 2 below shows the financial impact for customers living in a 3-bedroom property in receipt of housing benefits for 20%, 50% or 70% of their rent.

For example, a customer living in a 3-bed house in receipt of 70% benefits would see a rental increase of £2.24 per week (example 3 below). Please see Appendix 2 for full details of all property types.

Table 2

Example 1 - Customers on 20% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 80% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£6.32	£5.18	£5.57	£5.98	£5.96

Example 2 - Customers on 50% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pay 50% rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£3.95	£3.24	£3.48	£3.74	£3.72

Example 3 - Customers on 70% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 30% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£2.37	£1.94	£2.09	£2.24	£2.23

Example 4 - Customers not in receipt of any benefits Impact of a 7.7% increase in rents (customers paying full rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£7.90	£6.48	£6.96	£7.48	£7.45

4.10 The Income and Money Advice Service have implemented positive initiatives to support tenants that contribute towards their rental payment. The Welfare Rights Team assist the residents of Sandwell to claim the benefits that they are entitled to through benefit maximisation, representing clients where claims have failed.

- 4.11 The Housing Income and Money Advice Services actively promote and signpost customers to services provided through the partnership work with agencies such as; Citizens Advice Sandwell, SCVO, Think Sandwell Employment and Skills Team, Connexions Sandwell and proactive promotion of these services.
- 4.12 Additional funds have been sought through the Local Welfare Provision (LWP) to purchase furniture and white goods. Where customers are not eligible to be supported via the LWP, the HRA Hardship Fund will be utilised where customers are eligible for support. The current hardship fund available is £100k.
- 4.13 Proactive use of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) by applying to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) to use funds from the HRA to off-set any shortfalls from the DHP fund for 2024/25. Sandwell's overall limit for 2023/24 is £1.786m.
- 4.14 The Council needs to get the right balance between protecting its tenants from rental increases and minimising lost income in order to achieve comments within the 30-year business plan.
- 4.15 The rental income is vital to the financial well-being of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Rental income offsets operational costs and financial charges, and the surplus is used to invest in capital improvements to the housing stock. This includes delivering the major works programme on our high-rise accommodation to meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022 and provisions to fund the council's affordable homes new build scheme.
- 4.16 The additional income generated from a 7.7% increase of £11.93million will contribute to the upkeep of our existing stock as well as enabling us to build more high-quality housing to meet the needs of our residents. A rental increase lower than CPI+1% would have a detrimental impact on the council's ability to maintain and improve and increase our social housing stock.
- 4.17 As at 31 March 2023 there are 974 properties in Wednesbury currently managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement. It is proposed that PFI property rents are increased by 7.7% and service charges are increased by CPI+1%. This is in line with properties managed by the council.
- 4.18 There are a small number of properties that sit outside the Housing Revenue Account and their rental income contributes to the council's general fund finances. This includes service tenants for Parks, Sandwell Valley and Caretaking. It is proposed that rent and service charges on these properties are increased by CPI+1% from April 2024. These properties are heavily discounted.

Service Charges

- 4.19 A decision was made to freeze service charges for council tenants during 2021/22. This was following the COVID pandemic as there was an interruption to some services provided.
- 4.20 Service charges were increase by CPI+1% in 2022/23 which was a 4.1% increase

- 4.21 Service charges were increased by CPI+1% in 2023/24 which was a 11.1% increase.
- 4.22 Analysis undertaken by Savills has highlighted a low level of service charge income in Sandwell (based on 2020/21 outturn) when benchmarking against other authorities.
- 4.23 The service charge freeze from previous years has had a detrimental impact on Sandwell's lower comparable service charges.
- 4.24 Service charges are outside of the government's legislative changes. The principle continues to be to recover the cost of service provision.
- 4.25 Service charges are charged to tenants living in flatted accommodation, and other properties having communal areas which require services such as:
- Cleaning - for internal and external cleaning of high and low-rise flatted accommodation
 - Security - for CCTV, Concierge and Door Entry
 - Aerials - for a digital aerial service
 - Heating, water and laundry services - relating specifically to some blocks, an estimated charge is set to recover costs but there may be retrospective adjustments between years to reflect actual costs
- 4.26 Service charges are annually reviewed, traditionally they have only been uplifted annually by inflation. The income generated from service charges contributes significantly to the HRA; however, the costs of service provision is subsidised by rental income as some charges do not cover actual costs.
- 4.27 A commitment was made in the Rent Review Cabinet Report in December 2021 to review all services charges to ensure charges applied cover the full cost of service delivery. This work has been completed; the review has identified a small number of properties are not being charged for the provision of services for heating and water where there is no independent metering for the property, and laundry facilities in a limited number of low and high-rise blocks. Consultation has commenced with residents and it is proposed that charges are implemented to these properties from 2023/24.
- 4.28 Cleaning charges relate to internal cleaning within blocks and other shared facilities, and the external cleaning of paths and gardens. There are higher costs associated with high rise blocks as they will receive more frequent inspections and cleaning.
- 4.29 Security charges are applicable in low and high-rise blocks. Most properties receive a secure door entry service with a fob key and intercom / buzzer link. Full provision includes CCTV at the entrance and around the block, a door entry service with a direct link to the 24/7 CCTV control room at Roway Lane. The block expansion project will increase this facility and ensure all residents in high-rise blocks benefit from the safety and security provided by a monitored CCTV system.

- 4.30 Aerial service charge relates to a digital aerial service provided to 10,163 properties. There is a contract to maintain and repair this service. The service charge contributes to a replacement fund for when these are renewed or replaced.
- 4.31 Other service charges for specific schemes include furniture costs, warden services and lifts. It is proposed that these charges increase by CPI+1% in line with other service charges.
- 4.32 Leaseholders are also charged service charges, in addition to services mentioned above there is a recharge for the management and administration functions.
- 4.33 The proposal is to increase service charges by CPI+1%. Appendix 3 shows how this will impact current charges. Customers who are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will largely not be affected by this increase.
- 4.34 In response to the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022, additional services will be introduced to discharge new duties which can be recovered through the introduction of new service charges.

Garages

- 4.35 Garages are within the council's general fund property portfolio. As of October 2023, 62% of garages were rented by private home owners or by tenants with more than one garage.
- 4.36 Increased revenue from garage rental would support the general fund. Garages rented by customers that are not tenants or leaseholders will be charged a higher rate as VAT is applied as a requirement of His Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC).
- 4.37 A large proportion of garage tenants use this facility as a much cheaper alternative to storage costs. It is recommended that the weekly garage rental is increased in line with the council's fees and charges approved annual by Cabinet.

Leaseholder Management fee

- 4.38 Leaseholders are charged a management fee to cover the resource costs of running the service. This includes employee costs, training, ICT costs, management of the billing process, repairs statements, printing and postage. The charge is currently £115.66 per annum.
- 4.39 It is proposed that the leaseholder annual fee be increase by CPI+1% in 2024/25 to £124.57. The council's leaseholder charges are significantly lower than neighbouring authorities; as a comparable, Dudley MBC increased their management fee from £140.00 per annum in 2022/23 to £230.00 per annum from 2023/24 following a review of the service provision to leaseholders.
- 4.40 A full review of the leasehold management fee will be undertaken during the next 12-18 months.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 It has been recommended from April 2024 to increase rents by 7.7% for tenants within the Riverside managed PFI estate of Wednesbury. The council does have the discretion to set PFI rent. It would be unfair and inconsistent for customers in council properties if PFI tenants did not receive the same increase.
- 5.2 Increasing rents below the rate of inflation creates financial pressures for the council to deliver key services. The provision of good quality Housing and Neighbourhoods are key to improving lives and life chances for our residents. Reducing the level of income to the HRA will seriously impact our 30-year business plans and less funding for maintenance of our own stock and funding for new homes.
- 5.3 An alternative would be to increase rents by a lower percentage. The budgetary pressures from this would significantly impact our ability to deliver key services and may result in reduced services where costs can't be met through operational budgets. The challenges presented through the Consumer Regulation Act and the Building Safety Act put financial pressures on the HRA to reshape our services to meet the requirements. Appendix 4 shows the rental impact on budgets.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Rent income is a key component of the HRA finances. As a ringfenced account, all costs must be met from this revenue source. This includes all day to day running costs and any financing costs associated with capital investment.</p> <p>In order to continue the investment in the Housing stock, rent increases are inevitably required. With increases in CPI and Building Cost Indices (BCI) and the current energy crises more pressure is being put on HRA finances to continue to deliver services to tenants and continue improvements to the stock to ensure high quality homes and services are provided to tenants.</p>
	<p>Government policy allows an increase of up to CPI plus 1%, current inflation figure is 6.7% Applying rent increases lower than the CPI+1% is a risk to the Council as this results in a significant income loss to the HRA of £1.34m for every 1% reduction.</p>

<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Local housing authorities are required by s.74 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to keep a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) unless the Secretary of State has consented to their not doing so. The HRA identifies major elements of housing revenue expenditure, such as maintenance, administration and contributions to capital costs, and how they are funded by rents and other income.</p> <p>S.24 of the Housing Act 1985 gives local authorities the power to make reasonable charges for the tenancy or occupation of dwellings. Rent setting must be seen in the context of the statutory duty to set a balanced HRA budget.</p> <p>The Council is required to review from time to time that the rents and service charges that it charges for the tenancy or occupation of its dwellings are fair and reasonable. The review of rents is now subject to further restrictions arising from the provisions of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. In October 2017, the Government confirmed details for future social rents and from 2020/21, providers are able to increase rents up to a limit of CPI plus 1% each year. This policy is designed to provide more certainty over rent levels.</p> <p>The Council may amend the rent for its tenants by giving at least 28-days notice. The notice period arises from s.102 (1)(b) of the Housing Act 1985 and in the terms of the Council's standard tenancy agreement.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>Appropriate measures will be put in place to mitigate any risks identified up to acceptable levels once a decision is made what increases are to be applied.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>Appropriate measures will be put in place to mitigate any risks identified up to acceptable levels once a decision is made what increases are to be applied.</p>

Health and Wellbeing:	There are no direct implications from this report but rent and service charge income will continue to be used to protect residents such as through the funding of support for the anti-social behaviour service, cleaning of estates, fire protection and building safety measures and CCTV.
Social Value:	There is not direct impact resulting from this report.
Climate Change:	The requirement to retro-fit properties to achieve net zero targets for our housing stock will require significant investment which the HRA currently doesn't have capacity to deliver. Any rent increases below the current levels of inflation will increase further the budget pressures on the HRA in future years putting at risk our ability to deliver on these targets.
Corporate Parenting:	The Council has a duty under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, to ensure that children leaving care and entering adulthood are not isolated and are able to participate social an economically in society. The Council provides training flats for care leavers aged 16 to 18 and access to social housing register as a care leaver of Sandwell Children's Trust aged 25 or below. Apprentice opportunities are being successfully explored within Housing and the Income Management Team have successfully appointed the first care leaver into an apprentice role.

7. Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Impact of Rental Increase on Average Weekly Rents
- Appendix 2 – Impact of Rental Increase to Customers on Partial Housing Benefits
- Appendix 3 – Rental from Service charges and Impact on weekly charges
- Appendix 4 – Rental Increase and the Impact on Budgets

8. Background Papers

None.

Appendix 1 – Impact of rental increase on average weekly rents - varying property types and size

Average of Rent - 7.7% Increase

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£73.61	£64.18	£68.75	£0.00	£67.41
1	£87.95	£74.78	£81.20	£85.77	£81.82
2	£109.04	£82.40	£90.07	£97.88	£91.32
3	£110.50	£90.61	£97.42	£104.58	£104.17
4	£125.89	£0.00	£0.00	£118.20	£118.22
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£137.33	£137.33
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£128.14	£128.14
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£287.47	£287.47
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£136.05	£136.05
Average	£90.66	£80.95	£84.73	£103.82	£94.71

Impact of 7.7% increase on weekly Rent

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£5.26	£4.59	£4.92	£0.00	£4.82
1	£6.29	£5.35	£5.81	£6.13	£5.85
2	£7.80	£5.89	£6.44	£7.00	£6.53
3	£7.90	£6.48	£6.96	£7.48	£7.45
4	£9.00	£0.00	£0.00	£8.45	£8.45
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£9.82	£9.82
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£9.16	£9.16
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£20.55	£20.55
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£9.73	£9.73
Average	£6.48	£5.79	£6.06	£7.42	£6.77

Appendix 2 – Impact of Rental Increases for Customers on Partial Benefits

Impact of a 7.7% Increase

Example 1 - Customers on 20% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 80% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£4.21	£3.67	£3.93	£0.00	£3.86
1	£5.03	£4.28	£4.64	£4.91	£4.68
2	£6.24	£4.71	£5.15	£5.60	£5.22
3	£6.32	£5.18	£5.57	£5.98	£5.96
4	£7.20	£0.00	£0.00	£6.76	£6.76
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7.85	£7.85
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7.33	£7.33
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£16.44	£16.44
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7.78	£7.78
Average	£5.19	£4.63	£4.85	£5.94	£5.42

Example 2 - Customers on 50% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pay 50% rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£2.63	£2.29	£2.46	£0.00	£2.41
1	£3.14	£2.67	£2.90	£3.07	£2.92
2	£3.90	£2.95	£3.22	£3.50	£3.26
3	£3.95	£3.24	£3.48	£3.74	£3.72
4	£4.50	£0.00	£0.00	£4.23	£4.23
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£4.91	£4.91
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£4.58	£4.58
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£10.28	£10.28
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£4.86	£4.86
Average	£3.24	£2.89	£3.03	£3.71	£3.39

Example 3 - Customers on 70% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 30% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£1.58	£1.38	£1.47	£0.00	£1.45
1	£1.89	£1.60	£1.74	£1.84	£1.75
2	£2.34	£1.77	£1.93	£2.10	£1.96
3	£2.37	£1.94	£2.09	£2.24	£2.23
4	£2.70	£0.00	£0.00	£2.54	£2.54
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2.95	£2.95
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2.75	£2.75
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£6.17	£6.17
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2.92	£2.92
Average	£1.94	£1.74	£1.82	£2.23	£2.03

Appendix 3 - Services Charges – Income and Charges

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Income from Service Charges – Impact of Increases

Charge Description	Annual Income 2022/23	Current Income Est. (IE +11.1% Incr. Apr23)	Additional Income			
			5% Increase	7% Increase	7.7% Increase	9% Increase
Communal Cleaning	£1,290,532	£1,433,781	£71,689.07	£100,365	£110,401	£129,040
Security - CCTV/Concierge/Door entry	£1,159,765	£1,288,498	£64,424.92	£90,195	£99,214	£115,965
Aerial	£233,197	£259,082	£12,954	£18,136	£19,949	£23,317
Heating	£86,063	£95,616	£4,781	£6,693	£7,362	£8,605
Gap Service	£46,675	£51,856	£2,593	£3,630	£3,993	£4,667
Furniture	£71,043	£78,929	£3,946	£5,525	£6,078	£7,104
Willow Gardens	£95,950	£106,600	£5,330	£7,462	£8,208	£9,594
Communal Facility	£15,623	£17,357	£868	£1,215	£1,336	£1,562
Water (Walker Grange)	£9,179	£10,198	£510	£714	£785	£918
Lift Maintenance	£7,999	£8,887	£444	£622	£684	£800
Warden	£1,724	£1,915	£96	£134	£147	£172
Grounds Maintenance	£2,061	£2,290	£115	£160	£176	£206
Total	£3,019,811	£3,355,010	£167,751	£234,851	£258,336	£301,951

Average Weekly Charges – Impact of increases on weekly charges

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Average Charges	Details	Charges 2023/24	5% Increase	5% Inc. Difference	7% Increase	7% Inc. Difference	7.7% Increase	7.7% Inc. Difference	9% Increase	9% Inc. Difference
Cleaning	High rise flats	£5.36	£5.63	£0.27	£5.74	£0.38	£5.77	£0.41	£5.84	£0.48
Cleaning	Low/med rise flats	£4.83	£5.07	£0.24	£5.17	£0.34	£5.20	£0.37	£5.26	£0.43
Cleaning	Supported Accommodation	£10.33	£10.85	£0.52	£11.05	£0.72	£11.13	£0.80	£11.26	£0.93
Communal cleaning	Medium rise	£0.73	£0.77	£0.04	£0.78	£0.05	£0.79	£0.06	£0.80	£0.07
Aerial	Charge	£0.49	£0.51	£0.02	£0.52	£0.03	£0.53	£0.04	£0.53	£0.04
Furniture		£10.18	£10.69	£0.51	£10.89	£0.71	£10.96	£0.78	£11.10	£0.92
Lift	Scribbans Place	£7.94	£8.34	£0.40	£8.50	£0.56	£8.55	£0.61	£8.65	£0.71
Water	Walker Grange	£4.07	£4.27	£0.20	£4.35	£0.28	£4.38	£0.31	£4.44	£0.37
Security - CCTV		£4.27	£4.48	£0.21	£4.57	£0.30	£4.60	£0.33	£4.65	£0.38
Security - Concierge & CCTV		£9.91	£10.41	£0.50	£10.60	£0.69	£10.67	£0.76	£10.80	£0.89
Security - Door entry and CCTV		£6.23	£6.54	£0.31	£6.67	£0.44	£6.71	£0.48	£6.79	£0.56
Security - security door		£1.97	£2.07	£0.10	£2.11	£0.14	£2.12	£0.15	£2.15	£0.18
Warden	Walker Grange	£0.94	£0.99	£0.05	£1.01	£0.07	£1.01	£0.07	£1.02	£0.08
<u>Willow Gardens</u>										
Furniture		£3.14	£3.30	£0.16	£3.36	£0.22	£3.38	£0.24	£3.42	£0.28

Guttering		£0.16	£0.17	£0.01	£0.17	£0.01	£0.17	£0.01	£0.17	£0.01
Management Fee		£8.55	£8.98	£0.43	£9.15	£0.60	£9.21	£0.66	£9.32	£0.77
Oven / Hob		£1.99	£2.09	£0.10	£2.13	£0.14	£2.14	£0.15	£2.17	£0.18
Utilities (communal)		£9.18	£9.64	£0.46	£9.82	£0.64	£9.89	£0.71	£10.01	£0.83
Windows		£0.78	£0.82	£0.04	£0.83	£0.05	£0.84	£0.06	£0.85	£0.07
Grounds		£3.71	£3.90	£0.19	£3.97	£0.26	£4.00	£0.29	£4.04	£0.33
Cleaning		£9.93	£10.43	£0.50	£10.63	£0.70	£10.69	£0.76	£10.82	£0.89
Cleaning materials		£0.89	£0.93	£0.04	£0.95	£0.06	£0.96	£0.07	£0.97	£0.08
Lift		£0.50	£0.53	£0.03	£0.54	£0.04	£0.54	£0.04	£0.55	£0.05
<u>Other service charges</u>										
Gap	Gap	£33.24	£34.90	£1.66	£35.57	£2.33	£35.80	£2.56	£36.23	£2.99
Grounds	Parkside/ Scribbans Place	£1.20	£1.26	£0.06	£1.28	£0.08	£1.29	£0.09	£1.31	£0.11
Grounds	Norma Close	£0.62	£0.65	£0.03	£0.66	£0.04	£0.67	£0.05	£0.68	£0.06
Heating	Selby House	£6.89	£7.23	£0.34	£7.37	£0.48	£7.42	£0.53	£7.51	£0.62
Heating	Selby House	£7.34	£7.71	£0.37	£7.85	£0.51	£7.91	£0.57	£8.00	£0.66
Leaseholder charges	Per annum	£115.66	£121.44	£5.78	£123.76	£8.10	£124.57	£8.91	£126.07	£10.41

Appendix 4 – Budgeted Rental Income and Impact of Increasing rents

	Annual Income 2024/25 (53 weeks)	Additional Annual Income PA (53 weeks)
Rental Income 52 weeks (2024/24 full year forecast)	£122,086,330	
6% Increase (53 weeks)	£131,900,193	£9,813,863
7% Increase (53 weeks)	£133,144,534	£11,058,204
7.7% Increase (53 weeks)	£134,015,573	£11,929,243
8% Increase (53 weeks)	£134,388,876	£12,302,546
9% Increase (53 weeks)	£135,633,217	£13,546,887



Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review

FINAL

Report v1
9 January 2024



HRA Business Plan Review

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC, the Council) have appointed Savills to support officers in the production of the annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan model.

This builds upon the work that officers have undertaken in previous years in establishing a refreshed HRA Business Plan. However, to add value, SMBC have now adopted the Savills HRA Business Plan platform for ease of operation and scenario testing. SMBC, like many authorities, need to adopt a new approach to setting out the financial capacity and capability of the HRA to deliver on its objectives towards refurbishment, investment, and new supply. Consideration of a new approach is also consistent with the requirement for the publication of Prudential Indicators specific to the HRA following their reintroduction alongside the abolition of the debt cap.

Savills have therefore worked with officers to update the HRA Business Plan that was produced in 2022.23, in respect of projected rent increases, uplifts to repair costs, and costs of new build schemes that are currently being and scheduled to be undertaken. Officers have also provided both the short-term investments levels in the stock but longer-term estimates are purely averages of these in the absence of the ongoing stock condition survey results.

This plan is based on the draft 2024.25 budget and the following four years that form the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Given that the results of the stock condition survey will be delivered in the coming months, this plan will be refreshed to take account of this but also any other national or local policy changes.

1.2. Factors the Sector is Facing

When considering the HRA business plan and its current resources, we must be mindful of the current and future challenges that the social housing sector faces.

The following areas are not exclusive, but are the key ones that will impact upon both staffing and financial resources.

Building Safety

Since the tragic consequences of Grenfell Tower, steps have been made by Government to ensure that building and fire safety is at the forefront of social housing investment and delivery. This has increased the amount of reporting that is required and where the point of responsibility over how and what data is held. For SMBC this has meant implementing new fire safety measures, which not only adds to capital investment but requires ongoing monitoring and maintenance. Recovery for these costs is also difficult from leaseholders due to current lease arrangements. Furthermore additional revenue resource is required in relation to ensuring compliance.

Enhanced Regulation and Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act has introduced enhanced powers for the Regulator for Social Housing to monitor compliance with a refreshed set of consumer standards, and has also introduced statutory collections and reporting for Tenant Satisfaction Measures. For all local authorities with stock, Sandwell will in future be subject to an inspection by the Regulator which will provide a grading as to the compliance the Council is achieving against these standards.

1.3. Approach

This report sets out the work we have undertaken as follows:

1. The results of the latest HRA business plan model in the light of market conditions, policy initiatives and other factors.
2. Outputs from financial modelling and sensitivity testing (where appropriate) to establish alternative an alternative delivery scenario for the business plan.

2. Business plan model

2.1. Introduction

Our latest version of the HRA Business Plan model has been provided and populated in liaison with officers and forms the basis of this report.

It will continue to have revisits in respect of updates to the asset management strategy and any other amendments as further details become available from those included within this plan.

2.2. Overview of methodology and assumptions

Overall

The plan is based on the following overarching principles:

- Balanced to the 5 years (revenue) medium term financial strategy and then assumptions as to the following 25 years of projections
- Core inflation projected at 2.0% beyond 2022²⁸ thereafter with exceptions as detailed below:
- Rents increasing at CPI per annum only – a prudent assumption given recent interventions and the absence of a long-term national social rent policy
- Service charges increase in line with rents.
- Depreciation at fixed stock levels.
- Repairs increase by CPI only with adjustments to reflect
 - Stock losses through right to buy
 - Newly arising repair liabilities from new developments
 - An increase to reflect liabilities for when the PFI contract ceases in 2030.
- Management Costs increase in line with CPI with no adjustments for right to buy sales, new developments of PFI related properties. The PFI contract ceases at the end of 2030³¹ and both the government grant and contract liabilities have been excluded from the plan thereafter.
- Maintenance of the existing tenanted stock (subject to Inflation and Right to Buy sales) is modelled at a total of £900million over the 30 years from 2024²⁵.
- Provision of £103.429million new build programmes (with subsidy contributions of c£54.650million) delivering 378 homes.
- The inclusion of 34 loans directly attributable to the HRA, that are at fixed interest rates for varying periods.

The overall methodology within the plan is also founded on net rental income servicing the operational expenditure, interest charges, and where required, additional borrowing to finance investment to the stock and loan refinancing when existing loan facilities mature.

The following paragraphs provide more detail on the key elements of the plan.

Rents

The rents contained within the modelling are consistent with the current social rent policy where the increase applied to April 2024 is restricted to 7.7% (September CPI of 6.7% + 1%).

Rent levels, as an average for 2024.25, will be £93.74 per week on a 52 week basis and £130.55 for the 751 tenancies on affordable rents.

The rent policy moving forward will be consulted on by government during 2024 in respect of providing more certainty of rent increases for April 2025 and beyond. At this stage we have made the prudent assumption that rents increase as per the medium-term financial strategy for April 2025 to 2028 and beyond this will increase by CPI only.

Void rates of c1.5% and Bad Debt provision of c0.66% have been modelled throughout the plan.

Other Income

As stated the annual Government grant for the PFI scheme will conclude in 2030.31. All other income, including service charges will increase by CPI only period the medium-term financial strategy.

Management

We have made comparisons with other metropolitan (non-London) authorities for financial year 2021.22. In summary:

- SMBC Cost Per Unit 2024.25: £2,043 (Net £1,606 after service charges and other income)
- Average for peer group 2021.22: £1,320 (Net £1,033)
- Average for regional group 2021.22: £1,213 (Net £879)
- Average National position 2021.22: £1,888 (Net £1,211)

This demonstrates that SMBC's budgets for 2024.25 are higher than average benchmarks for 3 years ago. Obviously part of this will be due to inflation but also factors such as:

- PFI contractual payment
- TMO payments

In order for the medium term financial strategy to balance in each year amendments have been made to the overall management budget in respect of the savings required.

Repairs

We have made comparisons with other metropolitan (non-London) authorities for financial year 2021.22. In summary:

- SMBC Cost Per Unit 2024.25: £1,703
- Average for peer group 2021.22: £1,165
- Average for regional group 2021.22: £1,137
- Average National position 2021.22: £1,234

This demonstrates that SMBC's budgets for 2024.25 are higher than average benchmarks from 3 years ago. However the sector has since large inflationary increases with regards to repairs and also the impact of compliance, building safety and dis-repair claims is likely show that SMBC's will be more in line with average costs once our national database has been updated.

In order for the medium term financial strategy to balance in each year amendments have been made to the overall management budget in respect of the savings required.

Right to Buy sales volumes

The level of sales is modelled at 150 per annum which accounts for a stock loss of 16% over the plan period. It might be expected that SMBC will see further reductions in sale volumes on account of instability with house prices but also the availability and affordability of mortgages for prospective purchasers, but the approach taken is prudent. We have made adjustments to both rents, repairs and future investment expenditure to reflect these stock losses.

The HRA is modelled to benefit from the receipts from right to buy sales and also those ring-fenced for new delivery. This approach, will also be subject to annual review in respect of considering alternative uses.

Capital Works to Existing Properties

As already commented upon the early years capital investment in existing stock is based on the medium-term financial plan. Beyond this an average programme of £30million per annum has been modelled with allowances for inflation, stock losses but also new developments. This equates to an

average investment of c£32,136 per property over 30 years. This is lower than levels we have recently seen for other local authorities and therefore this level of investment must be viewed with caution. In addition it would not be normal to have a 'flat' annual investment expenditure.

SMBC are awaiting the results of the recently commissioned stock condition survey and this will form the basis for updating this plan.

Interest Rates

The opening debt (HRA Capital Financing Requirement or HRACFR) is estimated at £558.584million (excluding the PFI liability). It is currently financed by 34 fixed loans totalling £327.8million with varying interest rates and maturity dates. The average interest rate for these loans is c5.0%. Internal borrowing between the Council's General Fund and HRA is utilised to fund the £173.7million difference and with a lower level of interest is charged, offset by interest receivable on reserve balances. This position may well change as the Council annually reviews its treasury management strategy.

A long-term rate of 3.5% has been assumed for future borrowing and refinancing post 5 years, but rates of 5.0% reducing to 3.75% during the first 5 years of the plan have been modelled for new borrowing and refinancing of existing loans.

2.3. HRA Business Plan projections

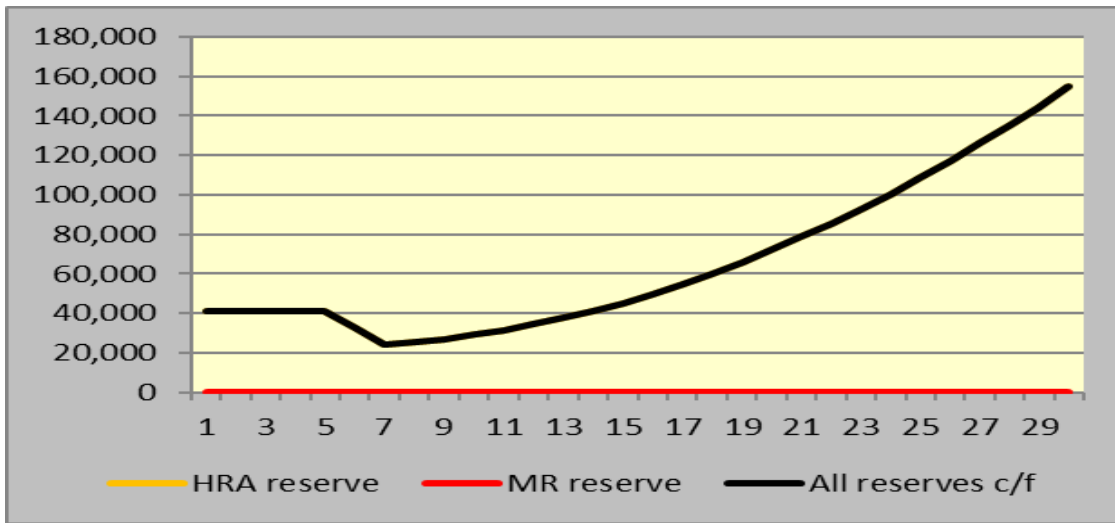
As a starting position for financial forecasting an agreed set of assumptions relating to inflation and interest rates and other cost and income adjustments are factored in. SMBC currently do not set a minimum reserve balance.

Various methodologies can be applied for arriving at a minimum balance such as:

- Equivalent to a period of gross expenditure with 1.5 months typically set as a basis
- A percentage of turnover is also adopted at other local authorities where limits are set at 10%
- Finally a straightforward allowance per unit is used.

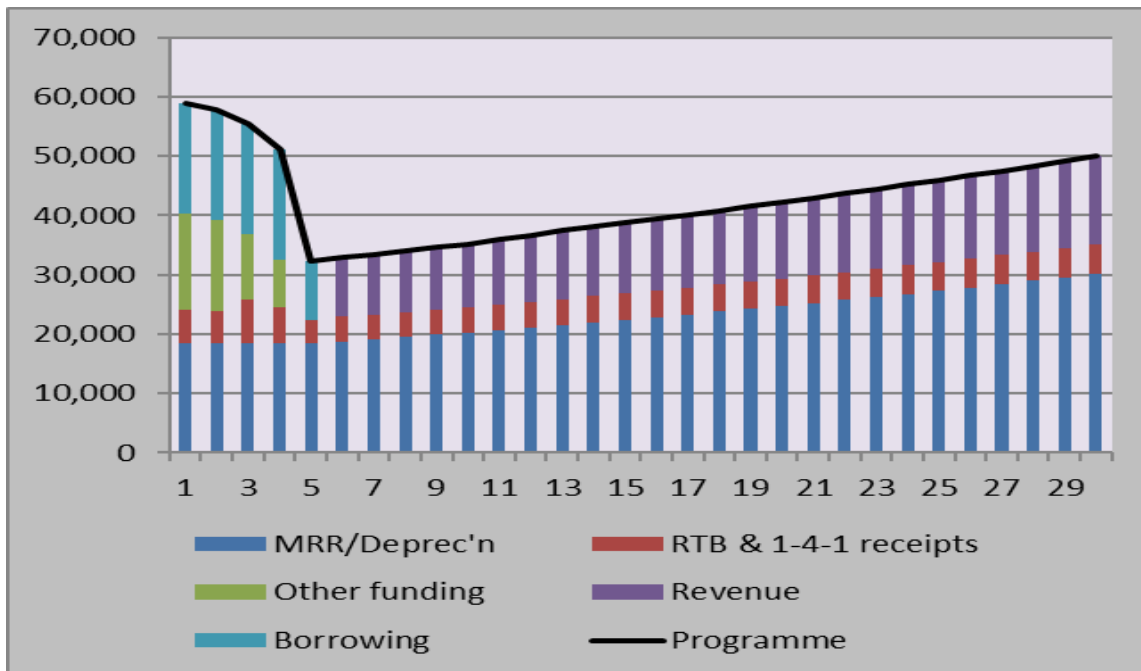
Therefore, SMBC should consider its minimum reserve levels moving forward, but we have adopted the 10% of turnover for the purposes of this plan. Year 1 of the plan relates to 2024.25.

Chart 2.1 – Projected HRA balances



The above graph demonstrates that from year 5 of the plan the reserves reduce, on account of funding the capital programme. Beyond this the HRA produces sufficient surpluses to continue to contribute towards capital expenditure and to begin to accrue reserves to the point of holding c£155million by year 30.

Chart 2.2 – Projected capital expenditure and financing



Capital expenditure is fully funded throughout the 30 years, demonstrated by the horizontal black line. There is a significant increase in projected expenditure in the early years to meet the requirements of the new build programme.

In order to part finance this, additional borrowing is required, which in turn results in additional interest charges.

Inflation has been included within the above projections, with the exception of years 1 to 4.

Chart 2.3 – Projected Capital Expenditure (By Category)

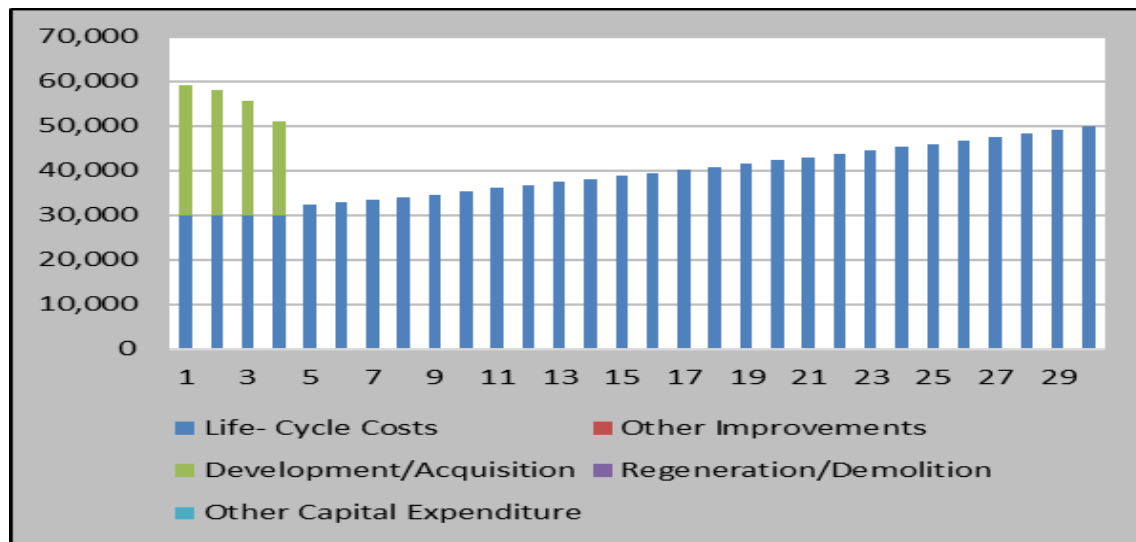
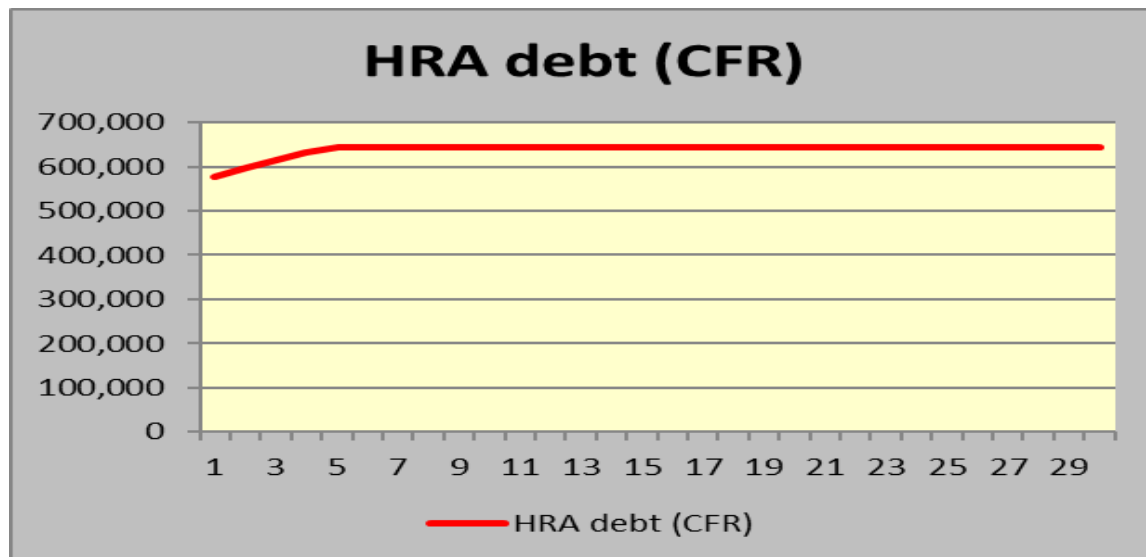


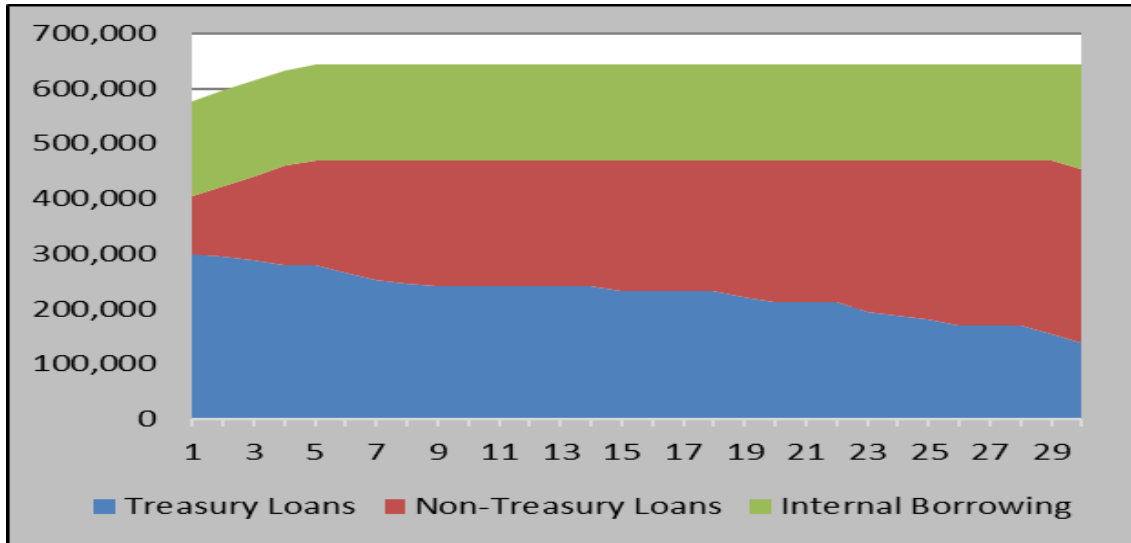
Chart 2.4 – Projected debt profile (HRACFR)



Borrowing is projected to initially peaks in year 4 at £643.0million from an opening position of £558.6million and remains at this level throughout the remainder of the plan.

All of the existing loan facilities that mature during the period of the plan are refinanced (as non-treasury loans) as demonstrated in the chart below.

Chart 2.5 – Projected Debt Analysis (HRACFR)



The blue shaded areas represent the existing loan portfolio that was allocated to the HRA in 2012 and any borrowing since then, whereas the red area represents a new pool of loans that are effectively a revolver type facility at an interest rate projected across all years at 3.5%, with the exception of higher rates in the earlier years.

3. Sensitivity Modelling

3.1. Sensitivity Modelling

We have modelled a range of scenarios that demonstrate the impact to the plan, which can be considered more externally influenced, as per the table below.

Table 3.1 -Sensitivity Table

Sensitivity £'m	HRA Bal Yr 30	Debt Yr 30
BASE	155	643
Inflation +0.5% pa	227	643
Inflation -0.5% pa	90	643
Interest -0.25% pa	183	643
Rents CPI +1% all years	977	643
Rent Freeze (Yr 2 – 2025.26)	25	713
Capital Expenditure +5%	103	645
Capital Expenditure +30%	25	953
Repairs Expenditure +5%	66	662
Right to Buys (Reduced by 50%)	283	645
Voids +0.5% Bad Debts +1%	83	647

The plan shows a varied impact to both positive and negative sensitivities. Areas of concern will more in respect of reserve balances and residual debt that the HRA has at year 30, although there is no statutory requirement for repayment, and the reduction in borrowing headroom.

4. Summary

1. The HRA business plan forecast as set out in our modelling for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough shows the current projected financial position.
2. The projections show that reserve balances begin to accrue whilst debt levels remain static. Whilst there is currently no requirement to repay debt, the accumulated reserves demonstrate the potential to do so.
3. The plan provides an initial basis on which to consider the investment plans, ahead of the results of the stock condition survey.
4. The Council can affect future operating surpluses above those modelled through effective cost management and this would increase borrowing capacity. Similarly, increases in inflation and in particular in rent inflation would add significantly to future capacity.
5. This report should provide a basis for the Council to inform its future approach to establishing a decision making framework for its HRA investment and development strategies, and also inform the work to be undertaken to adopt Prudential Indicators for the HRA. However, this needs to be considered in the context of Sandwell's treasury management strategy.

Simon Smith

Savills

January 2024

Appendix 1 Key Assumptions

	Assumption	Notes
Dwelling Rent	7.7% Increase 2024.25 then as per the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) then CPI only thereafter	
Void rates / Bad Debt Provision	1.5% / 0.66%	
Service Charges	As per rents beyond the MTFS	
Other Income	PFI contract ceasing in 2030.31 results in loss of grant	
Major Works Leaseholder Contributions	Linked to Capital Programme	
Repairs and Maintenance Costs	CPI only increases Beyond MTFP with adjustments for right to buys, new build and PFI contract	Efficiency savings modelled to balance to MTFS
Management Costs	CPI only increases beyond MTFP. Cessation of the PFI contract in 2030.31	Efficiency savings modelled to balance to MTFS
Interest rate on borrowings	Based on Existing actual rates c5.0% then long-term average of 3.5% (internal borrowing 4.5%)	
Depreciation	Straight Line Basis over life of Assets	

Capital Strategy
2023/24 to 2027/28

Introduction

1. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Capital Strategy considers the Council's long-term aspirations, corporate objectives, affordability criteria and available resources to guide capital investment decisions over the next five years. Capital expenditure relates to long-term investment in assets and differs completely from the Council's revenue budget as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Council receives capital grants and external funding contributions, and can raise capital finances either by selling property and other assets that are no longer needed, or by borrowing funds to support long-term investment in assets.
2. The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in local authorities sets out the requirement that authorities should have in place a Capital Strategy and governance procedures for the setting and revising of the strategy and prudential indicators.
3. The Section 151 Officer is responsible for ensuring that all matters required to be taken into account are reported to the decision-making body for consideration and for establishing procedures to monitor performance. Under the Prudential Code guide, a Capital Strategy needs to demonstrate that the local authority takes capital expenditure and investment decisions in line with service objectives and properly takes account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.
4. This version of the Capital Strategy details the forecast outturn position for 2023/24 and the currently approved Capital Programme covering the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. It also summarises future proposed, but currently unapproved, capital schemes, anticipated to commence over the same period.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28.

Current Capital Programme – General Fund

6. The current projected Capital Programme for the General Fund (GF) is shown below in summary, with the full detailed programme included as Appendix E. It includes all projects that have proceeded to approval stage, either via delegated powers or full Cabinet and Council recommendation approvals. It also includes estimates for capital grants for 2023/24 and beyond where there is an expectation that grant funding will continue, such as Highways Maintenance and School Maintenance Grants. The profiling of expenditure between financial years is as per the latest forecast, which was presented within the Council's 2023/24 Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring Report.

Table 1 – Approved Capital Programme (GF), with Latest Forecast Profiled Expenditure

Service Area	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	329	763	0	0	0	1,092
Borough Economy	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465
Finance	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333
Children's Services	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	3,610	0	0	0	3,807
Regeneration	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546
Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

7. As shown in Table 1, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total approved capital expenditure is £291m for the General Fund. Reprofiting of expenditure between financial years is likely to continue to take place, particularly following completion of the 2023/24 capital closedown procedure when final figures are established, which may result in further reprofiting of budgets from 2023/24 into 2024/25 and beyond. Reprofiting of budgets takes place when expenditure in any year is more or less than the allocated budget for the year, in which case the remaining project budget is redistributed across the remaining project period, in accordance with the estimated profile of expenditure. This is standard practice across local authority capital programmes.
8. The Council may also receive additional grant notifications throughout the financial year or if bids are submitted for additional grant funding as the year progresses. These changes will be reported as part of the quarterly reporting of Capital budget monitoring.

Future General Fund Schemes

9. The main objective for the introduction of the Capital Strategy requirement was in response to the major expansion of local authority investment activity into the purchase of non-financial investments, particularly property. The Capital Strategy, therefore, requires local authorities to assess investments over the long-term as opposed to the three years that planning was previously conducted over.
10. Table 1 summarises the current approved capital programme for the 5 years to 2027/28. The projects included within this programme have progressed through the governance process and are deemed to have been assessed fully to ascertain the outcomes of the project against criterion of risk and reward.
11. In order to comply with the requirement to consider capital expenditure over a medium to long-term period and to determine the financial sustainability of the authority, focusing on the affordability of the capital programme, the Council has compiled a planned programme of capital schemes that have been agreed in principal by Cabinet but have yet to complete the full due diligence process. These are described as “pipeline schemes” and are summarized in Table 2 below and detailed in Appendix E.

Table 2 – Capital Programme (Pipeline Schemes)

Service Area	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	0	563	0	0	0	563
Borough Economy	0	20,522	37,337	39,884	0	97,743
Finance	0	1,216	0	0	0	1,216
Children's Services	0	8,155	8,135	935	0	17,225
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Law & Governance	0	1,625	0	0	0	1,625
Regeneration	0	2,998	4,732	0	0	7,730
Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102

12. As shown above, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total capital expenditure on pipeline schemes yet to be approved is expected to be in the region of £126m for the General Fund. The total scheme costs detailed in Table 2 are initial estimates only and these are likely to change as more work is undertaken to develop robust business cases on an individual project basis including full options appraisal and detailed costings.

Capital Investment Plans

13. This Capital Strategy sits alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and feeds into the annual revenue budget as part of an integrated revenue and capital financial strategy. The ongoing implications for the revenue budget strategy are fully considered before any capital funding decisions are confirmed.

14. Sandwell Council has a range of ambitious, affordable capital investment plans designed to achieve the objectives set out in the corporate plan and 2030 Vision.

15. There are currently over 100 General Fund schemes that are included within the 5 year programme covering a wide range of developments. The main areas of investment include the following:

Towns Fund (Regeneration & Growth)

16. There are currently 15 active projects within the Towns Fund programme totaling £55m. These cover the areas of Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich. The major schemes relate to:
- Rowley Regis - Satellite Education Hub (£8.5m)
 - Smethwick - Midland Met Learning Campus (£11.3m)
 - West Bromwich – Retail Diversification Programme (£7.8m)
 - West Bromwich – Town Hall Quarter (£6.2m)

Levelling Up Partnership (Regeneration & Growth)

17. There are currently 5 projects due to start in 2024/25 totaling £20m, with the main scheme relating to the development of the Friar Park Urban Village (£11.5m).

Levelling Up Fund (Borough Economy)

18. £22m has recently been included within the programme for the development of Haden Hill Leisure Centre.

Oracle Fusion (Finance)

19. The programme includes £7.7m for the introduction of a new ERP system to transform Finance and HR support.

Highways (Borough Economy)

20. The programme includes a variety of schemes aimed at maintaining and developing the Council's Highways network. This totals £56.9m and includes the development of Birchley Island (£5.9m).

Schools (Children's Services)

21. There is a budget provision of around £50m for investment in schools over the next 5 years.

Disabled Facilities Grants (Housing & Assets)

22. £31.7m is included within the programme to provide grants to help private homeowners to adopt their properties to accommodate disabled needs.

West Bromwich Cemetery (Law & Governance)

23. The construction of a new cemetery in West Bromwich is due to be completed in 2024/25 at a cost of £3.6m.

Key (Pipeline) Projects

24. The largest value projects proposed to be added into the programme are as follows. These schemes have been agreed in principal but have yet to complete the full due diligence process:

- LUF Round 3 – Grove Lane (Regeneration and Growth): £20m
- New Archive Centre (Borough Economy): £20m
- City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements – Smethwick to Birmingham Growth Corridor (Borough Economy): £19m
- Causeway Green Primary School (Children's Services): £14m
- City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements – A461 WCB Corridor (Borough Economy): £13m
- City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements – Wednesbury to Brierly Hill Sustainable Access Measures (Borough Economy): £8m
- Sandwell Valley Master Plan (Borough Economy): £8m

Sandwell 2030 Vision

25. A continuous review of the capital programme is essential to ensure that resources are aligned to the corporate plan and 2030 Vision at all times. The 10 ambitions which make up the Sandwell 2030 Vision are listed in the table below:-

Table 3 – Sandwell 2030 Vision - Ambitions

Ambition 1	Raising Aspirations & Resilience
Ambition 2	Healthier for longer & safer
Ambition 3	Young People have skills for the future
Ambition 4	Raising the quality of Schools
Ambition 5	Lowering Crime & ASB
Ambition 6	Excellent public transport to the region & beyond
Ambition 7	Major new housing along major transport routes & employment sites
Ambition 8	Create environments in the 6 towns where people choose to live
Ambition 9	Hosting industries of the future
Ambition 10	National reputation for getting things done

26. The following sections detail how capital investment at a service level is being targeted to meet these ambitions.

Housing – Ambitions 1,2,5 & 7

27. One in 20 new council houses built in England in 2018 were built in Sandwell, and the Council plans to continue to deliver good quality, affordable housing for the people of Sandwell over

the next 5 year period using grant funding from Homes England as well as other sources of funding. The capital investment in existing stock provides the opportunity to raise standards of design, quality and sustainability across the Borough Housing and improve the quality of the neighbourhood.

28. The Council is also working on a number of energy efficiency upgrades to heating systems and boilers across council properties in order to help reduce fuel poverty across Sandwell. The HRA business plan includes £3 million annually for these improvements and a further £3 million annually for disabled adaptations to council homes.
29. This investment sits alongside a major programme of refurbishment in council housing stock. The investment recognises Sandwell's responsibility to invest in housing assets within the Borough to promote wellbeing and help people live healthy lives - this will continue to create mixed and sustainable communities and help residents maintain their independence for longer.

Schools – Ambitions 3 & 4

Primary Schools

30. Sandwell has 95 primary schools located across its 6 towns. 29 of these primary schools are now academies with 1 maintained and 1 foundation trust school scheduled to convert in this academic year. Like many parts of the country Sandwell has seen huge increases in its birth rate with Reception cohorts growing significantly. Additionally, the Council has seen increased in-year migration which has affected all primary year groups, with a levelling off experienced since School Capacity 2019, and most secondary year groups.
31. The total Reception capacity in 2010 was 4,246 with an overall primary capacity of 29,336. However, with Sandwell's pupil numbers in the primary sector increasing quickly and significantly, the total Reception capacity increased to 5,070 in September 2017 and has since reduced to the current figure of 4,950 for September 2023. This offers an overall primary capacity of 35,056 and a projected Reception surplus of 10.26%.
32. The projected overall primary surplus for September 2023 will be 4.66%. Although the cohort starting Reception in September 2017 saw the highest numbers since the mid-1970s, previous expansions meant that only an additional 3 temporary bulge expansions were required in Sandwell with one additional permanent form of entry introduced for Smethwick in 2018. A two forms of entry primary free school opened in September 2019 which has provided 420 additional places across the town of Smethwick, a town that had continued to attract considerable demand in all year groups.
33. No additional primary provision is anticipated to be required in Reception for the foreseeable future.
34. The Published Admission Numbers at 2 primary schools in Smethwick have this year been reduced by a form of entry at each school (60 places in total), and a third school in West Bromwich will reduce by a form of entry (30 places) with effect from September 2025 in response to the reducing demand for Reception places.

Secondary Schools

35. There are 22 secondary schools in Sandwell made up of 1 Voluntary Aided School, 2 Foundation Trust Schools, 18 Academies and 1 University Technology College (11-18 years). The overall secondary capacity is 24,294 and a projected year 7 surplus of 5.75%. The projected overall secondary surplus for September 2023 will be 3.40%.
36. It is projected that secondary numbers will increase by 969 across all year groups between 2023 and 2027 as larger cohorts move up from the primary sector and inward migration

continues to occur at similar levels. Based on the planned capacity for Year 7 in 2024 of 5,176, the borough wide PAN will be just sufficient to meet demand in 2024 with limited surplus.

37. Both Windsor Olympus Academy and Shireland CBSO Academy finally opened in September 2023 delivering 900, and 750 new places respectively. It has been projected that there will be a need for an additional 60 Year 7 places in Sandwell's secondary sector for the 2024/25 academic year to address local demand pressures in the Rowley Regis and Tipton areas, and in-year applications. The projections may need to revise if inward migration continues to increase at current levels.

Special Schools

38. During 2023 the Local Authority has started a major review for SEND provision, the 'Inclusion Transformation Programme' which, in part, is due to a continuing significant increase in the number of children and young people with a confirmed Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP). Over the past 2 years the total number of EHCPs has risen from 2,503 to 3,400 as at end June 2023. Such an increase has created significant pressure on the availability of suitable specialist places.
39. Two new schools, High Point Academy and Elm Tree Primary Academy have opened in the last 3 years to help with demand.
40. The Authority is supporting the expansion of The Brades Lodge to provide new places, and to further ease pressure on places, proposals are being considered to establish a new special school following an unsuccessful bid to the DfE to secure a new all through SEMH school through the Special Free School Programme.
41. There is an ongoing commitment to continue with locally based solutions such as expansion of well-established Focus Provision Units to complement mainstream special school provision.

Adult Social Care & Health – Ambition 2

42. The capital resources available to Adult Social care will be used in three main areas:
- The completion of a new £14m Social Care & Health Centre in Rowley Regis.
 - To support the ongoing development of the social care business system; and
 - To fund a range of ICT related expenditure to support mobile working, an integral element in the adult social care customer journey.

Transport – Ambitions 6,8 & 10

43. In a recent survey considering the importance of a "Connected and Accessible Sandwell", residents identified "Maintaining Roads and Pavements" as the most valued service (72% to 78% agreed) followed by "Improving Transport Options and Transport Links" (47% to 53% agreed). Capital investment in the delivery of Highway Maintenance, Highway Network Improvement and Road Safety Programmes, and Traffic Management related services, continue to generate significantly higher levels of public satisfaction than the Council's benchmarking peers.
44. The Council has approved a capital programme of maintenance work for 2023/24 and 2024/25, in line with Highway Infrastructure policy, that supplements the external capital grants from the Department for Transport (DfT) with additional capital resource. In addition to the DfT capital allocation of £5.4M, The Council has approved £3.6m of capital funding for 2023/24 and a further £4.9m in 2024/25.

45. In summer 2024 Highway Services will be reviewing the condition of Sandwell's highway infrastructure to identify capital budget requirements for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
46. Capital investments in Road Safety strategies, initiatives and programmes of work are maintaining a 22 year trend in the reduction of road casualties and continue to prioritise vulnerable groups identified within the Sandwell Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030. Capital investment in traffic management and road improvement schemes support the related sustainable benefits of encouraging active travel and modal shift, improving air quality and addressing climate change.
47. The Council is leading the delivery of the Birchley Island transport scheme at Junction 2 of the M5 in Oldbury along with developing a bid for a future improvement at M5 Junction 1.
48. The Council is a partner in Wednesbury- Brierley Hill West Midlands Metro Corridor (£450million investment) which is the largest light rail project in Europe and is coming to Wednesbury in 2024 creating a strategic link to Dudley and through West Bromwich to Birmingham.
49. The Council is also committed to enabling people to get around in a healthy and sustainable way which supports its health and wellbeing and its climate change strategies. The Council aims to make sure that all public transport options available locally are as green as possible, and will lobby for clean green buses for the borough as well as delivering bus priority measures on the West Midlands Core Bus Network. The Council is bringing forward a programme of schemes to develop the West Midlands Cycle Network in Sandwell along with more local cycling facilities and improvements for pedestrians. These will be predominantly segregated links that are part of the highway network.
50. The Council will also continue to make use of its extensive canal network as a means for cycling and walking and invest in green infrastructure as part of the successful delivery of the Local Transport Plan.
51. In addition, partnership work with the Canal and River Trust will enable the Council to make the best use of the borough's waterways.

Parks and Green Spaces – Ambitions 2 & 8

52. Sandwell has 543 green spaces, covering around 24% of the borough. Green spaces include 1,200 hectares of unrestricted green space including 32 parks and gardens, 22 green corridors, 211 amenity green spaces, 10 nature reserves, and 69 play areas. The Council is proud to have 14 green flag sites and will maintain this standard, as well as improving the quality and value of all its green spaces.
53. The Council approved a new green spaces strategy in June 2022, with a set of objective for three years to improve the quality and value scores for its green spaces. The Council has now completed 202 green space improvement plans, and will be bringing to Cabinet in March 24 a safer green spaces strategy, an allotments review and strategy. The Council has also implemented education and volunteering programmes in its green spaces. The Council's revised trees strategy and planting plan was approved by Cabinet in February 23, and set out how the Council plans to meet its commitment to plant 15,000 new trees by 2030 and to manage and protect its tree stock.
54. The Council has benefited from several capital investment projects, including:
 - The completion of £5.2m of National Lottery Heritage Fund and Sandwell Council funding for heritage and landscape improvements and a new Pavilion at West Smethwick Park.
 - The start of a £2.2m Town's Fund and Sandwell Council funding for heritage and landscape improvements, and new facilities at Britannia Park due to be completed in 2024.

- A smaller capital investment into Black Patch Park from the Levelling Up Fund of £86,000 to develop a master plan and improvements.
- A new Sandwell Valley Urban Bike Track, with £600,000 from Sport England, Birmingham Council, and Sandwell Council funding due to be completed in Summer 2023.

55. Sandwell Valley is a jewel in Sandwell's Crown and is currently seeing developments in Forge Mill Farm and at Sandwell Valley Visitor Centre. The Council is currently finalising a Master Plan for Sandwell Valley to become a sub-regional visitor destination, which is due for presentation and consideration in March 2024.

Leisure Facilities – Ambitions 1,2,9 & 10

56. The Council has developed an estate of modern leisure facilities within the borough. 2023 saw the opening of Sandwell Aquatics Centre as a community venue following the post-Commonwealth Games legacy works. Over the last 10 years the Council has now opened new leisure centres in Smethwick, Tipton, Oldbury, West Bromwich, and Wednesbury.
57. In 2023 the Council secured £20m funding from LUF2 to replace the ageing Haden Hill Leisure Centre. Subject to sign-off by LUF and Sport England, the centre will close in 2024 for a rebuild / refurbishment – to re-open in 2026.
58. With the opening of Sandwell Aquatics Centre, Langley and Smethwick Swimming Centres closed. The long-term future of some of the older leisure sites will need to be considered as part of the Capital Strategy to 2028.

Climate Change – Ambition 8

59. Sandwell Council is now actively pursuing capital investments to deliver its climate change agenda, including Heat Networks, Heat Pump Technology and Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points.

Revenue Implications of Capital Investment

60. The council takes into consideration the ongoing revenue implications of capital investment and has a consolidated revenue and capital budget setting process. The Cabinet receives all reports and information about the council's revenue and capital strategies and expenditure plans. The merging of the two processes allows the council to fully consider the implications on revenue of any capital schemes (whether savings or increased costs) and also places it in a position to consider the impact of the Prudential Framework in the future.
61. The cost of borrowing over the medium term expressed through the Minimum Revenue Provision is fully incorporated into the revenue budget setting process to ensure prudence and affordability.
62. The appraisal forms submitted when requesting a scheme to be included within the capital programme highlights both the financing of borrowing costs that the council may need to incur in pursuing the scheme together with the ongoing revenue costs of 'running' the asset once it is operational. The inclusion of these costs allows decisions to be taken with full consideration of the impact on the revenue position of the council. The Council has a robust process in place to test and consider all capital investment proposals with the underlying requirement that all decisions taken are affordable.

Allocating Resources to Capital Projects - The Capital Appraisal Process

63. The Council has a comprehensive project appraisal process, based on HM Treasury's best practice principles, as a means of assessing the merits and identifying the risks of individual capital schemes and the evaluation and comparison of such schemes for selection in times of limited resources. The appraisal process considers available external funding, any funding required by the Council and the resulting revenue implications of any such Council funding.
64. Project appraisals are the basis for formal monitoring and reporting on any capital schemes which are approved.
65. The level of appraisal and the route of approval that each scheme will follow is summarised in table 3 below:

Table 3 – Capital Appraisals - Approval Process

Total Project Costs	Short Appraisal	Full Appraisal	Capital Asset Management Board Approval	S151 Approval	Cabinet Member Approval	Cabinet Approval
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Under
£0.100m

71. These reports are also presented to the Budget and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management board for consideration.
72. Project Officers are consulted monthly to ensure capital forecast expenditure is accurate. Expenditure is monitored and analysed to ensure it is in accordance with the nature of the project and can be applied to the relevant asset register.
73. Re-profiling of capital resources into future years is reflected where necessary.
74. Capital grant claims are completed in accordance with grant terms and conditions to ensure all expenditure is financed.
75. Regular Capital Asset Management Board meetings are held to ensure that the capital programme is managed effectively.
76. Capital receipts are analysed monthly to ensure that all projects are financed correctly.

PFI

77. The Council has previously pursued the use of Public Private Partnerships and Private Finance Initiatives as a means of funding the investment identified through the Capital Strategy and Capital Programme. The council will continue to consider future opportunities as they arise but is no longer actively pursuing this funding option.

Commercial Activity

78. The Council currently holds commercial properties that generate significant revenue income to the authority. At present, the authority is not actively pursuing new investment in commercial assets for the sole purpose of providing income streams to aid the future funding of services. However, any new schemes will be evaluated to ensure that Members are fully informed of the risks and rewards of such investments

Asset Management

79. Sandwell Council is committed to proactive management of its assets, as reflected in the rolling programme of investment in buildings and ICT infrastructure. A 5-year programme of refurbishment of Sandwell Council House is now complete and will now secure this key asset for the longer-term but, alongside this investment, the Council will continue to rationalize its office accommodation to reduce ongoing costs to the council as it reaps the benefits of new, more agile ways of working.
80. The next year will see the Council's biggest ever investment in its ICT infrastructure as the Council implements a major upgrade to Oracle e-business suite; delivers technology modernization programme; and continues to roll out an expanding digital offer.

Knowledge and Skills

81. Sandwell Council has built up a significant pool of internal expertise and has a well-earned reputation for delivering projects on time and within budget. However, the Council will also buy in additional capacity and expertise as required.

Delivering the Strategy

82. The Capital Programme is revised annually as part of the budget setting process, and approved by Cabinet and Council. Any significant in-year variations to the programme require Cabinet approval.

83. Performance of the Capital Programme is part of the monthly financial monitoring process.

Review

84. The Capital Strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose and enables the Council to make the investments necessary to deliver its strategic aims.

Capital Financing Strategy
2023/24 to 2027/28

Introduction

1. The Capital Financing Strategy is intended to give a high-level overview of how capital expenditure within Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes will be funded.
2. The total approved Capital Programme for the General Fund is as shown in Table 1 below and for the Housing Revenue Account is as shown in Table 4 below.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Capital Financing Strategy.

Sources of Capital Funding

4. There are several sources of funding that the Council can use to finance its Capital Programme. The Current Programme is primarily funded from the following sources:
 - Capital Receipts
 - Prudential Borrowing
 - Revenue Contributions
 - Capital Grants

Capital Receipts

5. Capital Receipts come from the sale of the Council's assets. If the disposal is Housing Revenue Account land or property, then the whole receipt is not available to support the capital programme as a percentage must be paid over to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC). Where the sale of an asset leads to the requirement to repay grant, the capital receipt will be utilised for this purpose. Once this liability has been established and provided for, capital receipts will be available to support the capital programme as a corporate resource. Where the asset has been funded from prudential borrowing a review will be undertaken to determine whether the most cost-effective option is to utilise the receipt to repay debt, considering the balance sheet position of the authority.

HRA Right to Buy Receipts

6. In most cases there will be no ring fencing of capital receipts to specific projects. One exception to this is the retained Right to Buy (RTB) receipts held by the Council under the agreement signed in June 2012 and amended in June 2013. Under this agreement any retained RTB receipts, which are not used for the specific purpose of providing replacement affordable housing, must be returned to DLUHC.

Prudential Borrowing

7. The Council will investigate opportunities to resource capital projects using prudential borrowing where plans are sustainable, affordable, and prudent. Full appraisal will take place to ensure that, where appropriate, sufficient revenue returns are generated to cover the cost of borrowing.
8. Where it is considered that prudential borrowing is the appropriate method of funding, but it requires additional revenue financing, the cost will be built into the revenue budget planning process.

9. The term Prudential Borrowing above does not automatically lead to external borrowing as the Council may be able to use cash it holds in reserves and as working capital which is usually termed internal borrowing. The decision to borrow externally or to use existing cash will be made at an operational level when the relevant cash outflows take place, but over the course of a financial year as a whole, borrowing should be in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.
10. The revenue implications of Prudential Borrowing are interest costs, if external borrowing takes place, and minimum revenue provision (MRP), which is a charge to the General Fund even if the Council does not borrow externally and chooses instead to use existing cash resources.

Revenue Contributions

11. Subject to affordability, an element of the revenue budget can be set aside to fund the Capital Programme (Direct Revenue Financing). However, with increasing General Fund revenue pressures these opportunities are reducing.

Capital Grants: Government Grants

12. Capital resources from the Government can be split into two categories:
 - i). *Non-ring fenced* - resources which are delivered through grant that can be utilised on any project (albeit that there may be an expectation of use for a specific purpose). This now encompasses the vast majority of Government funding and the Council will initially allocate these resources to a general pool from which prioritised schemes can be financed.
 - ii). *Ring-fenced* - resources which are ring fenced to particular areas and therefore have restricted uses, specified by the funder.

Non-Government Contributions

13. Where there is a requirement to make an application to an external agency to receive external funding, and when appropriate to commit Council resources as matched funding to any bid for external resources, a business case should first be presented for consideration to the Capital Asset Management Board. The business case must demonstrate how the project aligns to Council's priorities and how matched funding and any revenue consequences can be managed within the context of the capital and revenue budget.

Current Capital Programme

General Fund

14. As per the Capital Strategy (Appendix G), the current projected Capital Programme for the General Fund is shown below in summary, with the full detailed programme included as Appendix E. The profiling of expenditure between financial years is as per the latest forecast, which was presented within the Council's 2023/24 Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring Report.

Table 1 – Approved Capital Programme (General Fund), with Latest Forecast Profiled Expenditure

Service Area (General Fund)	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	329	763	0	0	0	1,092
Borough Economy	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465
Finance	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333
Children's Services	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	3,610	0	0	0	3,807
Regeneration	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546
Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

15. It is currently proposed that this expenditure will be financed as follows:

Table 2 – Capital Financing (General Fund)

Funding Source	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Grants	49,165	93,516	46,254	21,339	21,339	231,613
Capital Receipts	0	0	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300
Revenue Contributions	147	3,560	0	0	0	3,707
Prudential Borrowing	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283
Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

16. As shown in Table 2, the main source of funding for the existing General Fund programme is Capital grants, which accounts for 80% of the programme funding required.
17. The second most significant funding source is borrowing, which accounts for 17% of funding required. Borrowing is required to fund all programmed expenditure that is not being funded from external funding (largely capital grants), capital receipts or revenue contributions.
18. The Council has a limited amount of capital receipts to fund the current capital programme. Capital receipts generation is dependent on the sale of assets. A prudent estimate of the value of capital receipts that may be available in future years has been included within Table 2. The corresponding values are subject to change, and will be revised as the Council's asset management strategy progresses. At present, capital receipts account for 2% of the funding of the existing programme, with a further 1% of funding coming from revenue contributions.
19. The resulting revenue impact of the prudential borrowing required to fund the existing General Fund Capital Programme is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Revenue Impact of Prudential Borrowing Required for Existing Programme

Revenue Implications	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total Over 5 Years (£000)
Prudential Borrowing Required	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283
Total Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and	2,079	3,065	3,442	3,661	3,880	16,127

Interest Costs) of Prudential Borrowing						
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20. All borrowing costs in 2024/25 are included within 2024/25 revenue budgets and borrowing costs in future years are incorporated into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as per Appendix A.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

21. The current projected capital programme for the Housing Revenue Account is shown below in Table 4.

Table 4 – Approved Capital Programme (HRA)

Service Area (HRA)	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
New Build	36,708	28,945	27,857	25,541	21,086	140,137
Housing Improvements	56,129	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	176,129
Total	92,837	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	316,266

22. As shown in Table 4, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total approved capital expenditure is expected to be in the region of £316m, and it is currently proposed that this expenditure will be financed as follows:

Table 5 – Capital Financing (HRA)

Funding Source	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Grants	2,190	12,287	11,306	7,000	3,966	36,749
RTB (141) Receipts	6,000	5,658	5,551	7,541	6,120	30,870
MRR	17,490	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369	90,966
Reserves	4,200	0	0	0	0	4,200
Revenue Contributions	5,875	0	0	0	0	5,875
Capital Receipts	0	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	16,000
Borrowing	57,082	18,631	18,631	18,631	18,631	131,606
Total	92,837	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	316,266

23. The major sources of financing for the HRA Capital Programme are prudential borrowing and the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR).

Future General Fund (Pipeline) Schemes

24. As per the General Fund Capital Strategy (Appendix G), a summary of proposed pipeline schemes is as follows:

Table 6 – Capital Programme (Pipeline Schemes)

Service Area (General Fund)	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	0	563	0	0	0	563
Borough Economy	0	20,522	37,337	39,884	0	97,743
Finance	0	1,216	0	0	0	1,216
Children's Services	0	8,155	8,135	935	0	17,225
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Law & Governance	0	1,625	0	0	0	1,625
Regeneration	0	2,998	4,732	0	0	7,730
Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102

25. As shown in Table 6, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total capital expenditure on pipeline schemes yet to be approved is expected to be in the region of £126m for the General Fund, and it is currently proposed that this expenditure will be financed as follows:

Table 7 – Capital Financing (Pipeline Schemes)

Funding Source	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Grants	0	25,896	42,183	32,963	0	101,042
Prudential Borrowing	0	9,183	8,021	7,856	0	25,060
Capital Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revenue Contributions	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102

26. As shown in Table 7, the major sources of financing for the pipeline schemes are Capital grants (80%) and prudential borrowing (20%). No other sources of funding are likely to be available to fund these schemes. A small proportion of grant funding for the pipeline schemes has already been secured, but the majority of external funding contributions required are prospective at this time and are subject to confirmation.
27. The resulting revenue impact of the borrowing forecast to be required is shown in Table 8 below. Taking a prudent approach, estimates assume that all borrowing would be external borrowing.

Table 8 – Revenue Impact of Prudential Borrowing Required to Fund Pipeline Schemes

Revenue Implications	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total Over 4 Years (£000)
Prudential Borrowing Required	9,183	8,021	7,856	0	25,060
Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of 2024/25 Prudential Borrowing	735	735	735	735	2,940
Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of 2025/26 Prudential Borrowing	0	606	606	606	1,818
Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of 2026/27 Prudential Borrowing	0	0	573	573	1,146
Total Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of Prudential Borrowing	735	1,341	1,914	1,914	5,904

28. The additional revenue budget required to fund the borrowing costs from 2024/25 is considered to be affordable, taking into consideration all other revenue budget pressures forecast, and the corresponding additional revenue budget required has been incorporated into the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as per Appendix A.

General Fund Total Programme

29. The existing programme, together with the pipeline schemes, gives a total programme value of £417m for the General Fund, which is scheduled in principle to be funded as follows:
- £333m is to be funded from Capital Grants (80%)
 - £74m from Borrowing (18%)
 - £6m from Capital Receipts (1%)
 - £4m from Revenue Contributions (1%)

Affordability of Borrowing

30. The revenue costs associated with the prudential borrowing required to fund the General Fund Capital Programme represented as a percentage of the Council's net revenue budget are as follows:
- 2023/24 – 4.7%
 - 2024/25 – 6.0%
 - 2025/26 – 6.3%
 - 2026/27 – 5.6%
 - 2027/28 – 5.7%
31. These percentages are well within expected tolerances and provide further assurance that the prudential borrowing required to fund the programme is at an appropriate level.

Next Steps

32. The Council's Treasury Management Strategy sets out medium and long term cash flow planning to ensure that the Council can meet its capital expenditure plans.

Investment Strategy 2024/25

Introduction

1. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Investment Strategy sits alongside the Capital Strategy and the Capital Financing Strategy and considers the non-treasury investments (industrial units and various commercial premises) that the Council holds in addition to cash investments which are discussed as part of the Treasury Management Strategy.
2. In general, non-treasury investments are held (a) to enhance and facilitate regeneration policy initiatives and (b) where this is so to ensure assets are held on a VFM basis such that suitable inflow of commercial rentals are received for the letting of such premises.

Context and Background

3. In October 2019, HM Treasury increased Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates by 1% on the back of concerns that councils were borrowing from the PWLB in order to invest in commercial investments (retail, offices, industrial parks, land etc) purely for a yield on that investment. This does not form part of this Council's operations in the past nor looking forward.
4. The 1% increase was reversed in November 2020 following the end of a consultation, and implemented new restrictions on borrowing to ensure that councils are not acquiring assets (land or buildings) primarily for yield. The Council should not have any proposals to invest primarily for yield in its Capital Programme as this would impair access to flows of capital funding from PWLB.
5. There are no proposals within the Capital Programme for acquiring new assets for yield and this is in line with relevant guidance.
6. The portfolio of investment assets was last valued at approximately £77m (source: Draft Statement of Accounts 2021/22) and for the period 2019/20 to 2021/22 has generated an average gross revenue yield of 4.6% and average net revenue yield of 3.9% per annum.

Equity Investments

7. The Council holds an equity investment in Birmingham Airport; this is a historic and long term investment undertaken with the 7 West Midlands District Councils to oversee the development of Birmingham Airport which is a major regional asset for the West Midlands conurbation. Accordingly, this investment is held as a long term policy initiative the driver of which is regenerative in character.

8. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council own 5.6% of the total Ordinary share allocation with a nominal value of 1 penny per share; this equates to a nominal value of £182,000 (i.e. the initial cost of investment). Sandwell MBC, along with the other councils in the West Midlands holds 49% of the issued Ordinary share capital for the Airport.
9. The Council also holds 11.5% of the preference shares issued to the councils at a nominal value 1 pence per share. This equates to £1.766m for Sandwell MBC.
10. The total nominal value of the share holdings in Birmingham Airport are approximately £1.95m and represents the amount of expenditure the Council incurred in purchasing this equity investment.
11. The Council is required to hold the shares at Fair Value (i.e. open market valuation basis) and independent experts are appointed through Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to conduct an annual valuation on behalf of all the councils investing in Birmingham Airport.
12. As at the end of 2019/20 the fair value of these shares equated to £17.32m which, although significantly more than the original cash cost to the Council, was a large decrease in value from the previous year's estimate of £28.41m. This reflected the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions on air travel on share prices in UK airports. During 2020/21 and 2021/22 the valuation remained stable as the economy began the slow recovery post pandemic. However, as air travel restrictions were fully lifted and there has been a general return to air travel (275% increase in 2022 compared to 2021), the last formal valuation as at March 2023 has seen the fair value of Sandwell's holdings increase to £32.55m.
13. The valuation is an estimate taking into consideration market conditions and the financial status of Birmingham Airport and is required for financial reporting in accordance with financial reporting standards and is not intended to identify the amount that might be realised from a disposal of shares.

Strategy

14. In the future, the Council is clear that it will not be seeking to invest in properties for yield but will only do so where the major driver is to achieve regeneration goals and where the ownership of additional commercial assets is a by-product of such endeavour. This strategy will ensure that the Council can maintain access to PWLB borrowing in future to support capital investment across the whole Council asset base, including investment in the Housing Revenue Account.
15. As with infrastructure assets (which fall outside of this Investment Strategy) the Council will undertake a periodic and cyclical review to ensure that the policy drivers which led to the original acquisition are still current and that the commercial returns represent VFM for the Council.

Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Policy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy
2024/25

Introduction

1. This Treasury Management Strategy Statement provides a comprehensive view of the Council's treasury position and its projected Treasury and Prudential Indicators having taken into consideration the proposed capital programmes for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.
2. The statutory indicators and limits are explained and included throughout this document and are summarised at Annex 6.
3. Annexes included within this Strategy:

Annex 1	Glossary
Annex 2	Economic Background
Annex 3	Credit and Counterparty Risk Management
Annex 4	Approved Countries for Investment
Annex 5	Treasury Management Role of the Section 151 Officer
Annex 6	Summary of Treasury and Prudential Indicators

Recommendations

4. Cabinet are requested to approve the Treasury Strategy Statement for onward submission to Full Council for adoption including:
 - i) The Borrowing and Investment Strategy for 2024/25
 - ii) The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2024/25
 - iii) The Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 to 2026/27 summarised at Annex 6
 - iv) Expected new net borrowing of £40.4m in 2024/25

Background

5. The Council is required to operate a balanced budget, which broadly means that cash raised during the year will meet cash expenditure. Part of the Treasury Management operation is to ensure that this cash flow is adequately planned, with cash being available when it is needed. Surplus monies are invested in low risk counterparties or instruments commensurate with the Council's low risk appetite, prioritising adequate liquidity and security of capital funds before considering investment return.
6. The second main function of the Treasury Management service is the funding of the Council's capital programme. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning, to ensure that the Council can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer-term cash flow surpluses. On occasion, when it is prudent and economic, any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or value for money objectives.

7. The contribution the Treasury Management function makes to the Council is of critical importance, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the General Fund Balance.
8. CIPFA defines Treasury Management as:

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

Reporting Requirements

Capital Strategy

9. The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes require all local authorities to prepare a capital strategy report which will provide the following:
 - i) a high-level long-term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and Treasury Management activity contribute to the provision of services
 - ii) an overview of how the associated risk is managed
 - iii) the implications for future financial sustainability
10. The aim of the capital strategy is to ensure that all elected members fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.
11. The capital strategy is included as a separate document within the budget report.

Treasury Management Reporting

12. Full council is required to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main treasury reports each year, which incorporate a variety of policies, estimates and actuals:
 - i). Prudential and Treasury Indicators and Treasury Strategy (this report) – The first, and most important report is forward looking and covers:
 - a. The capital plans (including prudential indicators)
 - b. A minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time)
 - c. The Treasury Management Strategy (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised), including treasury indicators
 - d. An Annual Investment Strategy (the parameters on how investments are to be managed).

- ii). A Mid-Year Treasury Management report – This is primarily a progress report and will update members on the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether any policies require revision.
- iii). An Annual Treasury report – This is a backward-looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25

13. The strategy for 2024/25 covers two main areas:

Capital Issues

- i). The capital expenditure plans and the associated prudential indicators;
- ii). The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy.

Treasury Management Issues

- i) The current treasury position;
- ii) Treasury indicators which will limit the treasury risk and activities of the council;
- iii) Prospects for interest rates;
- iv) The borrowing strategy;
- v) Policy on borrowing in advance of need;
- vi) Debt rescheduling;
- vii) The investment strategy;
- viii) Creditworthiness policy; and
- ix) Policy on use of external service providers.

14. These elements cover the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, DLUHC Investment Guidance, DLUHC MRP Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

Training

15. The CIPFA Treasury Management Code requires the responsible officer to ensure that Elected Members with responsibility for treasury management receive adequate training in Treasury Management. This especially applies to members responsible for scrutiny.
16. Furthermore, the Code states that they expect “all organisations to have a formal and comprehensive knowledge and skills or training policy for the effective acquisition and retention of Treasury Management knowledge and skills for those responsible for management, delivery, governance and decision making.
17. The scale and nature of this will depend on the size and complexity of the organisation’s Treasury Management needs. Organisations should consider how to assess whether Treasury Management staff and board/ council members have the required knowledge and skills to undertake their roles and whether they have been able to maintain those skills and keep them up to date.
18. As a minimum, authorities should carry out the following to monitor and review knowledge and skills:

- Record attendance at training and ensure action is taken where poor attendance is identified.
 - Prepare tailored learning plans for Treasury Management officers and board/council members.
 - Require Treasury Management officers and board/council members to undertake self-assessment against the required competencies (as set out in the schedule that may be adopted by the organisation).
 - Have regular communication with officers and board/council members, encouraging them to highlight training needs on an ongoing basis.”
19. It is anticipated that formal training will be provided to the cabinet during 2024/25 to ensure compliance with the Code’s requirements.
20. The training needs of Treasury Management officers are periodically reviewed with officers attending training sessions and economic/strategy updates throughout the year as and when they are provided by the councils treasury consultants.
21. A formal record of the training received by officers central to the Treasury function and members will be maintained by the Head of Technical Finance, Capital and Strategy.

Treasury Management Advisors

22. The council uses Link Group, Treasury Solutions as its external Treasury Management advisors. The council understands that responsibility for Treasury Management decisions remains with the organisation at all times and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon the services of our external service providers. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information, including, but not solely, our treasury advisers.
23. The Council also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of Treasury Management services in order to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The council will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

The Capital Prudential Indicators 2024/25 – 2026/27

24. The council’s capital expenditure plans are the key driver of Treasury Management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in prudential indicators, which are designed to assist member’s overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

Capital Expenditure and Financing

25. This prudential indicator is a summary of the Council's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of this budget cycle. Members are being asked to approve the capital expenditure forecasts as part of the 2024/25 Budget framework:

Capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	65.681	75.289	144.476	103.553	67.253
HRA	55.043	92.837	58.945	57.857	55.541
Total Indicator	120.724	168.126	203.421	161.410	122.794

26. The table below summarises how these plans are being financed by capital or revenue resources. Any shortfall of resources results in a funding borrowing need.

Financing of capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital receipts	1.677	6.000	9.658	11.651	13.641
Capital grants and Contributions	45.105	51.355	131.699	99.743	61.302
Major Repairs Reserve	16.834	17.490	18.089	18.000	17.950
Revenue Contributions	6.010	10.222	3.560	-	-
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
<i>Non-HRA amounts</i>	<i>19.265</i>	<i>25.977</i>	<i>21.504</i>	<i>13.016</i>	<i>10.851</i>
<i>HRA amounts</i>	<i>31.833</i>	<i>57.082</i>	<i>18.911</i>	<i>19.000</i>	<i>19.050</i>

27. Other long-term liabilities - The above financing need excludes other long-term liabilities, such as PFI and leasing arrangements that already include borrowing instruments.

The Council's Borrowing Need (the Capital Financing Requirement)

28. The second prudential indicator is the council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is simply the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from either revenue or capital resources. It is essentially a measure of the council's indebtedness and so its underlying borrowing need. Any unfinanced capital expenditure as shown above will increase the CFR.
29. The CFR does not increase indefinitely, as the minimum revenue provision (MRP) is a statutory annual revenue charge which broadly reduces the borrowing need in line with each asset's life and so charges the General Fund budget with a notional amount which represents the economic consumption of capital assets as they are used.
30. The CFR includes any other long-term liabilities such as PFI schemes and finance leases. Whilst these increase the CFR, and therefore the council's borrowing requirement, these types of scheme include a borrowing facility and so the council is not required to separately borrow for these schemes. The council currently has

£65.477m of such schemes within the CFR as at 31 March 2023 and is forecast to reduce to £61.569m by 31 March 2024.

31. The council is asked to approve the CFR projections below:

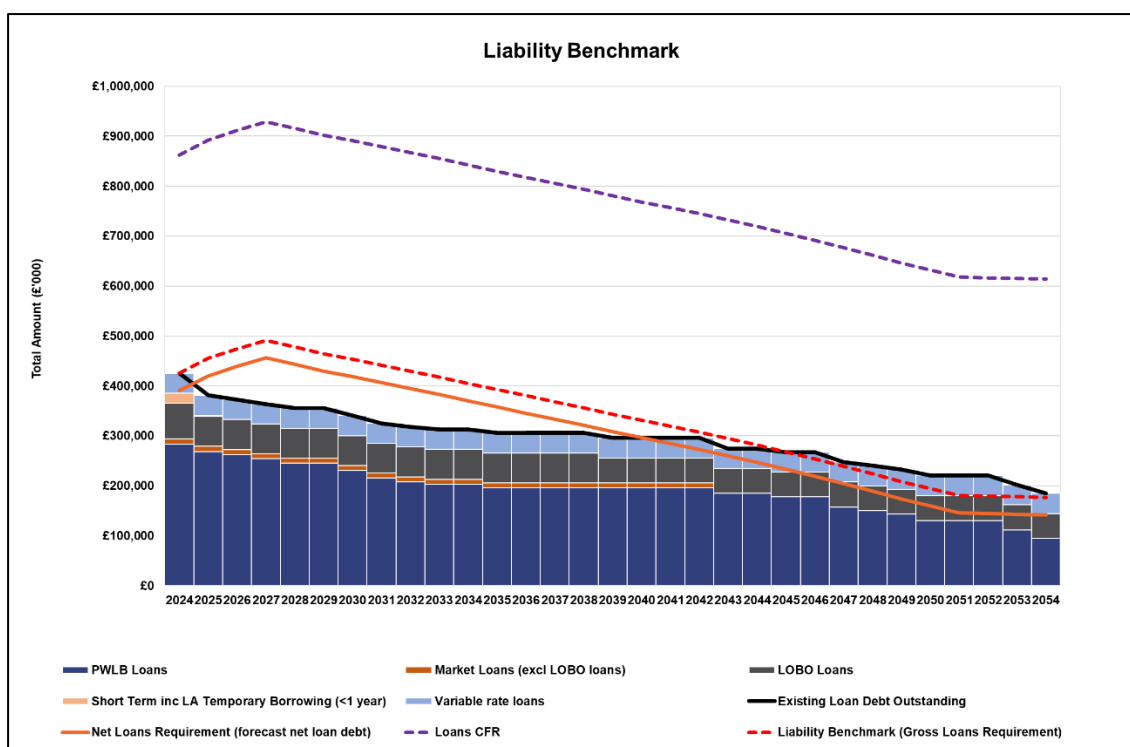
£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital Financing Requirement					
Non-HRA	334.348	350.655	357.949	355.941	350.686
Housing	517.908	573.601	591.089	608.465	623.985
Total CFR	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

Movement in CFR represented by					
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Less MRP/VRP	(6.593)	(7.151)	(11.477)	(12.211)	(12.881)
Other financing movements (i.e. PFI)	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

The revenue implications of increases in the CFR due to the additional financing requirement are included in the budget proposals for General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

Liability Benchmark

32. The council is required to estimate and measure the Liability Benchmark for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years, as a minimum.
33. There are four components to the Liability Benchmark: -
1. Existing loan debt outstanding: the council's existing loans that are expected to still be outstanding in future years.
 2. Loans CFR: this is calculated in accordance with the loans CFR definition in the Prudential Code and projected into the future based on approved prudential borrowing and planned MRP.
 3. Net loans requirement: this will show the Authority's gross loan debt less Treasury Management investments at the last financial year-end, projected into the future and based on its approved prudential borrowing, planned MRP and any other major cash flows forecast.
 4. Liability benchmark (or gross loans requirement): this equals net loans requirement plus short-term liquidity allowance.



Core funds and expected investment balances

34. Whilst not a formal Treasury or Prudential Indicator, it is prudent to be mindful of the cash resources available to the Council for investment purposes. This ensures that there are sufficient resources to meet expenditure needs and also to manage the Council's under-borrowing position and debt refinancing risk. The application of resources (capital receipts, reserves etc.) to either finance capital expenditure or other budget decisions to support the revenue budget will have an ongoing impact on investments unless resources are supplemented each year from new sources (asset sales etc.). Detailed below are estimates of the year-end balances for each resource and anticipated day-to-day cash flow balances.

Year End Resources £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Fund balances / reserves	243.072	243.072	228.072	218.072
Capital receipts	16.000	14.000	12.000	10.000
Grants unapplied	46.000	44.000	43.000	42.000
Provisions	17.000	17.000	18.000	18.000
Other	-	-	-	-
Total core funds	322.072	318.072	301.072	288.072
Working capital*	21.748	14.271	19.060	19.179
Under/over borrowing	(308.820)	(297.343)	(285.132)	(272.251)
Expected investments	35.000	35.000	35.000	35.000

* Working capital balances shown are estimated year-end; these may be lower or higher mid-year

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement

35. Regulation 27 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) Regulations 2003 ('the 2003 Regulations') requires local authorities to 'charge to a revenue account a minimum revenue provision (MRP) for that year'. The minimum revenue provision is an annual amount set aside from the General Fund to meet the cost of capital expenditure that has not been financed from available resources, namely: grants, developer contributions (e.g. s.106 and community infrastructure levy) revenue contributions, earmarked reserves or capital receipts.
36. MRP is sometimes referred to as the mechanism for setting aside monies to repay external borrowing. In fact, the requirement for MRP set aside applies even if the capital expenditure is being financed from the Council's own cash resources and no new external borrowing or other credit arrangement has been entered into.
37. Regulation 28 of the 2003 Regulations requires full Council to approve a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement setting out the policy for making MRP and the amount of MRP to be calculated which the Council considers to be prudent. This statement is designed to meet that requirement.
38. In setting a prudent level of MRP local authorities must "have regard" to guidance issued from time to time by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The latest version of this guidance (version four) was issued by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (as it then was) in February 2018.
39. In setting a level which the Council considers to be prudent, the Guidance states that the broad aim is to ensure that debt is repaid over a period reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits to the Council.
40. The Guidance sets out four "possible" options for calculating MRP, as set out below,

<u>Option</u>	<u>Calculation Method</u>	<u>Applies to</u>
1: Regulatory Method	Formulae set out in 2003 Regulations (later revoked)	Expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008
2: CFR Method	4% of Capital Financing Requirement	Expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008
3: Asset Life Method	Amortises MRP over the expected lift of the asset	Expenditure incurred after 1 April 2008
4: Depreciation Method	Charge MRP on the same basis as depreciation	Expenditure incurred after 1 April 2008

41. Two main variants of Option 3 are set out in the 2018 Guidance: (i) the equal instalment method and (ii) the annuity method. The annuity method weights the MRP charge towards the later part of the asset's expected useful life and is increasingly becoming the most common MRP option for local authorities.
42. The 2018 Guidance also includes specific recommendations for setting MRP in respect of finance leases, investment properties and revenue expenditure which is statutorily defines

as capital expenditure under the 2003 Regulations (also referred to as revenue expenditure funded by capital under statute or REFCUS). Examples of REFCUS include capitalised redundancy costs, loans or grants to third parties for capital purposes, and the purchase of shares in limited companies.

43. Other approaches are not ruled out however they must meet the statutory duty to make prudent MRP provision each financial year.
44. Looking forward, DLUHC is consulting on changes to the current guidance and statutory requirement for MRP. To date however no definitive announcement has been made. Members will be kept abreast of these changes, and any implications for the Council locally, as and when they take place.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement for 2024/25

45. Having regard to the current 2018 Guidance on MRP issued by DLUHC and the “options” outlined in that Guidance (the MRP Guidance), the Council is recommended to approve the following MRP Statement to take effect from 1 April 2024, on the basis that this represents “a prudent provision” in line with Regulation 28.

<u>MRP Stream</u>	<u>Policy</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Capital Expenditure incurred before 1 st April 2008	MRP will be calculated on the remaining un-financed balance at 1 April 2024 using an amortisation basis over 25 years from 2024/25 through to 2048/49 inclusive. (25 years remaining) The discount rate to be applied will be the 25 year PWLB annuity rate as at 1 April 2024.	Utilising an amortisation basis for MRP ensures that the full balance is repaid in 25 years whereas Options 1 and 2 never repay the debt as they both work on a reducing balance method. This is a deviation from Options 1 and 2 of the guidance.
All General Fund operational capital expenditure after 1 st April 2008	MRP will be calculated on an amortised basis using the expected asset lives of the assets (Option 3 asset life), subject to a maximum useful asset life of 50 years. The balance for the purpose of the MRP calculation will be remaining un-financed balance as at 1 April 2024 and amortised over the remaining life of the asset. The discount rate to be applied will be the PWLB annuity rate applicable on 1 April in the year of expenditure.	The use of the annuity method complies with Option 3 as set out in para 35(b) of the MRP Guidance. The MRP Guidance does not suggest with discount rate(s) to use. By specifying the PWLB new loan annuity rate at 1 April of year of expenditure provides a clearly evidenced trail to the discount rate to be used.

<u>MRP Stream</u>	<u>Policy</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Expenditure capitalised by virtue of a capitalisation direction under section 16(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 2003	<p>MRP on any expenditure capitalised by way of a direction will be charged over 20 years using the asset-life method annuity approach.</p> <p>The balance for the purpose of the MRP calculation will be remaining un-financed balance as at 1 April 2024 and amortised over the remaining balance of the 20 year period.</p> <p>The discount rate to be applied will be the PWLB annuity rate applicable on 1 April in the year of expenditure.</p>	<p>The 20 year life is the period specified in para 47 of the MRP Guidance.</p> <p>The use of the annuity method complies with Option 3 as set out in para 35(b) of the MRP Guidance.</p>
MRP for service concession contracts	The amount of MRP charge will be equal to the amount by which the balance sheet liability is written down by the unitary charge (i.e. the principal element of the unitary charge)	This complies with para 43 of the MRP Guidance.
Loans to third parties	<p>MRP will be calculated on an annuity basis over the expected useful life for which the loan is to be used and adjusted by any loan principal repayments by the third party. Any residual balance will be charged to the General Fund Revenue Account, subject to the amount not being less than nil (i.e. a credit to the revenue account).</p> <p>The discount rate to be applied will be the PWLB annuity rate applicable on 1 April in the year the loan was issued.</p>	<p>This approach complies with Option 3 of the MRP Guidance and the useful life is that set out in para 47 of the MRP Guidance.</p> <p>At the time of writing the application of loan repayments from the third party can be applied to reduce the CFR and therefore the outstanding unfinanced capital expenditure which is used for MRP calculations but is subject to review as part of the consultation and therefore has potential to be changed.</p>

Asset Lives used for MRP calculations will be determined by the Council's capital team (using RICS registered valuers where appropriate) and will be consistent with the depreciation policies set out in the Council's annual Statement of Accounts. If no life can

be reasonably attributed to an asset, such as freehold land, the estimated useful life will be taken to be a maximum of 50 years. This complies with para 42 of the MRP Guidance.

MRP commencement – MRP should normally begin in the financial year following the one in which the expenditure was incurred. However, in accordance with the statutory MRP Guidance, commencement of MRP may be deferred until the financial year following the one in which the asset becomes operational. This approach complies with para 41 of the MRP Guidance.

The above MRP Policy statement is considered to represent a prudent charge to the General Fund for the provision of repayment of unfinanced capital expenditure and will ensure that all unfinanced capital expenditure is funded through the MRP charge in line with the life expectancies of the assets underpinning the CFR balance.

There is no requirement on the HRA to make an MRP charge, but there is a requirement for a charge to be made for depreciation.

West Midlands Combined Authority: Collective Investment Fund

46. The agreed Combined Authority Devolution Deal proposes the establishment of a Collective Investment Fund to support investment in the region. It is possible that some of this investment may be delivered by individual districts and funded from prudential borrowing.
47. MRP on investments in Equities will be made on an annuity profile over 20 years, as recommended by Government guidance.

Borrowing

48. The capital expenditure plans set out in Section 2 provide details of the service activity of the council. The Treasury Management function ensures that the Council's cash is organised in accordance with the relevant professional codes, so that sufficient cash is available to meet this service activity and the council's capital strategy. This will involve both the organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of appropriate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions and the annual investment strategy.

Portfolio Position at 31 December 2023

49. The overall Treasury Management portfolio as at 31 March 2023 and for the position as 31 December 2023 are shown below for both borrowing and investments:

Treasury Portfolio	31 March 2023		31 December 2023	
	Balance £m	Interest Rate	Balance £m	Interest Rate
Treasury Investments				
Specified Investments:				
Bank/ Building Society (Fixed Rate)	10.000	4.34%	5.000	5.62%
Bank/ Building Society (Variable Rate)	0.620	1.00%	15.671	3.25%
Money Market Funds (Variable Rate)	19.834	4.16%	70.502	5.34%
Total Specified	30.454	4.16%	91.173	5.00%
Total Investments	30.454	4.16%	91.173	5.00%
Treasury External Borrowings				
Other Local Authorities	41.498	3.02%	16.498	5.37%
PWLB	295.482	5.07%	290.904	5.02%
LOBO	82.000	4.08%	72.000	4.01%
Market	10.000	4.50%	15.000	4.62%
Temporary Loans	39.933	3.16%	41.306	4.79%
Interest Free	1.895	0.00%	1.895	0.00%
Total External Debt	470.808	4.52%	437.603	4.81%
Net Debt Position				
	440.354		346.430	

Treasury External Borrowings (Non HRA / HRA apportionment)	31 March 2023		31 December 2023	
	Balance £m	Interest Rate	Balance £m	Interest Rate
Non-HRA	143.006	3.65%	122.752	4.65%
HRA	327.802	4.91%	314.851	4.87%
Total External Debt	470.808	4.52%	437.603	4.81%

50. The council's forward projections for borrowing are summarised below. The table shows the actual external debt, against the underlying capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement – CFR), highlighting any over or under borrowing.

£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
External Debt					
Debt at 1 April	475.588	470.808	553.867	594.282	626.298
Expected change in Debt	(4.780)	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Other long-term liabilities (OLTL) at 1 April - PFI	68.525	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Expected change in OLTL	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Actual gross debt at 31 March	536.285	615.436	651.695	679.274	702.420
The Capital Financing Requirement	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Over/ (Under) Borrowing	(315.971)	(308.820)	(297.343)	(285.132)	(272.251)

51. Within the range of prudential indicators, there are several key indicators to ensure that the Council operates its activities within well-defined limits. One of these is that the Council needs to ensure that its gross debt, does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2024/25 and the following two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue purposes or speculative purposes.
52. The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) confirms that the Council complied with this prudential indicator in the current year and does not envisage difficulties for the future. This view considers current commitments, existing plans, and the proposals in this budget report. For example, actual gross debt at 31st March 2025 (£651.7m) is expected to be less than both the CFR for the previous year (£924.3m) and the CFR at 31st March 2027 (£974.7m).

Treasury Indicators: Limits to Borrowing Activity

The Operational Boundary

53. The Operational Boundary is the limit beyond which external debt would not normally be expected to exceed. In most cases, this would be a similar figure to the CFR, but may be lower or higher depending on the levels of actual debt and the ability to fund under-borrowing by other cash resources.

Operational Boundary £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	553.867	594.282	626.298	656.199
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Total	619.344	655.851	683.711	709.175

The Authorised Limit

54. The Authorised Limit for external debt is a key prudential indicator, which represents control over the maximum level of debt. This represents a legal limit beyond which external debt is prohibited and this limit needs to be set or revised by the full council. It reflects the level of external debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term.
55. This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all councils' plans, or those of a specific council, although this power has not yet been exercised.
56. The council is recommended to approve the following Authorised Limit:

Authorised Limit £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	901.718	931.842	952.343	967.780
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	85.477	81.569	77.413	72.976
Total	987.195	1,013.411	1,029.756	1,040.756

Prospects for Interest Rates

57. The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Authority to formulate a view on interest rates. Link provided the following forecasts on 07 November 2023. These are forecasts for Bank Rate, average earnings and PWLB certainty rates, gilt yields plus 80 basis points (0.80%)

Link Group Interest Rate View		07.11.23											
	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.30	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
6 month ave earnings	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.60	3.40	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10
12 month ave earnings	5.80	5.70	5.50	5.20	4.70	4.20	3.70	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
5 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.50	3.50
10 yr PWLB	5.10	5.00	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50
25 yr PWLB	5.50	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.00	4.00	4.00
50 yr PWLB	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80

Additional notes by Link on this forecast table: --

58. Our central forecast for interest rates was previously updated on 25 September and reflected a view that the MPC would be keen to further demonstrate its anti-inflation credentials by keeping Bank Rate at 5.25% until at least H2 2024. We expect rate cuts to start when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are supportive of such a move, and that there is a likelihood of the overall economy enduring at least a mild recession over the coming months, although most recent GDP releases have surprised with their on-going robustness.
59. Naturally, timing on this matter will remain one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.
60. In the upcoming months, our forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and Gaza and Israel.
61. On the positive side, consumers are still anticipated to be sitting on some excess savings left over from the pandemic, which could cushion some of the impact of the above challenges and may be the reason why the economy is performing somewhat better at this stage of the economic cycle than may have been expected. However, as noted previously, most of those excess savings are held by more affluent households whereas lower income families already spend nearly all their income on essentials such as food, energy and rent/mortgage payments.

PWLB Rates

62. Gilt yield curve movements have broadened. The short part of the curve has not moved far but the longer-end continues to reflect inflation concerns. At the time of writing there is 60 basis points difference between the 5 and 50 year parts of the curve.

The balance of risks to the UK economy

63. The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK is to the downside mostly due to:

- i) Labour and supply shortages depressing economic activity
- ii) Perception that the Bank of England has increased Bank Rate too fast and too far which would subsequently bring about a deeper and longer UK recession
- iii) UK/ EU trade arrangements having a major impact on trade flows due to complications or lack of co-operation in fixing and remaining significant issues.

64. However, the possible upside risks to current forecasts could be:

- i) A view that the Bank of England increases have been too timid and inflationary pressures remain for a longer period.
- ii) A weakening of the pound due to a lack of confidence in the UK Governments fiscal policies.

Borrowing and Investment Advice

65. The long-term (beyond 10 years) forecast for Bank Rate has increased from 2.75% to 3% and reflects Capital Economics' research that suggests AI and general improvements in productivity will be supportive of a higher neutral interest rate. As all PWLB certainty rates are currently significantly above this level, borrowing strategies will need to be reviewed in that context. Overall, better value can generally be obtained at the shorter end of the curve and short-dated fixed LA to LA monies should be considered. Temporary borrowing rates will remain elevated for some time to come but may prove the best option whilst the market continues to wait for inflation, and therein gilt yields, to drop back later in 2024. Target borrowing rates are set two years forward (as rates are expected to fall back) and the current PWLB (certainty) borrowing rates are set out below:

PWLB debt	Current borrowing rate as at 6 Nov 23 p.m.	Target borrowing rate (from Q3 2025)	Target borrowing rate previous (end of Q3 2025)
5 years	5.02%	3.80%	3.90%
10 years	5.15%	3.80%	3.80%
25 years	5.61%	4.20%	4.10%
50 years	5.38%	4.00%	3.90%

66. The suggested budgeted earnings rates for investments up to about three months' duration in each financial year are rounded to the nearest 10bps and set out below. You will note that investment earnings have been revised somewhat higher for all years from 2025/26 as Bank Rate remains higher for longer.

Average earnings in each year	Now	Previously
2023/24 (residual)	5.30%	5.30%
2024/25	4.70%	4.70%
2025/26	3.20%	3.00%
2026/27	3.00%	2.80%
2027/28	3.25%	3.05%
Years 6 to 10	3.25%	3.05%
Years 10+	3.25%	3.05%

Borrowing Strategy

67. The Council is currently maintaining an under-borrowed position. This means that the capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow has been used as a temporary measure. This strategy is prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels once prevailing inflation concerns are addressed by tighter near-term monetary policy
68. Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2024/25 treasury operations. The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances:
- i) If it was felt that there was a significant risk of a sharp FALL in borrowing rates, then borrowing will be postponed.
 - ii) If it was felt that there was a significant risk of a much sharper RISE in borrowing rates than that currently forecast, fixed rate funding will be drawn whilst interest rates are lower than they are projected to be in the next few years
69. Any decisions will be reported to the appropriate decision making body at the next available opportunity.
70. Despite the above, it is highly likely that there will be a requirement to take loan debt during 2024/25 to cover capital financing needs and cash flow requirements. Therefore the strategy in this instance would be to acquire short dated borrowing due to the borrowing rates expected to be temporarily elevated in the short term. As borrowing rates decrease, and as these loans mature, they would be replaced with longer dated debt at more affordable levels.

Policy on Borrowing In Advance of Need

71. The council will not borrow more than or in advance of its needs purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Levels of short-term cash based investments are generally low and expected to remain so during 2024/25. Any decision to borrow in advance will be within forward approved Capital Finance Requirement estimates and will be considered carefully to ensure that value for money can be demonstrated and that the council can ensure the security of such funds.
72. Borrowing in advance will be made within the constraints that it will be limited to no more than 20% of the expected increase in borrowing need (CFR) over a three-year planning period.
73. Risks associated with any borrowing in advance activity will be subject to prior appraisal and subsequent reporting through the mid-year or annual reporting mechanism.

Debt Rescheduling

74. Rescheduling of current borrowing in our debt portfolio is unlikely to occur as there is still a large difference between premature redemption rates and new borrowing rates.
75. If rescheduling was done, it will be reported to the council at the earliest meeting following its action.

New Financial Institutions (as a source of borrowing or types of borrowing)

76. Currently the PWLB Certainty Rate is set at gilts + 80 basis points for both HRA and non-HRA borrowing however, consideration may still need to be given to sourcing funding from the following sources for the following reasons:
 - i) Local authorities (primarily shorter dated maturities out to 3 years or so – still cheaper than the certainty rate).
 - ii) Financial institutions (primarily insurance companies and pension funds but also some banks, out of forward dates where the objective is to avoid “cost of carry” or to achieve refinancing certainty over the next few years)
77. Our advisors will keep us informed as to the relative merits of each of these alternative funding sources.

Annual Investment Strategy

Investment policy – management of risk

78. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and CIPFA have extended the meaning of ‘investments’ to include both financial and non-financial investments. This report deals solely with treasury (financial) investments, (as managed by the Treasury Management team). Non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets, are covered in the Investment Strategy, (a separate report).
79. The council’s investment policy has regard to the following: -
 - i) DLUHC’s Guidance on Local Government Investments (“the Guidance”)

- ii) CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 (“the Code”)
 - iii) CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021
80. The Council’s investment priorities will be security first, portfolio liquidity second and then yield (return). The council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with the council’s risk appetite.
81. In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to maintain a degree of liquidity to cover cash flow needs but to also consider “laddering” investments for periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, whilst investment rates remain elevated, as well as wider range fund options.
82. The above guidance from the DLUHC and CIPFA place a high priority on the management of risk. This council has adopted a prudent approach to managing risk and defines its risk appetite by the following means: -
- i). Minimum acceptable credit criteria are applied to generate a list of highly creditworthy counterparties. This also enables diversification and thus avoidance of concentration risk. The key ratings used to monitor counterparties are the short term and long-term ratings.
 - ii). Other information: ratings will not be the sole determinant of the quality of an institution; it is important to continually assess and monitor the financial sector on both a micro and macro basis and in relation to the economic and political environments in which institutions operate. The assessment will also take account of information that reflects the opinion of the markets. To achieve this consideration the council will engage with its advisors to maintain a monitor on market pricing such as “credit default swaps” and overlay that information on top of the credit ratings.
 - iii). Other information sources used will include the financial press, share price and other such information pertaining to the banking sector in order to establish the most robust scrutiny process on the suitability of potential investment counterparties.
 - iv) This Council has defined the list of types of investment instruments that the Treasury Management team are authorised to use. There are two lists in Annex 3 under the categories of ‘specified’ and ‘non-specified’ investments.
 - Specified investments are those with a high level of credit quality and subject to a maturity limit of one year or have less than a year left to run to maturity, if originally they were classified as being non-specified investments solely due to the maturity period exceeding one year.
 - Non-specified investments are those with less high credit quality, may be for periods in excess of one year, and/or are more complex instruments which require greater consideration by members and officers before being authorised for use.
 - Non-specified investments limit. The council has determined that it will limit the maximum total exposure to non-specified investments as being 30% of the total investment portfolio.

- Lending limits, (amounts and maturity), for each counterparty will be set through applying the matrix table in paragraph 89.
- Transaction limits are set for each type of investment in paragraph 89.
- This council will set a limit for the amount of its investments which are invested for longer than 365 days, (see paragraph 102).
- Investments will only be placed with counterparties from countries with a specified minimum sovereign rating, (see paragraph 93).
- This council has engaged external advisors, (see paragraph 22), to provide expert advice on how to optimise an appropriate balance of security, liquidity and yield, given the risk appetite of this authority in the context of the expected level of cash balances and need for liquidity throughout the year.
- All investments will be denominated in sterling.
- As a result of the change in accounting standards under IFRS 9, this authority will consider the implications of investment instruments which could result in an adverse movement in the value of the amount invested and resultant charges at the end of the year to the General Fund. (In November 2018, the MHCLG, concluded a consultation for a temporary override to allow English local authorities time to adjust their portfolio of all pooled investments by announcing a statutory override to delay implementation of IFRS 9 for five years ending 31 March 2023 which has subsequently been extended for a further two years to 31 March 2025.
- If considering 'Property Funds' or other 'Diversified Income Funds' in the future, the Council may look to use externally appointed fund managers.

83. However, this Council will also pursue value for money in Treasury Management and will monitor the yield from investment income against appropriate benchmarks for investment performance, (see paragraph 104). Regular monitoring of investment performance will be carried out during the year.

Creditworthiness policy

84. This Council applies the creditworthiness service provided by the Link Group. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach utilising credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies - Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays: -

- i) "watches" and "outlooks" from credit rating agencies;
- ii) CDS spreads that may give early warning of changes in credit ratings;
- iii) sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries.

85. This modelling approach combines credit ratings, and any assigned Watches and Outlooks, in a weighted scoring system which is then combined with an overlay of CDS spreads. The end-product of this is a series of colour coded bands which indicate the relative creditworthiness of counterparties. These colour codes are used by the Authority to determine the suggested duration for investments. The Authority will, therefore, use counterparties within the following durational bands:

Yellow	5 years*
Dark pink	5 years for Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.25
Light pink	5 years for Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.5
Purple	2 years
Blue	1 year (only applies to nationalised or semi nationalised UK Banks)
Orange	1 year
Red	6 months
Green	100 days
No colour	not to be used

86. The Link creditworthiness service uses a wider array of information other than just primary ratings. Furthermore, by using a risk weighted scoring system, it does not give undue preponderance to just one agency's ratings.
87. Typically, the minimum credit ratings criteria the council uses will be a short-term rating (Fitch or equivalents) of F1 and a long-term rating of A-. There may be occasions when the counterparty ratings from one rating agency are marginally lower than these ratings but may still be used. In these instances, consideration will be given to the whole range of ratings available, or other topical market information, to support their use.
88. All credit ratings will be monitored weekly as a minimum. However, the council is alerted to changes to ratings of all three agencies through its use of the Link creditworthiness service as and when they occur so adjustments to the counterparty list would be made at each event.
- if a downgrade results in the counterparty / investment scheme no longer meeting the council's minimum criteria, its further use as a new investment will be withdrawn immediately.
 - in addition to the use of credit ratings the council will be advised of information in movements in Credit Default Swap spreads against the iTraxx European Senior Financials benchmark and other market data on a daily basis via its Passport website, provided exclusively to it by Link. Extreme market movements may result in downgrade of an institution or removal from the council's lending list.
89. Sole reliance will not be placed on the use of this external service. In addition, this council will also use market data and market information, as well as information on any external support for banks to help support its decision-making process.

Y	Pi1	Pi2	P	B	O	R	G	N/C
1	1.25	1.5	2	3	4	5	6	7
Up to 5yrs	Up to 5yrs	Up to 5yrs	Up to 2yrs	Up to 1yr	Up to 1yr	Up to 6mths	Up to 100days	No Colour

	Colour (and long-term rating where applicable)	Institution Financial Limit	Time Limit
Banks/ Building Societies *	Yellow	£20m	5 yrs
Banks/ Building Societies	Purple	£20m	2 yrs
Banks/ Building Societies	Orange	£20m	1 yr
Banks – part nationalised	Blue	£20m	1 yr
Banks/ Building Societies	Red	£15m	6 mths
Banks/ Building Societies	Green	£10m	100 days
Banks/ Building Societies	No Colour	Not to be used	
Limit 3 category – Authority’s banker (where “No Colour”)	n/a	£5m	1 day
DMADF	UK sovereign rating	unlimited	6 months
Local authorities	n/a	£10m	5 yrs
Housing associations	Colour bands	£5m	As per colour band
	Fund rating**	Institution Financial Limit	Time Limit
Money Market Funds CNAV	AAA	£20m	liquid
Money Market Funds LVNAV	AAA	£20m	liquid
Money Market Funds VNAV	AAA	£10m	liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.25	Dark Pink / AAA	£10m	liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.50	Light Pink / AAA	£10m	liquid

* *The yellow colour category is for UK Government debt, or its equivalent, money market funds and collateralised deposits where the collateral is UK Government debt.*

** *“Fund ratings” are different to individual counterparty ratings, coming under either specific “MMF” or “Band Fund” rating criteria.*

90. In addition to the above counterparty selection criteria where credit ratings have been issued, the council will also include a number of other non-rated organisations where investments may be placed for service or strategic purposes. These will be classified as Non-Specified investments and details of those counterparties are included in Annex 3 to this report.
91. Creditworthiness - Significant levels of downgrades to Short and Long-Term credit ratings have not materialised since the crisis in March 2020. In the main, where they did change, any alterations were limited to Outlooks. Nonetheless, when setting minimum sovereign debt ratings this Council will not set a minimum for the UK.

92. CDS prices - Although bank CDS prices, (these are market indicators of credit risk), spiked upwards during the days of the Truss/Kwarteng government, they have returned to more average levels since then. However, sentiment can easily shift, so it will remain important to undertake continual monitoring of all aspects of risk and return in the current circumstances. Link monitor CDS prices as part of their creditworthiness service to local authorities and the Council has access to this information via its Link-provided Passport portal.

Limits

93. Due care will be taken to consider the exposure of the council's total investment portfolio to non-specified investments, countries, groups and sectors.
- i) Non-specified Treasury Management investment limit. The council has determined that it will limit the maximum total exposure of Treasury Management investments to non-specified Treasury Management investments as being 30% of the total Treasury Management investment portfolio.
 - ii) Country limit. The council has determined that it will only use approved counterparties from the UK and from countries with a minimum sovereign credit rating of AA- from Fitch (*or equivalent*). The list of countries that qualify using this credit criteria are shown in Annex 4. This list will be added to, or deducted from, by officers should ratings change in accordance with this policy.

Other limits. In addition: -

- no more than £10m will be placed with any non-UK country at any time;
- limits in place above will apply to a group of companies/institutions;
- sector limits will be monitored regularly for appropriateness.

Investment Strategy

In-house funds

94. Investments will be made with reference to the core balance and cash flow requirements and the outlook for short-term interest rates (i.e. rates for investments up to 12 months). Greater returns are usually obtainable by investing for longer periods. The current shape of the yield curve suggests that is the case at present, but there is the prospect of Bank Rate having peaking in the second half of 2023 and possibly reducing as early as the second half of 2024 so an agile investment strategy would be appropriate to optimise returns.
95. Accordingly, while most cash balances are required in order to manage the ups and downs of cash flow, where cash sums can be identified that could be invested for longer periods, the value to be obtained from longer-term investments will be carefully assessed.

Investment returns expectations

96. The current forecast shown in paragraph 57 includes a forecast for Bank Rate to have peaked at 5.25% in Q4 2023.

97. The suggested budgeted investment earnings rates for returns on investments placed for periods up to about three months during each financial year are as follows:

Average earnings in each year	
2023/24 (residual)	5.30%
2024/25	4.70%
2025/26	3.20%
2026/27	3.00%
2027/28	3.25%
Years 6 to 10	3.25%
Years 10+	3.25%

98. As there are so many variables at this time, caution must be exercised in respect of all interest rate forecasts.
99. For its cash flow generated balances, the council will seek to utilise its business reserve instant access and notice accounts, money market funds and short-dated deposits, (overnight to 100 days), in order to benefit from the compounding of interest.

WM Combined Authority

100. The council will be prepared to lend to the Combined Authority. Such lending may be as part of arrangements agreed with the Combined Authority and other constituent authorities.

Investment treasury indicator and limit

101. These are the total principal funds invested for greater than 365 days. These limits are set with regard to the council's liquidity requirements and to reduce the need for early sale of an investment and are based on the availability of funds after each year-end.
102. The council is asked to approve the treasury indicator and limit:

Upper limit for principal sums invested for longer than 365 days			
£m	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Principal sums invested for longer than 365 days	15.000	15.000	15.000

103. As at 31 December 2023 no treasury investments were for periods greater than 365 days.

Investment Performance

104. This council will use an investment benchmark to assess the investment performance of its investment portfolio of the 7 day compounded SONIA.

End of year investment report

105. At the end of the financial year, the council will report on its investment activity as part of its Annual Treasury Report.

Money Market Funds

106. A large proportion of the council's funds are currently managed on a discretionary/pooled basis by the following institutions:
- Aberdeen Standard Liquidity Fund (Lux) – Sterling Fund (Class 1)
 - Aviva Investors Sterling Liquidity Fund (Class 3)
 - BlackRock Institutional Sterling Liquidity Fund (Heritage)
 - BNP Paribas Insticash Sterling (Institutional)
 - CCLA – The Public Sector Deposit Fund (Class 4)
 - Federated Short-Term Sterling Prime Fund (Class 3)
 - Fidelity Institutional Liquidity Sterling Fund (Class A)
 - Invesco Sterling Liquidity Portfolio (Institutional)
 - Goldman Sachs Sterling Liquid Reserves (Institutional)
107. The Council fully appreciates the importance of monitoring the activity and resultant performance of its appointed external fund managers. In order to aid this assessment, the council is provided with a suite of regular reporting from its managers via both the Institutional Cash Distributions (ICD) Portal and the fund managers themselves.

The Capital Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2024/25 – 2026/27

108. The council's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of Treasury Management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in the prudential indicators, which are designed to assist members' overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	65.681	75.289	144.476	103.553	67.253
HRA	55.043	92.837	58.945	57.857	55.541
Total	120.724	168.126	203.421	161.410	122.794

Affordability Prudential Indicators

109. The previous sections cover the overall capital and control of borrowing prudential indicators, but within this framework prudential indicators are required to assess the affordability of the capital investment plans. These provide an indication of the impact of the capital investment plans on the councils overall finances. The council is asked to approve the following indicators:

Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

110. This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (borrowing and other long-term obligation costs net of earnings from investment income) against the net revenue stream (council tax, business rates and HRA rent/ service charge income)

%	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	2.7%	2.4%	3.1%	3.3%	3.3%
HRA	17.6%	20.6%	18.5%	18.9%	18.9%
Total	7.0%	7.5%	7.7%	7.9%	8.0%

111. The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals in this budget report.

HRA Ratios

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
HRA CFR £m	517.908	573.601	591.089	608.465	623.985
Number of HRA dwellings	28,139	28,006	28,030	27,989	27,889
CFR per dwelling £	18,405	20,481	21,088	21,739	22,374
HRA debt charges £m	20.451	25.695	26.500	27.400	28.300
Number of HRA dwellings	28,139	28,006	28,030	27,989	27,889
Debt cost per dwelling £	727	917	945	979	1,015

Maturity Structure of Borrowing

112. Maturity structure of borrowing. These gross limits are set to reduce the council's exposure to large fixed rate sums falling due to refinancing and are required for upper and lower limits.
113. The council is asked to approve the following treasury indicators and limits:

Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2024/25		
	Lower	Upper
Under 12 months	0%	40%
12 months to 2 years	0%	30%
2 years to 5 years	0%	20%
5 years to 10 years	0%	25%
10 years to 20 years	0%	30%
20 years to 30 years	0%	40%
30 years to 40 years	0%	50%
40 years to 50 years	0%	70%
50 years plus	0%	90%

114. The limits for under 12 months and up to 2 years have been increased from 2023/24 limits to allow for short term fixed rate debt to be taken during this current period of high interest borrowing rates. This will allow the Council to refinance for longer periods (subject to interest rates having fallen to acceptable levels) at the time of maturity.

Glossary

The following list is to assist members in the terminology and acronyms referred to within this report.

Authorised Limit	-	This is the statutory borrowing limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. Central Government retains an option to control either the total of all councils' plans, or those of a specific council, although this power has not yet been exercised.
Capital Financing Requirement	CFR	Amounts of historic capital spend funded through borrowing that has yet to be charged to revenue through either a Minimum/ Voluntary Revenue Provision or by set aside of capital receipts.
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy	CIPFA	Accountancy body dedicated to public financial management and is responsible for setting of accounting standards for local authorities.
Investment Counterparty	-	The organisations responsible for repaying the councils investment upon maturity and for making interest payments
Credit Default Swap	CDS	A specific kind of counterparty agreement which allows the transfer of third party credit risk from one party to the other. One party in the swap is a lender and faces credit risk from a third party, and the counterparty in the credit default swap agrees to insure this risk in exchange for regular periodic payments (essentially an insurance premium). If the third party defaults, the party providing insurance will have to purchase from the insured party the defaulted asset. In turn, the insurer pays the insured the remaining interest on the debt, as well as the principal.
Credit Rating	-	This is a scoring system that rating agencies issue organisations with, to determine how credit worthy they are with AAA being the highest rating.
Internal Borrowing	-	Amounts of Capital Financing Requirement that have not been funded by actual external borrowing (e.g. PWLB) but through temporary use of cash resources thereby reducing investment income potential offset by savings in external debt interest.

Lenders Option Borrowers Option	LOBO	A form of loan which has a clause where the lender can invoke a change in interest rate at fixed points (lenders option). The borrower (i.e. the council) can then choose to exercise their option and repay the loan without penalty if it is determined that the change in rate is not in the council's interest (borrowers option).
Minimum Revenue Provision	MRP	A statutory charge to the General Fund to set funds aside for repayment of capital expenditure not yet funded from revenue or capital resources (i.e. historic expenditure funded by borrowing)
Monetary Policy Committee	MPC	Interest rates are set by the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee. The MPC sets an interest rate it judges will enable the inflation target to be met. Their primary target (as set by the Government) is to keep inflation at or around 2%.
Money Market Fund	MMF	A pooled investment vehicle (typically AAA rated) for placement of liquid investments. It is managed by external fund managers and is usually instant access.
Operational Boundary	-	The expected level of external debt the council is expected to hold each year.
Other Long Term Liabilities	OLTL	Outstanding amounts of finance relating to finance leases or PFI contracts.
Public Works Loans Board	PWLB	Branch of HM Treasury responsible for lending to local authorities.
Sterling Overnight Index Average	SONIA	Interest rate based on actual transactions and reflects the average of the interest rates that banks pay to borrow sterling overnight from other financial institutions and other institutional investors.
Working Capital		Cash and other liquid assets needed to finance the everyday running of a business such as the payment of salaries and purchases.
Yield		The annual rate of return on an investment, expressed as a percentage.

Economic Background

The first half of 2023/24 saw:

- Interest rates rise by a further 100bps, taking Bank Rate from 4.25% to 5.25% and, possibly, the peak in the tightening cycle.
- Short, medium and long-dated gilts remain elevated as inflation continually surprised to the upside.
- CPI inflation falling from 8.7% in April to 6.7% in September, its lowest rate since February 2022, but still the highest in the G7.
- Core CPI inflation declining to 6.1% in September from 7.1% in April and May, a then 31 years high.
- A cooling in labour market conditions, but no evidence yet that it has led to an easing in wage growth (as the 3myy growth of average earnings rose by 7.8% for the period June to August, excluding bonuses).

The registering of 0% GDP for Q3 suggests that underlying growth has lost momentum since earlier in the year. Some of the weakness in July was due to there being almost twice as many working days lost to strikes in July (281,000) than in June (160,000). But with output falling in 10 out of the 17 sectors, there is an air of underlying weakness.

The fall in the composite Purchasing Managers Index from 48.6 in August to 46.7 in September left it at its lowest level since COVID-19 lockdowns reduced activity in January 2021. At face value, it is consistent with the 0% q/q rise in real GDP in the period July to September, being followed by a contraction in the next couple of quarters.

The 0.4% m/m rebound in retail sales volumes in August is not as good as it looks as it partly reflected a pickup in sales after the unusually wet weather in July. Sales volumes in August were 0.2% below their level in May, suggesting much of the resilience in retail activity in the first half of the year has faded.

As the growing drag from higher interest rates intensifies over the next six months, we think the economy will continue to lose momentum and soon fall into a mild recession. Strong labour demand, fast wage growth and government handouts have all supported household incomes over the past year. And with CPI inflation past its peak and expected to decline further, the economy has got through the cost-of-living crisis without recession. But even though the worst of the falls in real household disposable incomes are behind us, the phasing out of financial support packages provided by the government during the energy crisis means real incomes are unlikely to grow strongly. Higher interest rates will soon bite harder too. We expect the Bank of England to keep interest rates at the probable peak of 5.25% until the second half of 2024. Mortgage rates are likely to stay above 5.0% for around a year.

The tightness of the labour market continued to ease, with employment in the three months to July falling by 207,000. The further decline in the number of job vacancies from 1.017m in July to 0.989m in August suggests that the labour market has loosened a bit further since July. That is the first time it has fallen below 1m since July 2021. At 3.0% in July, and likely to have fallen to 2.9% in August, the job vacancy rate is getting closer to 2.5%, which would be consistent with slower wage growth. Meanwhile, the 48,000 decline in the supply of workers in the three months to July offset some of the loosening in the tightness of the labour market. That was due to a 63,000 increase in inactivity in the three months to July as more people left the labour market due to long term sickness or to enter education. The supply of labour is still 0.3% below its pre-pandemic February 2020 level.

But the cooling in labour market conditions still has not fed through to an easing in wage growth. The headline 3my rate rose 7.8% for the period June to August, which meant UK wage growth remains much faster than in the US and in the Euro-zone. Moreover, while the Bank of England's closely watched measure of regular annual average total pay growth for the private sector was 7.1% in June to August 2023, for the public sector this was 12.5% and is the highest total pay annual growth rate since comparable records began in 2001. However, this is affected by the NHS and civil service one-off non-consolidated payments made in June, July and August 2023. The Bank of England's prediction was for private sector wage growth to fall to 6.9% in September.

CPI inflation declined from 6.8% in July to 6.7% in August and September, the lowest rate since February 2022. The biggest positive surprise was the drop in core CPI inflation, which declined from 6.9% to 6.1%. That reverses all the rise since March.

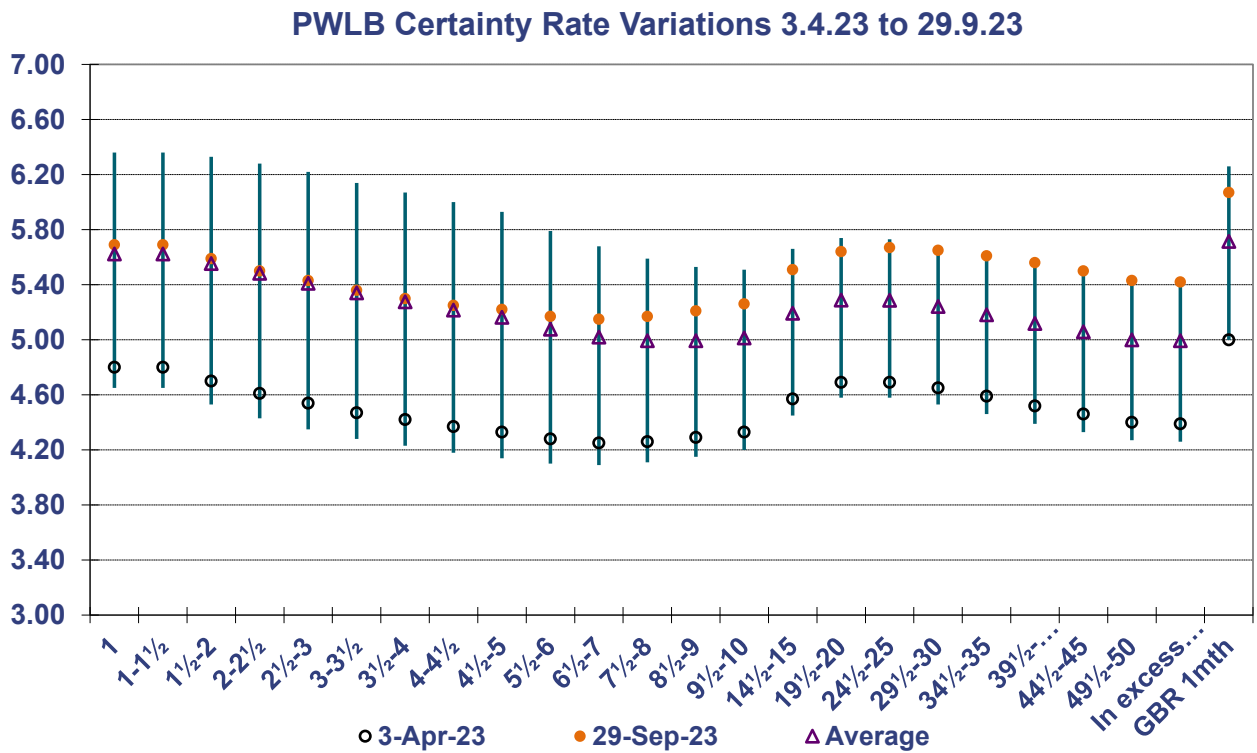
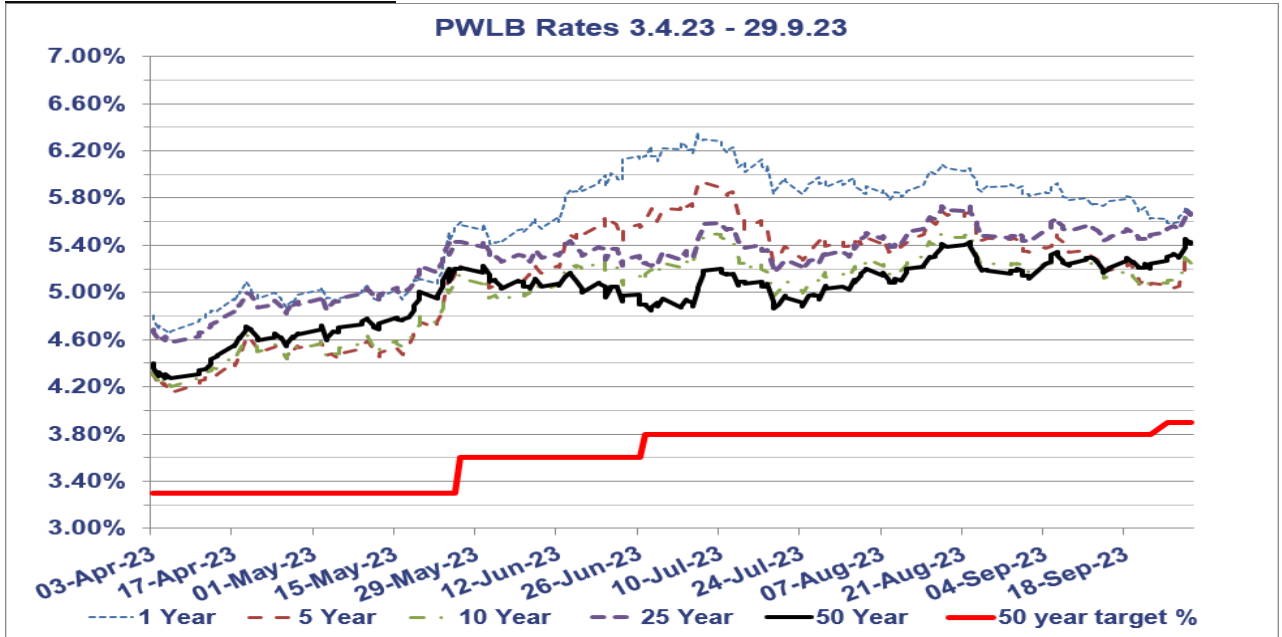
In its latest monetary policy meeting on 06 November, the Bank of England left interest rates unchanged at 5.25%. The vote to keep rates on hold was a split vote, 6-3. It is clear that some members of the MPC are still concerned about the stickiness of inflation.

Like the US Fed, the Bank of England wants the markets to believe in the higher for longer narrative. In terms of messaging, the Bank once again said that "further tightening in monetary policy would be required if there were evidence of more persistent inflationary pressures", citing the rise in global bond yields and the upside risks to inflation from "energy prices given events in the Middle East". So, like the Fed, the Bank is keeping the door open to the possibility of further rate hikes. However, it also repeated the phrase that policy will be "sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long" and that the "MPC's projections indicate that monetary policy is likely to need to be restrictive for an extended period of time". Indeed, Governor Bailey was at pains in his press conference to drum home to markets that the Bank means business in squeezing inflation out of the economy.

This narrative makes sense as the Bank of England does not want the markets to decide that a peak in rates will be soon followed by rate cuts, which would loosen financial conditions and undermine its attempts to quash inflation. The language also gives the Bank of England the flexibility to respond to new developments. A rebound in services inflation, another surge in wage growth and/or a further leap in oil prices could conceivably force it to raise rates in the future.

In the table below, the rise in gilt yields across the curve as a whole in 2023/24, and therein PWLB rates, is clear to see.

PWLB RATES 01.04.23 - 29.09.23



HIGH/LOW/AVERAGE PWLB RATES FOR 01.04.23 – 29.09.23

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
Low	4.65%	4.14%	4.20%	4.58%	4.27%
Date	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	05/04/2023
High	6.36%	5.93%	5.51%	5.73%	5.45%
Date	06/07/2023	07/07/2023	22/08/2023	17/08/2023	28/09/2023
Average	5.62%	5.16%	5.01%	5.29%	5.00%
Spread	1.71%	1.79%	1.31%	1.15%	1.18%

The peak in medium to longer dated rates has generally arisen in August and September and has been primarily driven by continuing high UK inflation, concerns that gilt issuance may be too much for the market to absorb comfortably, and unfavourable movements in US Treasuries.

The S&P 500 and FTSE 100 have struggled to make much ground through 2023.

CENTRAL BANK CONCERNS

Currently, the Fed has pushed up US rates to a range of 5.25% to 5.5%, whilst the MPC followed by raising Bank Rate to 5.25%. EZ rates have also increased to 4% with further tightening a possibility.

Ultimately, however, from a UK perspective it will not only be inflation data but also employment data that will mostly impact the decision-making process, although any softening in the interest rate outlook in the US may also have an effect (just as, conversely, greater tightening may also).

Treasury Management Practice (TMP1) – Credit and Counterparty Risk Management

Specified Investments: All such investments will be sterling denominated, with maturities up to a maximum of 1 year, meeting the minimum 'high' quality criteria where applicable. (Non-specified investments which would be specified investments apart from originally being for a period longer than 12 months, will be classified as being specified once the remaining period to maturity falls to under twelve months.)

Non-Specified Investments: These are any investments which do not meet the specified investment criteria. A maximum of 30% will be held in aggregate in non-specified investment.

A variety of investment instruments will be used, subject to the credit quality of the institution, and depending on the type of investment made, it will fall into one of the above categories.

The criteria, time limits and monetary limits applying to 'high' rated institutions or investment vehicles that could be classified as either Specified Investments or Non-Specified Investments (i.e. where maturities are more than 12 month) are detailed in the table below:

	Minimum credit criteria / colour band	Max % of total investments / £ limit per institution	Max. maturity period **
DMADF – UK Government	Yellow	100%	6 months (max. is set by the DMO *)
UK Gilts	Yellow	£10m	5 years
UK Treasury Bills	Yellow	£10m	364 days (max. is set by the DMO*)
Bonds issued by multilateral development banks	Yellow	20% / £10m	5 years
Money Market Funds CNAV	AAA	100%/ £20m	Liquid
Money Market Funds LNAV	AAA	100%/ £20m	Liquid
Money Market Funds VNAV	AAA	50%/ £10m	Liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.25	AAA	50% / £10m	Liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.5	AAA	50% / £10m	Liquid
Local Authorities	Yellow	100%/ £10m	5 years

	Minimum credit criteria / colour band	Max % of total investments / £ limit per institution	Max. maturity period **
Term Deposits with Housing Associations	Blue Orange Red Green No Colour	75% / £10m	12 months 12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
Term Deposits with Banks and Building Societies	Blue Orange Red Green No Colour	75% / £10m	12 months 12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
CDs or Corporate Bonds with Banks and Building Societies	Blue Orange Red Green No Colour	75% / £10m	12 months 12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
Gilt Funds	UK sovereign rating	£10m	

* DMO is the Debt Management Office of HM Treasury

** maturities within 12 months would be deemed Specified Investments. All other periods would be classified as Non-Specified Investments.

The table below lists counterparties and limits for non-rated institutions that would be deemed Non-Specified Investments regardless of time until maturity.

Non-Specified Investment Category	Limit
The council's own banker if it fails to meet the basic credit criteria. In this instance balances will be minimized as far as is possible.	£15m
Building Schools for the Future Local Education Partnership. Whilst this is not a usual investment counterparty, the council is likely to invest a small amount as part of the wider Building Schools for the Future project.	£1m
Sandwell Inspired Partnership Services. Whilst this is not a usual investment counterparty, the council is likely to invest a small amount for the organisation to be use as working capital in its infancy.	£1.5m
Bond funds this Authority will seek further advice on the appropriateness and associated risks with investments in these categories.	£10m

Property funds the use of these instruments can be deemed to be capital expenditure and as such will be an application (spending) of capital resources. This council will seek guidance on the status of any fund it may consider using.	£10m
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Accounting treatment of investments. The accounting treatment may differ from the underlying cash transactions arising from investment decisions made by this council. To ensure that the council is protected from any adverse revenue implications, which may arise from these differences, we will review the accounting implications of new transactions before they are undertaken.

Approved Countries for Investment

This list is based on those countries which have sovereign ratings of AA- or higher as at 19 December 2023, (we show the lowest rating from Fitch, Moody's and S&P) and also, (except - at the time of writing - for Hong Kong and Luxembourg), have banks operating in sterling markets which have credit ratings of green or above in the Link creditworthiness service.

Based on lowest available rating

AAA

- Australia
- Denmark
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Singapore
- Sweden
- Switzerland

AA+

- Canada
- Finland
- U.S.A.

AA

- Abu Dhabi (UAE)

AA-

- Belgium
- France
- Qatar
- U.K.

Although this list includes all countries that have a credit rating above the approved minimum rating, ethical considerations will also be taken into account before a country is included in the final approved list.

The Treasury Management role of the Section 151 Officer

The S151 officer is responsible for:

- recommending clauses, Treasury Management policy/practices for approval, reviewing the same regularly, and monitoring compliance;
- submitting regular Treasury Management policy reports;
- submitting budgets and budget variations;
- receiving and reviewing management information reports;
- reviewing the performance of the Treasury Management function;
- ensuring the adequacy of Treasury Management resources and skills, and the effective division of responsibilities within the Treasury Management function;
- ensuring the adequacy of internal audit, and liaising with external audit;
- recommending the appointment of external service providers.

Summary of Treasury and Prudential Indicators

Prudential Indicator - Capital Expenditure and Financing:

Capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	65.681	75.289	144.476	103.553	67.253
HRA	55.043	92.837	58.945	57.857	55.541
Total	120.724	168.126	203.421	161.410	122.794

Financing of capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital receipts	1.677	6.000	9.658	11.651	13.641
Capital grants and Contributions	45.105	51.355	131.699	99.743	61.302
Major Repairs Reserve	16.834	17.490	18.089	18.000	17.950
Revenue Contributions	6.010	10.222	3.560	-	-
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
<i>Non-HRA amounts</i>	<i>19.265</i>	<i>25.977</i>	<i>21.504</i>	<i>13.016</i>	<i>10.851</i>
<i>HRA amounts</i>	<i>31.833</i>	<i>57.082</i>	<i>18.911</i>	<i>19.000</i>	<i>19.050</i>

Prudential Indicator - Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) Projections:

£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital Financing Requirement					
Non-HRA	334.348	350.655	357.949	355.941	350.686
Housing	517.908	573.601	591.089	608.465	623.985
Total CFR	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

Movement in CFR represented by					
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Less MRP/VRP	(6.593)	(7.151)	(11.477)	(12.211)	(12.881)
Other financing movements (i.e. PFI)	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

Prudential Indicator – Gross debt projections compared to CFR:

£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
External Debt					
Debt at 1 April	475.588	470.808	553.867	594.282	626.298
Expected change in Debt	(4.780)	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Other long-term liabilities (OLTL) at 1 April - PFI	68.525	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Expected change in OLTL	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Actual gross debt at 31 March	536.285	615.436	651.695	679.274	702.420
The Capital Financing Requirement	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Over/ (Under) Borrowing	(315.971)	(308.820)	(297.343)	(285.132)	(272.251)

Treasury Indicators - Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit:

Operational Boundary £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	553.867	594.282	626.298	656.199
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Total	619.344	655.851	683.711	709.175

Authorised Limit £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	901.718	931.842	952.343	967.780
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	85.477	81.569	77.413	72.976
Total	987.195	1,013.411	1,029.756	1,040.756

Treasury Indicator - Investment limits for periods greater than 365 days:

Upper limit for principal sums invested for longer than 365 days			
£m	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Principal sums invested for longer than 365 days	15.000	15.000	15.000

Note: current treasury amounts invested for periods greater than 365 days is nil

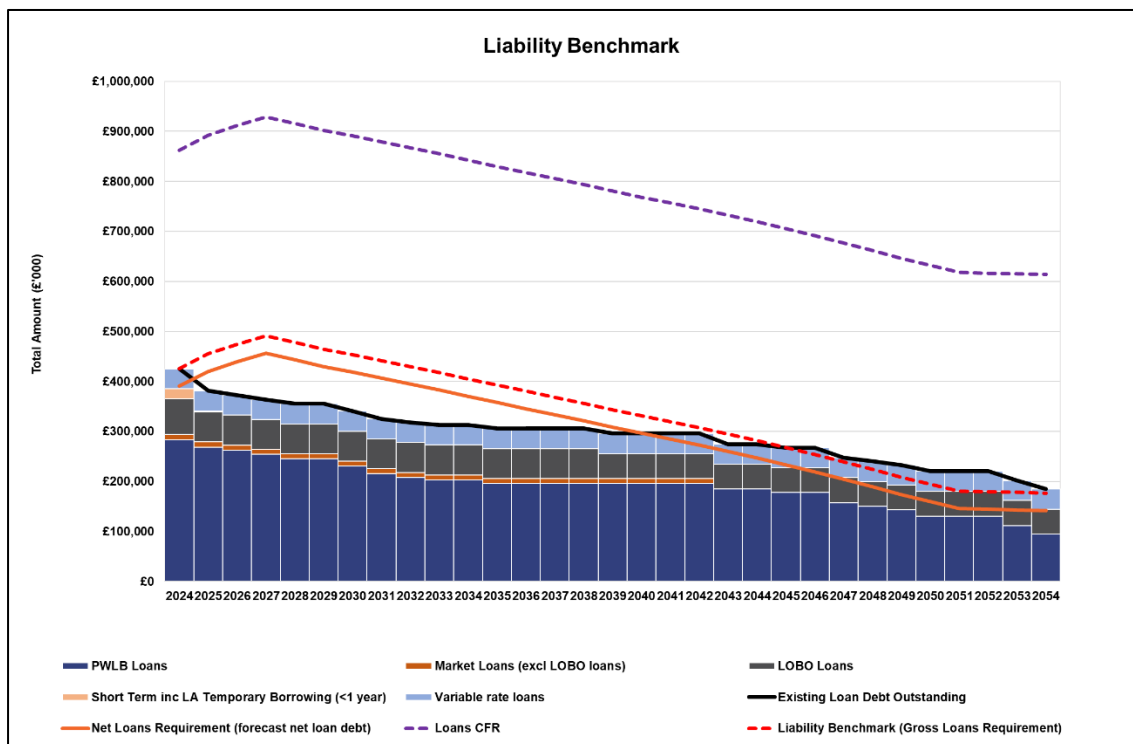
Prudential Indicator - Ratios of financing costs to net revenue stream:

%	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	2.7%	2.4%	3.1%	3.3%	3.3%
HRA	17.6%	20.6%	18.5%	18.9%	18.9%
Total	7.0%	7.5%	7.7%	7.9%	8.0%

Treasury Indicator - Maturity structure for fixed rate debt:

Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2024/25		
	Lower	Upper
Under 12 months	0%	40%
12 months to 2 years	0%	30%
2 years to 5 years	0%	20%
5 years to 10 years	0%	25%
10 years to 20 years	0%	30%
20 years to 30 years	0%	40%
30 years to 40 years	0%	50%
40 years to 50 years	0%	70%
50 years plus	0%	90%

Prudential Indicator - Liability Benchmark



Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework

2024/25

Recommendations

1. For the reasons set out in the report it is recommended that Cabinet endorse and recommend to Full Council that -
 - i) approval be given for the Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework for 2024-25 comprising the policies set out at Annexes 1 to 9 of this report;
 - ii) approval be granted for the Council Tax Award of Discount Policy (Annex 2), Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy (Annex 3), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Policy (Annex 8), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Hardship Relief Policy (Annex 7) and War Pension Policy (Annex 9) as set out in Annex 2; and
 - iii) Authority be given to the Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer in conjunction with Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and in consultation with the Monitoring Officer to make necessary changes to the policies during 2024-25 due to the Cost of Living Crisis.

Context and Key Issues

2. The existing Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework includes:
 - i) Corporate Debt Recovery Policy
 - ii) Council Tax Award of Discount Policy
 - iii) Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy
 - iv) Flood Relief Policy
 - v) Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
 - vi) Local Welfare Provision Policy
 - vii) Non-Domestic Rate Hardship Relief Policy
 - viii) Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
 - ix) The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy
3. The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy includes a statement covering the introduction of changes effective from 1st April 2024. This is based on regulation amendments to charge an additional 100% for Council Tax where properties have remained empty and unfurnished for a period of 1 year or more (currently this is 2 years). The Council previously used its discretion to agree to these changes at a cabinet meeting in February 2023 and the new charges will come into effect from 1st April 2024.
4. The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy also includes details of new legislation detailing the way in which second homes may be charged. These changes relate to properties which are left empty, is not deemed someone's sole or main residence when empty and the owner has multiple properties. At present these properties are charged 100% Council Tax from the day they become empty but the new legislation provides Councils with discretion to charge an additional 100%. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which introduces this legislation contains a clause requiring the authority to make the determination at least one year before the start of the year to which it relates. If the decision is

taken to introduce these changes they will therefore not be effective until 1st April 2025. The table below summarises the changes:

	Current Charge	Charge as of 01 April 2024	Charge as of 01 April 2025	Notes
Empty & Unfurnished	100%	100%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty & Furnished	100%	100%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty Homes Premium – between 1 & 2 years	100%	200%	N/A	Changes in legislation will allow us to apply the premium after 1 year and not wait until it has been empty for 2 years
Empty Homes Premium – between 2 & 4 years	200%	200%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty Homes Premium – between 5 & 9 years	300%	300%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty Homes Premium – between 10 years plus	400%	400%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Second Home Premium – from day 1 (empty properties where the owner has more than one property and is either furnished or unfurnished)	N/A	N/A	200%	This premium although recently passed in Parliament cannot be adopted by Authorities until our intention to implement has been publicly advertised for a 12 month period, and therefore, can only be considered in Sandwell from 01 April 2025 at the earliest

- The new Housing Benefit War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Disregard Policy 2024/25 details Sandwell's decision to disregard all the war pension income when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit assessment. Sandwell has 11 Housing Benefit claimants who receive this additional disregard.

6. For the reasons set out in the report, Cabinet is asked to recommend that Full Council re-affirm its previous decision to approve the disregard of War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s pensions in full as income above the statutory £10.00 per week disregard in the calculation of Housing Benefit entitlement and in full as income in relation to the means tested assessment of Council Tax Reduction Scheme discount through a War Pension Policy as set out in Annex 9 to this report.
7. Prior to the introduction of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, a statutory £10.00 per week disregard operated for War Disability and War Widows pensions through means tested social security benefits including Housing Benefit. Any amount above the £10.00 per week disregard of pension income was counted as income, reducing the amount of benefit received.
8. S.134(8) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 permitted administering local authorities to disregard up to 100% of war pensions above the £10.00 per week disregard. This had to be agreed by Full Council with any cost of this disregard being borne by the relevant local authority. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) through a resolution of Full Council agreed to disregard war pensions in full above the weekly disregard during the 1990's.
9. From April 2004, Government agreed to subsidise 75% of the discretionary disregard Councils made if the amount did not exceed 0.2% of the total Housing Benefit subsidy received. This means that local authorities now only pay for 25% of the discretionary disregard. From April 2005, War Pension and War Widow(er)s Pension schemes were closed to applicants who were injured or became a widow(er) after this date – these were replaced by the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. Payments from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme were given a full statutory disregard in means tested benefits, including Housing Benefit.
10. A number of local authorities have been asked to provide evidence that they had passed resolutions disregarding War Pensions and War Widow(er) Pensions by their external auditors. Many local authorities no longer retain original documentation confirming the disregard. Sandwell MBC has similarly been asked to provide the documentation confirming the passage of resolutions disregarding War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s Pensions. Whilst a search has been undertaken the resolution has yet to be retrieved from historic records.
11. This report therefore seeks a decision of Full Council to re-affirm the discretionary disregards for War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s Pensions in order to safeguard the finances of war pensioners and war widow(er)s.”
12. The Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy details changes following the introduction of new regulations relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). These changes effective from December 2023 will result in licenced HMO's being re-assessed by the Valuation Office Agency. Where tenants are affected by these changes as rooms are individually banded, we will consider supporting with Section 13a, 1C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which allows the Council to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable. Legislation does not dictate the circumstances in which reductions apply and therefore the Council must use discretion in deciding whether to use these powers.
13. The Local Welfare Provision Policy for 2024-25 is subject to funding being available to provide the support

14. The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy for 2024/25 was in a separate report and has been approved by Cabinet and full Council in December 2023.

15. There have been no changes to any of the other policy intentions.

Alternative Options

16. The Council is required to set out its application of areas of the legislation which allow local application of rules. The policy framework achieves this.

Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>There is a direct cost to the local Council Taxpayers for Discretionary Rate Relief granted. The Council cannot refuse any applications, which comply with its Discretionary Rate Relief policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>There is a direct cost to the local Council Taxpayers of any relief granted under the provisions of s.49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The cost of any relief granted under s.13A (Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy) is borne by the local Council Taxpayers.</p> <p>The cost of Discretionary Housing Payments in excess of the Government Contribution is borne by the local Council Taxpayers, unless we are able to claim part of this from the Housing Revenue Account. The Council Tax Award of Discounts Policy generates additional income for the council through Council Tax collection.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The policy on s.49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 Hardship Relief complies with appropriate legislation relating to the Council’s powers with regard to awarding relief.</p> <p>The Council cannot refuse any applications which comply with its policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>The policy on Discretionary Rate Relief, complies with appropriate legislation relating to the Council’s powers with regard to awarding Discretionary Rate Relief to businesses. The Council cannot refuse any applications for Discretionary Rate Relief, which comply with its policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>The policy on Discretionary Housing Payments complies with appropriate legislation.</p> <p>The s.13A Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy complies with appropriate legislation. The Council cannot refuse any applications for relief, which comply with its policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy complies with appropriate legislation to allow the Council to set locally prescribed levels of discounts for empty domestic properties.</p>

Risk:	Risk assessments, where required, have been previously undertaken. As these policies have been in place for several years no significant risks have been identified or have occurred.
Equality:	Equality impact assessments (EIA) have previously been completed on all of the policies.
Health and Wellbeing:	Several of the policies provide additional financial support to some of our most vulnerable residents.
Social Value:	Sandwell's Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework is operating well and providing crucial support to vulnerable, low income households.
Climate Change:	No impact.
Corporate Parenting:	No impact

Annexes

- Annex 1 Corporate Debt Recovery Policy
- Annex 2 Council Tax Award of Discount Policy
- Annex 3 Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy
- Annex 4 Flood Relief Policy
- Annex 5 Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
- Annex 6 Local Welfare Provision Policy
- Annex 7 Non-Domestic Rate Hardship Relief Policy
- Annex 8 Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
- Annex 9 The Housing Benefit War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Disregard Policy 2024/25

Background Papers

None

Corporate Debt Recovery Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

Introduction

1. This document details the Council's policies on the billing, collection and recovery of monies due to the Council. Sums due to the Council can be a mixture of statutory and non-statutory charges. The methods for billing and recovery of the statutory debts are tightly prescribed by statute.
2. This Policy sets out the general principles to be applied in relation to debt management across all services provided by the Council.
3. It is essential that all monies due are collected effectively by the Council and that debts owed are kept to a minimum. This is because the Council has both a legal duty and a responsibility to its citizens to ensure that income due is paid promptly.
4. The management of income is a key business area for the Council. The Council collects income from many streams; some of this activity is governed by legislation while others by sound principles of financial management. The key to economic, efficient, and effective income management is the creation and maintenance of a clear framework that sets out the approach, principles, and strategy within which all activities will be conducted.
5. This policy also recognises that collection of debt should be fair to everyone, especially those on limited incomes who struggle to pay or those who have not paid because of an oversight. It is also recognised that some people deliberately avoid their payment obligations by delaying their payments or choosing not to make payment and proportionate measures will be deployed to develop a culture of payment while encouraging those in need of help to get in touch with the Council at an early stage.
6. Where a person or organisation makes contact to discuss payment difficulties their circumstances will be considered fairly and objectively with a view to agreeing a reasonable payment arrangement, minimising recovery action, and avoiding potential additional costs. Where people or organisations fail to make contact or maintain their payment obligations, recovery action will continue in the wider public interest.
7. Underpinning this policy are effective income management processes critical to the delivery of overall Council objectives, as every pound of income that is not collected or takes extra effort to collect, ultimately leads to additional financial pressures on the Councils budget.
8. This policy applies to the collection of:
 - Council Tax & Non-Domestic Rates Policy (**Appendix 1**)
 - Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy (**Appendix 2**)
 - Sundry Debt (Council Services) Policy (**Appendix 3**)
 - Bankruptcy Policy (**Appendix 4**)
 - Write-Offs Policy (**Appendix 5**)

9. This policy intends to:

- Recover all money outstanding in respect of debts owed to the Council.
- Protect the Council's finances for the good of all residents within the Sandwell area.
- Ensure that enforcement action is taken to recover debts.
- Facilitate a coordinated approach to managing multiple debts owed to the Council.
- Ensure that the Council engages with debtors when enforcing debts to take the appropriate action considering the individual circumstances of the debtor.
- Identify, where appropriate, support which may be required to those owing money to the Council;
- Giving specific considerations to vulnerable customers where appropriate.
- Apply best practice to debt collection.
- Minimise the risk of bad debts.

General Principles

10. All directorates will work together to ensure the most appropriate arrangement for recovery of debts is achieved. In cases of multiple debts, a lead officer may be appointed. The lead officer will be responsible for liaising with relevant service areas. To assist Sandwell Council is working towards a Single View of debt across all recovery areas.
11. In all cases the Council will work with the debtor taking account of their individual circumstances in order to arrive at an arrangement that is reasonable to both them and the Council.
12. A flexible approach will be adopted to ensure regular payments. This reduces the risk of further action and unnecessary additional costs becoming payable, it also maintains collection.
13. Where necessary when working with debtors the Council will provide additional support with the aim of maximising their income by: -
- Providing welfare advice to ensure the debtor is receiving any benefits, reductions, and discounts they are entitled to.
 - Promoting and referring debtors to agencies who can offer personal budgeting support / debt advice/ affordable credit.

Principles of recovery action

14. The Council will ensure that: -

- Any recovery action taken will be proportionate

Proportionality allows for a balance to be struck between the potential loss of income due to the Council and the costs of compliance.

- The approach taken will be consistent

15. Consistency means taking a similar approach in similar circumstances to achieve similar objectives. The Council aims to achieve this in the advice given, the use of its powers and the recovery procedures used. At the same time, the Council recognises the need to treat everyone as individuals and therefore will aim to take account of many variables such as the social circumstances of the individual, the payment history, and their ability to pay.

- The actions taken will be transparent
16. Transparency is important in maintaining public confidence in the Council. It means that helping people to understand what is expected of them, to meet their payment obligations and what they should expect from the Council. It also means clearly explaining the reasons for taking any recovery action and the next steps that the Council may take if payment is not made.
 17. The Council will also work with the voluntary sector and advice agencies, where we collectively:
 - Acknowledge that there is a distinction between can't and won't pay
 18. The policy will ensure fairness in that every debtor has an obligation to repay their debt owed so that future services do not suffer. Those who pay promptly should not subsidise those who are not prepared to pay what they owe.
 - Recognise that advice and early intervention is a key element from the perspective of all partners.
 19. The policy will ensure that the Council and its partner organisations will treat all debtors fairly and, where possible they will promote free debt advice services. Where appropriate, payment agreements will be put in place to assist debtors in adverse financial circumstances. The decision to agree a repayment timetable will be influenced by the willingness of the debtor to take advantage of the debt advice at an early stage.
 - Acknowledge that financial capability and vulnerability are sometimes underlying issues around non-payment.
 20. The policy will seek to promote financial inclusion and early intervention by recognising that debtors may have underlying problems with money management or may not be receiving all the financial assistance to which they are entitled.
 21. In all cases consideration will be given to the value of the outstanding debt and the cost of recovering that debt and where the Council believes it is uneconomical to pursue recovery the debt may be recommended for write off.

Policy aims and objectives

22. The key aims are to:
 - Ensure the Council provides bills promptly and remind people quickly if they do not pay.
 - Offer efficient and flexible payment methods
 - Encourage people to make early contact to avoid the build-up of debt
 - Inform people of their entitlement to benefits, discounts and exemptions to ensure maximum take-up and that net bills/liabilities are issued
 - Inform people of the general availability of income related benefits such as Universal Credit, Pension Credits, Housing and Council Tax Reduction

- Take positive action to prevent arrears from occurring in the first place, maximising income, and entitlement at an early stage
- Take recovery action against deliberate non-payers or those who delay payment without genuine reason while always working to identify and assist those who genuinely can't pay or are finding it difficult to pay
- Where people have fallen or are likely to fall into arrears, a commitment to work with them and their representatives to set reasonable and realistic payment levels that they can maintain, ensuring that payment arrangements reflect the ability to pay as well as the level of debt owed
- Work in a co-ordinated approach with multiple debts owed to the Council. Priority will be given to debts where non-payment could lead directly to the loss of a person's home in the case of non-payment of housing rent. Other debts owed to the Council may, depending on the circumstances, be treated to as a lower priority until payment of the priority debt owed to the Council is made
- Work in partnership with recognised advice agencies to advise people who need help and guidance to repay debts where they can get independent advice from to assist with wider financial problems

Principles of enforcement action

23. Where a debt remains outstanding for a service provision and there is no statutory obligation to provide the service, consideration will be given to terminate the service until such time that the debt is brought up to date.
24. Costs incurred are the responsibility of the customer, the aim of the policy is to minimise such costs wherever possible.
25. Payment orders made by a Court will take priority over any informal payment arrangement
26. We will utilise all methods of recovery available.
27. Enforcement agents and debt collection agencies instructed by the Council will be required to work within agreed guidelines, legislation and Codes of Practice always.

Policy review

28. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments, feedback and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

29. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Vulnerable customers

30. We understand that there are members of our community that may be considered vulnerable, therefore require additional support. Being vulnerable does not mean that you will not have to pay anything that you are legally obliged to pay.

Where we identify someone as being vulnerable, consideration should be given to:

- Longer period to pay
 - Holding off enforcement action for an agreed period
 - Assisting with the taxpayer to claim the right benefits, reductions, discounts or any other entitlement
 - Referring a taxpayer to our Welfare Rights team if appropriate and sources of independent advice services
 - Agreed temporary payment arrangement with lower repayments with a review date
31. We are aware that a taxpayer's vulnerability status may be temporary or permanent in nature but will vary widely. In order to aide us in identifying a vulnerable person we have a list below, identifying some characteristics of a vulnerable person. However, each case must be taken on its own merit:

- Disabled Person
- People experiencing serious illness, including mental illness
- People aged under 18
- Elderly people
- People in late stages of pregnancy

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Council Tax and Business Rates Policy

Introduction

1. This document explains the Revenues Service approach to administering the billing, collection and recovery of Council Tax as laid down by the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Local Government Finance Act 1988 and all other supporting legislation. The document details information about the billing and recovery processes. The intention is to explain the processes clearly to show the transparent nature of the work, rather than give a detailed analysis of the legislation involved.

The Billing Process

2. The Council recognises that providing a correct bill in an efficient way maximises the likelihood of helping customers pay on time, and it strives to issue accurate bills to customers as promptly as possible, and to offer helpful advice face-to-face, in writing, by e-mail, over the phone and through advice on the website.
3. All available discounts, exemptions, valuation band changes, and Council Tax reduction will be granted in appropriate cases at the earliest possible time to ensure the amount owed is correct. Customers will be given the maximum number of instalments that are available so that payment can be spread over the longest period within the year.
4. Discounts, exemptions and reliefs will be reviewed periodically engaging external contractors and utilising third party data where appropriate and lawful, however it remains a customer responsibility to inform the Council within 21 days of any changes in their circumstances that may affect their entitlement to any reduction in their charges.
5. Clear information regarding reductions, reliefs, including benefit, is widely available through leaflets that are provided with annual bills and through the website. Officers are trained to advise customers about the range of benefits, discounts, and exemptions available and how to make claims.
6. Where there is a joint occupation or ownership, for example joint tenants or owners, or partnerships like husband and wife, both are expected to pay the charge. All bills and other correspondence will be addressed to all the liable persons for the charge. The law says that each person will be liable both for their own share of the charge and for the whole charge (called "jointly and severally liable"), so if necessary action for recovery of the debt will be taken against any or all of the liable persons.
7. If a taxpayer disputes the basis of why or what they have been charged in relation to Council Tax, the Council will advise them of their appeal rights by initially writing to the Council or alternatively by seeking redress at the Valuation Tribunal for Wales.
8. Council Tax and Business Rates is charged for financial years beginning on 1st April and ending on 31st March the following year. Taxpayers who receive an annual bill during March will normally receive ten monthly instalments payable between April and January inclusive, but the Council also welcome taxpayers to pay over 12 months. As the financial year progresses, less months are available, so the number of instalments reduces. Between 1st May and 31st December, the number of instalments allowed for the year's charge is the number of whole months less one. New bills created from January will usually be given one instalment payable within 14 days from the date of the bill.

The Recovery Process

9. The Council only must prove recovery documents are issued in time and in line with regulations; it is not necessary to prove customers have received them.
10. As Council Tax and Business Rates are statutory charges it is very important that taxpayers give it a high priority when looking at their finances. If monthly instalments are paid late, or not at all, the Council will take action to recover the overdue amounts by sending documents that explain the consequences of delaying or not making payment. Taxpayers are actively encouraged to contact the Council without delay if they experience difficulties in paying their bill.
11. The Council has a planned annual recovery and enforcement timetable that sets out the dates for the issue of all recovery documents like reminders, final notices, and summonses. It also details magistrates' court hearing dates and targets for transmitting accounts for further recovery action using Enforcement Agents. The enforcement taken will be:

Reminders and Final Notice Stage:

12. Apart from any accounts issued near the end of a financial year, all bills include a monthly instalment scheme. It is a taxpayer's responsibility to make sure that instalments are paid on time. If taxpayers do not pay, or if they make occasional or irregular payments that are not received on or by the due date, they will be considered overdue. If this happens, recovery action will be taken, initially in the form of a 1st Reminder Notice.
13. Legislation allows for reminders to be sent immediately after an instalment is due, but the Council will usually allow taxpayers 12 days after a payment has become overdue before issuing a 1st reminder.
14. If an overdue instalment is subject to a 1st Reminder Notice, a taxpayer is required to make payment in full of the overdue instalment within 7 days. If payment is made as required, future instalments can then be paid as shown on the bill.
15. If the overdue instalment is paid, but a future instalment is not paid on time a 2nd Reminder Notice will be issued. If payment is made as required, future instalments can then be paid as shown on the bill. The second reminder states clearly that no further reminder notices will be sent if future instalments are not paid on time.
16. If payment is not made within 7 days following the issue of a of a 1st or 2nd reminder notice, after a further seven days a Final Notice will be sent for the full amount outstanding for the year.
17. Additionally, a Final Notice will also be issued if part or all of an instalment is overdue for a third time. This requires the full annual charge that is outstanding, rather than just the overdue instalment, to be paid in full within seven days. If payment is not made as required a summons will be sent for the full amount outstanding for the year together with associated costs of £79 for the issue of the summons.
18. Dependent on how promptly taxpayers pay, no more than two reminders and one final notice will be issued in a financial year before a summons is issued. Where the right to pay by instalments is lost due to consistent late payment, or no payment, this will only be forfeited for the current financial year; the right to pay by instalments will be reinstated when subsequent years' charges become due
19. Reminder and Final Notices confirm the full range of payment methods available and include information to encourage taxpayers to get in touch with the Council to discuss payment difficulties. The Council will, where appropriate, re-instate a taxpayer's instalment scheme where the taxpayer has agreed to bring the account up to date and switch to payment by direct debit for payment of future payments.

20. The Council will normally only offer to re-instate instalments once in any financial year following the issue of a final reminder. The Council recognises the offer to re-instate instalment may help a taxpayers meet financial obligations, but at the same time, the taxpayers previous payment history will be considered to ensure habitual late payers are not continually given the opportunity to delay payment.

Summons Stage:

21. In the event of late or non-payment as explained above, the Council will issue a Summons at the Magistrates' Court, giving at least fourteen days' notice of the hearing date. The summons will confirm the charge outstanding together with court costs that are added to the amount payable in recognition of the extra work needed to secure payment. The additional costs charged for a summons are currently £79 for Council Tax and £112 for Business Rates.
22. The summons will confirm the date and time of the Magistrates Court hearing at which the Council's officer will need to satisfy the Magistrate that the customer is the liable person, does owe the amount outstanding, and that the Council has sent the correct documents to the customers' current or last known address.
23. Taxpayers who pay the full amount confirmed on the summons, including the additional £79 costs or £112 costs for ratepayers before the hearing date do not have to attend court, however any payment arrangement made following the issue of a summons which extends payment beyond the liability order court hearing date will be made on the basis that the application for a liability order will continue and will include the initial £79 court costs for Council Tax or £112 court costs for Business Rates and additional costs of .50p for the issue of a Liability Order (i.e. a total of £79.50 costs for Council Tax or £112.50 for Business Rates).
24. Attendance at the Magistrates Court is not compulsory, and usually the majority of customers summonsed do not attend. A taxpayer can dispute the charge or speak to the Court. The Court will give an audience to anyone who wishes to appear, however, unless the taxpayer has a valid defence then the Court is obliged to grant a Liability Order.

Liability Order stage

25. Following the issue of a Liability Order, the Council will write to the taxpayer or ratepayer to secure full payment or to make a suitable payment agreement. The notification will also provide details of potential consequences of enforcement action (and additional enforcement (Bailiff) costs) if the taxpayer does not make payment or fails to make a payment agreement. For Council Tax matters, the Council will also request to a taxpayer complete a 'statutory request for information', with details of their employment details, and if appropriate, information about any benefit that is received. Taxpayers are required to complete and return the statutory request within 14 days.
26. The Council will enter into a payment agreement with a taxpayer or ratepayer using the first principle that the outstanding balance must be paid in full prior to the end of the financial year, although in cases where there is no ongoing liability, payment agreements may be extended beyond the end of the financial year, depending on the circumstances of the case.
27. Following the issue of a Liability and in the event of the taxpayer not returning the 'statutory request for information' or failing to make a payment agreement, the recovery action to be taken will be dependent on the circumstances of each individual case and with due regard to the most effective way for the Council to collect :
28. Attachment of Earnings – Attachments require an employer of the taxpayer (for Council Tax only) to deduct a set percentage of the earnings and send them directly to the Council to pay the outstanding

Liability Order. The amount of money deducted depends on how much is earned and whether the person is paid weekly or monthly. The deductions are governed by Council Tax regulations.

29. Attachment from Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance, Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance – Attachments require the Department of Work and Pensions to make deductions from the taxpayer's benefit. The level of deduction is fixed by the Government but does increase annually.
30. Attachment of Members Allowances – The Council may make an attachment of the allowances of an elected member.
31. Taking Control of Goods & Use of Enforcement Agents – Enforcement Agents contracted by the Council may be used where no attachment is possible or suitable. The Enforcement Agents will always be required to comply with the Taking Control of Goods Regulations 2014.
32. Initially, if a debt has been passed to an enforcement agent a fixed fee of £75 for each liability order will be incurred. This is known as the compliance stage and taxpayers are encouraged to make early contact with the Enforcement Team within 10 days to pay the amounts due in full or set up a realistic repayment plan.
33. If taxpayers fail to engage or set up a repayment plan at the compliance stage, the liability order(s) will be passed to the Enforcement Agent for a visit to be undertaken. If the Enforcement Agent is required to visit there is a fixed fee of £235 plus 7.5% for any balance due above £1,500.
34. The enforcement agent will normally ask taxpayers for payment in full, however the enforcement agent will normally also enter into a Controlled Goods Agreement which also provides taxpayers with an opportunity to pay.
35. If possessions are subject to a Controlled Goods Agreement these goods cannot be disposed or sold without the enforcement agents consent.
36. If taxpayers refuse to sign a Controlled Goods Agreement the enforcement agent can take goods to the value of the debt whilst at the property. There are additional costs of £110 plus 7.5% for any balance due above £1,500 if goods must be removed and sold.
37. If the enforcement agent decides the value of the goods is insufficient to pay the amount outstanding and there is no prospective of making payment agreement, or the taxpayer cannot be traced the enforcement agent will normally return the Liability Order to the Council which ends the enforcement agent action.
38. If enforcement agent action proves unsuccessful, the Council will then consider whether to take further recovery action, dependent on the specific personal and financial circumstances of each individual case and with due regard to the most effective way for the Council to collect:
39. Charging Order – For taxpayers owing £1,000 or more, the Council may apply to the County Court for an Order that places a charge on the taxpayer's property and the court, in certain circumstances, empowering the sale of the property if the taxpayer does not pay. The obtaining of a charging order does not prompt automatic payment of the amount outstanding; providing there is sufficient equity in the property value following the repayment of any outstanding mortgage or other existing registered charges, it secures payment of the debt when the property is sold. Before such action is taken, the Council will always send a final letter inviting the taxpayer to a pre-arranged meeting to make a payment agreement.
40. Bankruptcy – For taxpayers owing £5,000 or more, the Council may also consider taking bankruptcy action. Before such action is taken, the Council will always send a final letter inviting the taxpayer to a

pre-arranged meeting to make a payment agreement. Bankruptcy will be considered, only as a last resort, in line with the policy in Appendix 4.

Write Offs

41. The Council recognises that where a debt is deemed to be irrecoverable, especially after all recovery options have been considered and/or taken, prompt write off of such debts is appropriate and good practice in certain circumstances and in line with the policy in Appendix 5.

Appendix 2 - Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy

Introduction

42. This policy document sets out Sandwell MBC's commitment to the recovery of Housing Benefit Overpayment in accordance with the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 and the Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained State Pension Age) Regulations 2006
43. It is essential that Sandwell MBC demonstrates that it carries out recovery of Housing Benefit Overpayments efficiently and effectively.
44. By doing so the Council:
- Reduces losses to Public Funds
 - Provides revenue for the Council
 - Helps reduce the loss from overpayments
 - Deters fraud and error
 - Demonstrates commitment to accuracy and provision of a quality service to customers.

General Principle

45. Overpayments are established through a review of benefit entitlement, where the original decision is superseded or in rare instances the correction of an accidental error. They are amounts of benefit that have been paid to which there is no entitlement.

Prevention of overpayments

46. We will endeavour to minimise the level of overpayments by:
- Paying Housing Benefit promptly;
 - Continuously reviewing and improving our systems and working practices;
 - Actively encouraging customers to promptly report changes in circumstances.

Identification

47. Accurate and prompt identification of overpayments is important to ensure we maximise the successful recovery of the overpayment and reduce the number of complaints and appeals.
48. To help identify overpayments the council will:
- Establish the cause of the overpayment and whether it is recoverable and from whom it should be recovered.
 - Calculate underlying entitlement in all cases
 - Ensure that every overpayment has been classified correctly,
 - Notify the customer of the overpayment in accordance with current legislation
 - Determine the best method of recovery.

- Not commence recovery until the individual has had the right to dispute the decision (in accordance with the timescales set out in the legislation).
- Offer help and advice to customers wishing to dispute the decision to recover the overpayment.
- In the event of being unable to recover an overpayment, promptly submit the debt for 'write-off'.

Recoverability

49. If the overpayment was caused by misrepresentation or failure to disclose information, then the overpayment must be recovered from the person who misrepresented or failed to disclose that information.
50. If the overpayment was caused by official error it must be recovered from the person who at the time of receiving the payments, could reasonably have been expected to know that they were being overpaid.
51. An overpayment can be recovered from:
- The claimant
 - The partner, if they were members of the same household at the time of the overpayment was created
 - The person to whom the overpayment was paid

52. If a deceased person has an outstanding overpayment recovery can be sought from their estate.

Recovery from on-going Benefit

53. Where the claimant is still entitled to Housing Benefit the overpayment should be recovered from their on-going entitlement.
54. The maximum deductions are provided by the government on an annual basis
55. Where the claimant's Housing Benefit includes an earnings disregard, a disregard for Charitable / Voluntary payments or a War Pension disregard, the Housing Benefit Regulations allow 50% of the statutory disregard to be added to the claw-back rate. (It does not include the additional earnings disregard)
56. However, a customer can request any alternative method of recovery and each request would be considered on its own merits.
57. Where there is no on-going Benefit entitlement
58. If there is no on-going benefit entitlement the overpayment will be recovered via an Invoice after 31 days of an overpayment being created. This allows the customer to request a revision, appeal or make a new claim for Housing Benefit.
59. The invoice will request a first payment within 14 days from the date of the invoice. If the total overpayment is less than £60.00 the invoice will request the overpayment to be paid in one instalment. If the overpayment is over £60.00 that the overpayment will be split over 12 monthly instalments.
60. If the debtor is unable to pay in full or the instalment amounts, it is possible to make alternative arrangement which will be covered in a later paragraph.

Methods of Payment

61. It is essential to provide flexible and convenient methods of payment. At present the Council can accept payment by the following means:

- Direct Debit
- Online using our online payment system
- Credit / Debit card
- Payment Line
- Standing order
- Cheque
- Cash

Non-Payment

62. If the customer fails to make a payment following an arrangement a reminder will be issued 20 days from the date of the original Invoice.

63. A final demand will be issued if still no payment is received after 40 days from the original invoice. The final demand will request a full payment of the Housing Benefit Overpayment within 7 days.

Arrangements

64. If the customer cannot pay the overpayment invoice or meet the instalment amounts in full, they are encouraged to contact the council immediately as it may be possible to make a payment arrangement.

65. Each request will be considered on its own merits evaluating the amount due, and the customers personal and financial circumstances. It may be necessary to issue an Income and Expenditure form to obtain a clear picture of the customer's financial circumstances. The aim is to agree a realistic arrangement to collect the unpaid invoice within a reasonable time.

66. Once an arrangement is agreed between Sandwell MBC and the customer, a new invoice will be issued to the customer.

Further recovery action

67. Where the customer fails to make a payment on their arrangement or no payments are received against the outstanding invoice, further recovery action will be taken.

68. The type of action that may be taken is as follows:

- *Recovery from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Benefits.* Deductions from certain DWP Benefits will be considered
- *Recovery from Landlord payments.* Where the overpayment is recoverable from the landlord the overpayment can be deducted from their next Housing Benefit payment.
- *Council Rent account that are in credit.* If the customer is a Council tenant and has a outstanding overpayment and their rent account is in credit. The credit can be used to reduce or clear the outstanding overpayment.

- *Direct Earnings Attachment.* The Council can ask an employer to deduct any Housing Benefit Overpayment of an employee direct from their earnings.
- *Debt collecting Agency.* The Council will forward any outstanding overpayment of Housing Benefit to an agreed debt collecting agency where that customer has failed to engage, and all the above alternatives are not an option.

Change of Address “Gone Aways”

69. If correspondence is returned undelivered and marked “Gone away” or similar and a forwarding address is not already known every effort is made to find a new address for the customer.
70. The Council will make all legally allowable checks on different records and systems to trace the customer to continue the recovery action.

Unrecoverable Overpayment

71. In certain circumstances the Council can decide not to recover an overpayment. Examples include:

- The customer is deceased and has left no estate to recover the overpayment from
- The customer has gone away, and the Council has been unable to trace them
- Where the overpayment is uneconomical to pursue

Write Offs

72. The Council recognises that where a debt is deemed to be irrecoverable, especially after all recovery options have been considered and/or, prompt write off of such debts is appropriate and good practice in certain circumstances and in line with the policy in Appendix 5.

Appendix 3 - Sundry Debt (Council Services) Policy

Introduction

73. The Council charges and collects income from a diverse range of activities, customers and range of public bodies and private businesses. Sundry debt does not include Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Rent or Housing Benefit Overpayments.
74. The value of invoices raised can range significantly from a few pounds to several hundred thousand of pounds and therefore, taken together, the value of all these sundry debts is considerable.
75. It is essential that the Council recovers all collectable debt owed to it and the purpose of this policy aims to:
- Maximise the collection of the Councils income
 - Ensure that, where possible, payment up front is received ensuring whenever possible that collection of the fee or charge involved takes place prior to the service being provided so that credit is only given when essential to do so
 - Ensure clear terms and conditions of payment appear within documentation
 - Ensure invoicing and recovery procedures are carried out on an accurate and timely basis, encouraging debtors to pay promptly, and making collection and recovery activity more efficient by prioritising collection of larger debts
 - Minimise the time taken to raise invoices to within 10 days of the provision of service(s)
 - Minimise the time taken to collect charges or to effect recovery
 - Minimise the time taken to resolve invoice disputes
 - End the ongoing delivery of a non-statutory service to a customer in non-payment cases, but only where it is possible to do so.
 - Minimise the level of debt owed to the Council and its provision for bad debts
 - Minimise the incidence of debt that cannot be collected
 - Raise corporate awareness and responsibility of the importance of prompt debt recovery across all services
76. The charge must, depending on legislation, always cover the cost of providing goods or service and the costs of collection, unless the Council has taken a policy decision to subsidise the service.
77. The charge must be invoiced in an efficient and cost-effective way, ensuring that the frequency of invoices is minimised for services that are delivery on a regular and planned basis.
78. The debt will remain the responsibility of the Service in which it was raised, and recovery action will be taken by the General Debt Recovery Team. It is the responsibility of the services to assist the General Debt Recovery Team in collecting debts, ensuring that information and assistance is provided to ensure debts are collected quickly.

Corporate Responsibilities

79. All officers involved in the issuing and recovery of sundry debt invoices must ensure that:
- The Corporate Debt Recovery Policy is adhered to (specifically Appendix 3 – Sundry Debts)
 - The aims of the policy are adhered to
 - The parts of this policy that apply to their Service areas are correctly followed
 - Specific attention is paid to prohibit the practise of not resolving invoice disputes within a reasonable period
 - Budget Managers are fully aware of their responsibilities

- Relevant systems and procedures are in place
 - Officers involved in the debt collection process are appropriately trained and are aware of their corporate responsibility
80. The Director of Finance (Section 151), Revenues & Benefits Service Manager with Internal Audit support will provide assurance that this Policy is adhered to and is effective.

Raising an Invoice

81. A commercial approach should be adopted where fees and charges are obtained in advance or at the time of service provision. Where goods or services provided need to be paid for after this, then the Council offers credit facilities wherever it is considered prudent to do so.
82. Prompt invoicing is essential to efficient debt collection; the longer the period, the less likely is prompt settlement. Invoices must therefore be raised within 10 days of the service being delivered or due. By raising an invoice, the originating service agrees approval to take appropriate recovery action through the General Debt Recovery Team, including court action when necessary, is granted at the time the debt is raised.
83. Invoices must not be raised for amounts of less than £40, excluding VAT, unless the invoice relates to collection of peppercorn rents, licenses or leases in connection with occupation of Council land and property. This is in line with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.
84. For payment of amounts of £40 or less services are required to request payment up front where it is reasonable and practical to do so.
85. The service responsible for raising the invoice must ensure that the evidence of the service provided is fully validated and that the invoice is accurate and contains sufficient detail for both billing and recovery purposes. Services must ensure that all invoice information is fully completed, including:
- Customer's full name(s)
 - Customer's full address(es), including postcode(s)
 - Customer's contact telephone number(s)
 - Customer's e-mail address
 - Name of contact officer in cases of query over the service provided
 - Date of supply of service
 - Purchase order number (where applicable)
 - Full description of the service/goods supplied
 - For each type of supply – the unit price or rate, quantity or extent of goods and services
 - Amount due
 - VAT amount and rate of VAT charged
 - Total due
 - For each type of supply – the unit price or rate, quantity or extent of goods and services, VAT amount and rate of VAT charged
86. The content (narrative) on the invoice should be concise but of sufficient clarity to ensure that the customer fully understands the bill.
87. All invoices must be raised to a correctly named legal entity. In the event of non-payment, legal action cannot be taken against a non-legal entity. Legal entities are:

- Individuals - This is usually someone living at a residential address. When a request is received for a service, the person's full name (title, forename(s) and surname) must be obtained and stated. Initials are not sufficient. If the request is on behalf of more than one person then the full name of each person must be obtained and stated. The full correct postal address, including postcode, must be stated.
- Sole Traders - Where an individual is trading in his or her own name the full name of the individual as well as the business name must be obtained e.g. Mr John Smith, trading as Fast Removals. Evidence of the name of the business could be in the form of a request for services on a business letterhead. The individual's full postal address must also be requested.
- Partnerships - "LLP" must be added where applicable, otherwise the full names of one, two or more partners must be stated, followed by "trading as" (as above). If LLP is applicable the full correct business address, including postcode, must be stated, otherwise the full correct postal address(es), including postcode of the partner(s) should be stated.
- Limited companies - the name must include "Ltd" or "Plc". Invoices can be addressed to either the current registered office or to a place of business of the company. Evidence of their Limited Company Status and registered office must be obtained by requiring confirmation of the service request on their official letterhead
- Charities limited by guarantee - Companies which are charitable and also limited by guarantee can be exempted from using the term "Ltd" so, for example: "Oxfam" is a correct name. Evidence of their charitable status must be obtained by requiring confirmation of the service request on their official letterhead.
- Clubs run by a committee - the full name(s) and address(es) of the treasurer and / or the secretary, or the trustees must be stated.
- Trustees – the full name(s) and address(es) of the trustee(s) and the full name of the trust must be stated.
- Executors or Personal Representatives – must be addressed e.g. "Mr Peter Smith! Executor of James Brown Deceased or "Personal representatives of James Brown Deceased". The full postal address(es) of the executors/personal representatives must be stated.

88. An invoice should not be raised where:

- A purchase order or written agreement has not been received
- It cannot be proven that the goods and/or services have been supplied
- If the debt is already bad or doubtful

Payment Terms

89. The Council will collect monies owing to it fully and promptly in line with the Immediate payment terms as outlined on the invoice. The standard terms apply to all sundry debtor accounts raised by the Council and should not be deviated from unless with the prior approval of the Director of Finance (Section 151).
90. All requests from customers to enter into payment agreements must be referred to the Corporate Debt team regardless of the amount owed. The Corporate Debt team will set up and monitor all payment agreements.
91. Payment terms beyond the 30-day period will only be granted where a customer is not able to settle the debt in full in one payment.

92. The General Debt Recovery Team will withdraw payment terms if a debtor fails to maintain a payment agreement.

Accounting Arrangements

93. Services will receive the credit when an invoice is first raised.

94. Where debts cannot be recovered and the debt is written off, the original debt will be debited from directorate bad debt provision by way of a write off. All write offs will be considered in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules and in accordance with the policy guidance in Appendix 5 to this policy.

95. All relevant information relating to an invoice (otherwise known as a proof of debt) should be kept until at least six years after it is first issued. If at the end of that six-year period the bill still remains unpaid but payments are being made, the supporting documentation should be retained until final settlement or write off of the debt.

96. Appropriate accounting arrangements will be put in place to ensure that the Council reclaims VAT from HMRC on a bad debt if:

- Goods/Services have been supplied and VAT has been accounted for and paid to HMRC (as output tax), but no payment (or only a part payment has been received, and
- The amount has, or is, about to be written off in the accounts, and
- Six months have elapsed from the later of the supply date and the time when payment was due, and
- The reclaim of VAT is made within three years and six months of the date the payment was due and payable or the date of supply.

97. Refunds for overpayments must be submitted by the Accounts Receivable Control Team to process and reconcile the refund request to control account and journals relating to the ledger code. Refunds will only be processed where there are no other debts outstanding and due from that customer.

98. All credit values of £1 or under will be transferred to the Councils Central Fund after the expiry of one financial year plus the current financial year. The same process will also be followed for any credit balances where General Debt/ Recovery/Accounts Receivable Control Team is unable to trace the debtor.

Dispute Resolutions

99. Where a customer disputes an invoice with the service, the service must notify the General Debt Recovery Debt team immediately to prevent the recovery process continuing. Equally, where a customer contacts the debt team rather than the service to dispute the invoice, the matter will be referred to the service responsible for raising the invoice and recovery will be held. Full notes and reasons for the dispute must be added to the customer's account.

100. To ensure the efficiency of debt collection and good customer service, all disputes must be resolved by the service responsible for raising the invoice within 20 working days of the dispute being raised. The General Debt Recovery Team must be notified of the outcome of the dispute.

101. A dispute is not resolved unless it meets one of the following conditions:

- Customer is correct and gets a full credit
- Customer is partly correct, gets a partial credit and accepts revisions
- Customer is not correct and accepts the charge

- Customer is not correct but does not accept the decision of the service and the service is prepared to support the commencement or continuation of recovery proceedings.
102. Where disputes are not resolved within 20 working days of the dispute being raised, outstanding disputes will be escalated to senior service manager within the service area initiating the invoice.
 103. Following a case referral to a senior service manager, if the service does not resolve the dispute or provide a viable reasons within a further 5 working days as to why the dispute cannot be resolved the disputed debt will be escalated to the relevant chief officer for review and resolution.
 104. For all unresolved disputes exceeding 35 working days, the General Debt Recovery team will raise a credit note to remove the debt from the system and reverse the income from the service. The service responsible for raising the invoice will be notified when this happens. It will then be the responsibility of the service for the re-raising of the invoice once the dispute is resolved, if appropriate.

Accounts subject to Recovery

105. Following the issue of invoices, unless there are payment agreement in place, reminders will be sent for all invoices unpaid or partly unpaid after 7 days past the invoice due date, i.e. day 37 after the invoice is raised.
106. If an invoice is still unpaid after a further 14 days of the invoice reminder being raised (i.e. day 51 after the invoice is raised), a further letter will be sent that explains to the customer the potential action of a referral to a debt collection agency or legal action through the County Council that may be considered by the Council
107. If, after a further 14 days, after the issue of the letter referred to in 7.2, an invoice is still unpaid (i.e. day 65 after the invoice in raised) the General Debt Recovery Ream will attempt to make telephone contact with the customer in an effort to resolve the matter. Where appropriate, payment agreements will be offered. If telephone contact cannot be made or contact is made but the customer does not wish to engage with the Council to resolve the matter, the General Debt Recovery Team will consider the most appropriate recovery route. Each case will be treated on its own merits, but the following guidance will normally be adhered to:
 108. Single or multiple debts up to £500 may be referred to the Councils contracted debt collection agents to collect the amount overdue if all previous attempts to secure payment have been unsuccessful. No additional fees will be added to the original debt.
 109. Single or multiple debts over £500 will be considered for action through the County Court if the originating service can provide the necessary supporting information to aid a successful prosecution.
 110. Consideration will be given not to take further recovery but only in cases where it is reasonable, economic and in the interests of Council Taxpayers to do so. In any case being considered for write off, the write off guidance in appendix 5 will be followed.
 111. In appropriate cases where County Court action is considered appropriate, any failure of services to provide supporting information to aid a successful prosecution will result in the General Debt Recovery Team raising a credit note to cancel the charge and the loss of income will be met by the service who raised the original invoice.
 112. For debts of £5,000 or more, the Council may also consider taking bankruptcy action through the courts if sufficient assets exist to meet the outstanding amount owing to the Council. Before such action is taken, the Council will always send a final letter inviting the customer to a pre-arranged meeting to make a payment agreement. Bankruptcy will be considered in line with the policy in Appendix 4.

113. In some instances, despite a County Court Judgement being obtained and enforcement action being taken, such action may, in some cases, fail to produce a payment towards some or all the debt due. In these circumstances, further action is limited and in these cases the invoice will be considered for write off in accordance with the write off guidance in appendix 5.

Credit Notes

114. There is a clear distinction between raising a credit note and writing off a debt.

115. A credit note to cancel or reduce a charge must only be issued to

- Correct a factual inaccuracy or administrative error in the raising of the original invoice
- Cancel an invoice where a dispute has not been resolved within 28 days
- Adjust the amount of debt due
- Cancel an invoice where the service is unable to provide sufficient documentary evidence to support the recovery of an outstanding invoice.

116. All credit notes must be supported by evidence that validates the reason for reducing or cancelling the invoice.

117. When raising credit notes, services must ensure that all information is fully completed, in the same way as invoices are raised, including:

- It must reflect an agreed reduction in value and be issued within one month of the agreement.
- Description of supply
- Rate and amount of VAT charged
- Total charge
- In addition, the invoice number and date of the original VAT invoice should be shown on the credit note.

Corporate Reporting and Monitoring

118. All Chief Officers will be issued with a monthly report to show debt levels outstanding within their portfolios. The reporting systems will show the breakdown of aged debt levels including a comprehensive breakdown of the invoices raised these within their services which remain outstanding.

119. In the interests of transparency and accountability, a half yearly report will also be presented to the chief officer's team showing debt levels across the organisation together with a full breakdown of aged debt levels within each portfolio.

Write Offs

120. The Council recognises that where a debt is deemed to be irrecoverable, especially after all recovery options have been considered and/or taken, prompt write off of such debts, including reclaiming of VAT from HMRC (where applicable) is appropriate and good practice in certain circumstances and in line with the policy in Appendix 5.

Appendix 4 - Bankruptcy Policy

Introduction

121. The Council is committed to using the most effective recovery methods available and this policy will ensure that the Council's very occasional use of bankruptcy is consistent and complies with all relevant legislation and best practice.
122. Council Tax and Business Rate regulations allow for debts over £5,000 to be considered for bankruptcy providing that Liability Orders have been obtained. For Sundry debts and Housing Benefit overpayments, bankruptcy proceedings may be taken against debtors who owe more than £5,000 where a County Court Judgement has been granted in respect of the debt.
123. The Council also recognises that serious nature of bankruptcy which may result in an insolvent person's property being vested in a trustee – someone who realises and distributes payment among the creditors in final settlement of their claims. The serious nature of this action cannot be underestimated as the consequences could result in a person losing their home and possessions, and be liable to pay a charge and statutory fees/costs associated with bankruptcy amounting to several thousand pounds
124. Given that the Council is not a preferential creditor for the purposes of bankruptcy there is no guarantee of a dividend being paid. The Council will only consider using bankruptcy as a last resort and final option and will take a cautious and diligent approach in deciding if bankruptcy is reasonable action to take.
125. Bankruptcy action takes place in the debtors local County Court with bankruptcy jurisdiction unless the debtor resides in London, in which case the action takes place in the High Court or the Central London High Court.
126. The Recovery Team will manage the administration of bankruptcy cases and proceedings in respect of Council Tax, Business Rates, Sundry Debt and Housing Benefit overpayments, with the assistance from Legal Officers in appropriate cases.

When bankruptcy Action may be taken

127. The Recovery Team may consider using bankruptcy proceedings in the following circumstances:
 - Where the debt exceeds £5,000 and the debtor appears to have sufficient assets or equity to ensure the debt is recoverable by the Official Receiver of the Insolvency Service or the Trustee in Bankruptcy.
 - Where the debtor is not prepared to make a payment agreement to clear the debt within a reasonable and acceptable timescale.
 - Where other methods of recovery are considered inappropriate or have failed and bankruptcy action, as a last resort, appears to be a fair and proportionate course of action.

Recording Information and Decisions

128. When the Council consider bankruptcy proceedings, a log of events will be maintained on the customer's account throughout the process to ensure that bankruptcy remains the most appropriate course of action.

129. Prior to commencing bankruptcy proceedings enquiries will be made of the Revenues and Benefit records to:
- Establish a debt history and whether any previous debts have been collected within a reasonable period by other means.
 - Ensure that all known benefits, discounts, and exemptions have been granted based on the information held
 - Establish whether, based on any information held, the debtor may be vulnerable or unable to deal with their day to day financial affairs or have had previous debts written off.
130. Contact will also be made with relevant portfolio to ascertain if the debtor is known to them and therefore may be vulnerable. If the debtor is currently receiving any care service further enquiries will be made with the key worker to establish if the debtor may be vulnerable by way of, for example, age, mental illness, serious learning difficulties or where it is known that the debtor is unable to deal with their own affairs. Should it be apparent the debtor has such difficulties then consideration will be given to whether the help of other agencies should be sought, and to the appropriateness of pursuing an alternative course of action, including the potential to write off in line with the policy in appendix 5.
131. If records held and enquiries with relevant Directorates do not indicate that the debtor may be vulnerable then enquiries will be made with a credit reference agency and the Land Registry to establish information about the debtor's financial standing and ownership of property and assets.
132. In the event that vulnerability is identified then details of the perceived vulnerability will be recorded. Further enquiries will then be made with the relevant support services within the Council together with possible referral to other advice agencies and to determine an alternative method of recovery.

Statutory Demand

133. Where a decision is taken to commence bankruptcy proceedings a formal 'statutory demand' for payment will be issued by the Council to the debtor and the service of the statutory demand upon the debtor is the first formal stage in bankruptcy proceedings.
134. Guidance on service requirements are set out in the Insolvency Proceedings Court Practice Direction. A letter will also be issued with the statutory demand setting out the intentions of the Council and what the debtor needs to do to comply with it.
135. The debtor will still have the opportunity to contact the Council, even at this stage and, depending on information supplied, it may still be possible to a short-term repayment arrangement. The debtor also has the right to apply to the County Court to have the Statutory Demand set aside.

Bankruptcy Petition

136. The Council may present a Creditors Bankruptcy Petition to the County Court within four months of service of the Statutory Demand Notice if the debtor has not complied with it, or if alternative payment arrangements cannot be agreed following the service of the Statutory Demand.
137. Prior to presentation of the Petition, further enquiries will be made all relevant Directorates to establish whether the debtor has become known to them during the recent process in which case the action will be reconsidered.
138. The Council is required to serve the Petition upon the debtor and guidance for service requirements are set out in the Insolvency Proceedings Court Practice Direction.

139. At this stage, the debtor is required to pay the debt in full before the hearing of the Petition at Court otherwise the Court will be asked to make a Bankruptcy Order. The Council will always support a short adjournment of the court proceedings if the debtor provides the court with evidence that they will be able to pay in full within a very short period.
140. If, between the Petition being presented to the Court and the hearing of the Petition, it becomes known that the debtor does not have the capacity to deal with the matter, then full consideration will be given to seeking an adjournment of the proceedings to enable both the debtor and the Council to obtain further advice.

Making of a Bankruptcy Order

141. If the Court awards a Bankruptcy Order, the Official Receiver of the Insolvency Service is immediately appointed Trustee in Bankruptcy.

Appendix 5 - Write Off Policy

Introduction

142. The Council recognises that where a debt is irrecoverable, prompt and regular write off of such debts is important so that the Council can budget for bad debts. An integral part of debt recovery is the effective management of bad debts to ensure that resources are applied efficiently to the collection of monies outstanding which can reasonably be expected to be collected.
143. The Council will seek to minimise the cost of write offs to the local taxpayers by taking all necessary and appropriate recovery action to recover what is due. All debts will be subject to the full collection, recovery and legal procedures and considerations as outlined in this Corporate Debt Recovery Policy.
144. Write offs will be carried out in accordance with the Councils Financial Procedure Rules, and only in cases where
- The demand or invoice has been raised correctly and is due and owing; **and**
 - There is a justified reason why the debt should no longer be pursued.
145. The Director of Finance has delegated authority to write off debts up to £24,999. All debts considered for write off in excess £25,000 will be referred to Cabinet member for Finance and Resources for approval.
146. Debts will normally only be considered for write off where the account is 'closed' and there are no reoccurring debts. Only in exceptional circumstances will amounts on 'live' and ongoing accruing debts be considered for write off. All such cases must demonstrate that further recovery will not achieve collection of the debt.
147. The Council will record all write off decisions.

Reasons for Write Off

148. Is it not possible to list every possible scenario which could make a debt suitable for write off, however the following reasons capture the main reasons why debts become irrecoverable:
149. Absconded / No Trace The debtor has left the address listed on the invoice/bill and all reasonable attempts, including using trace agents, to find the debtor have failed.
150. Deceased The debtor has passed away and there is evidence of in-sufficient or no funds in the deceased persons estate to pay the amount outstanding
151. Debt 'out of time' Debts over 6 years old and where a Liability Order has not been granted (Council Tax and Business Rates), or no contact has been made and no payments have been received (in accordance with the Limitation Act 1980 as amended).

Small Debts and debts

152. Uneconomical to pursue When all recovery processes have been tried or considered and where the cost of proceeding to recover would be cost prohibitive to the Council and to its taxpayers.
153. Debts subject to a Debt Relief Order Where debts owed to the Council are subject to and included in a Debt Relief Order and cannot be recovered.

154. Bankruptcy The debtor is declared bankrupt and sums due before the date of bankruptcy cannot be recovered.
155. Companies in Liquidation/ The Company is a Limited Company registered with Wound Up / Dissolved Companies House and no longer exists and there is Struck Off no means of recovering the debt.

Conditions for re-claiming VAT on Bad Debts

156. The Council will be entitled to a refund of VAT from HMRC on any bad debts (excluding Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit Overpayments) if the conditions prescribed below are met:
- Goods and services have been supplied and VAT has been accounted for and paid to HMRC but no payment (or only a part payment – see 3.4) has been received.
 - The debt has, or is, to be written off in the accounts and transferred to a bad debt account
 - The debt must not have been assigned
 - The debt has remained unpaid (or partly unpaid) for six months or more after the later of the date payment was due or the date of the supply of the goods or services
 - The re-claim of VAT is made within three years and six months of the later of the date payment was due or the date of the supply of the goods or services.
157. The Council is required, in accordance with HMRC guidance, to retain copies of all invoices and bad debt account details for a fixed period of six years
158. VAT on bad debts will be re-claimed on the monthly VAT return, ensuring that appropriate VAT codes are debited with the appropriate amounts to reduce the amount of the write off recorded against the appropriate bad debt provision for the relevant Directorate.
159. Where the Council is re-claiming VAT on debts where part payment is received, the entitlement to bad debt relief on VAT is based on the amount outstanding for the supplies made. For a single supply, where no payment is received, the amount of VAT accounted for can be reclaimed. If a part payment of the debt is received, a refund can only be claimed on the VAT relating to the amount still unpaid.
160. HMRC advise that payments should be allocated to the earliest supply made unless the customer specifies that a payment is for a particular supply and pays for that supply in full.
161. In bad debt cases where everything except the VAT element is paid, if the customer refuses to pay the VAT element of an invoice and this is the only element outstanding, relief is limited to the VAT element of the total debt outstanding. For example, if the charge was £100 (which was paid) and £20 VAT remains outstanding, the Council is entitled to re-claim VAT of £3.33 (i.e. 1/6 of £20).
162. Any bad debt relief claimed on sales must be at the same rate of VAT as used for those sales, that is, 20% from 4 January 2011, 17.5% from 1 January 2010 to 3 January 2011 and 15% from 1 December 2008 to 31 December 2009.
163. If VAT is re-claimed on a bad debt and a payment is later received from the customer, the VAT element included in the payment must be paid over to HMRC in the tax period in which the payment is received.
164. For any technical queries on VAT treatment of invoices please refer to the Council's Tax Advisor.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Council Tax Award of Discount Policy

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Introduction

1. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 provides Local Authorities with the necessary powers to reduce Council Tax by awarding discounts where specific prescribed circumstances prevail.

Each Local Authority has the right to set the level of empty property discounts to be levied on Council Tax accounts in their area.

General principles/ regulations

2. Section 11(A) of the Local Government Act 1992, introduced by Section 75(1) of the Local Government Act 2003 gives Local Authorities the flexibility to determine what, if any, discounts should be applied to empty properties.
3. Section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, introduced by Section 12 of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, allowed for Local Authorities to charge an amount for Council Tax where properties have remained empty and unfurnished for a period of 2 years or more. The charges were further amended by the Rating (Properties in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018. This is known as an 'Empty Homes Premium' and the charges are shown in Section 3 below.
From 01 April 2024 based on the recent Levelling up and Regeneration Bill of 2022 a further amendment to this section of the Local Government Finance Act will allow for Local Authorities to charge an amount for Council Tax where properties have remained empty and unfurnished for a period of 1 year or more.
The Bill also recognises the impact that high levels of second home ownership can have in some areas and will introduce a new discretionary council tax premium on second homes of up to 100%.

Processes for services / providers

4. The purpose of this policy is to outline the level of discount that Sandwell has resolved to apply under the regulations highlighted in Section 2 above.
5. Discounts will be applied based on information received, Council Tax accounts will be updated, and revised bills issued accordingly.

The level of Council Tax discounts

Empty but furnished property

6. Properties which are unoccupied but furnished:
7. No discount is applied which means an empty furnished property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
8. 100% Council Tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty but furnished, regardless of any change in ownership.
9. This 0% discount is known as a 'Prescribed Class B' (or 'PCLB') discount

10. From 01 April 2025 (following 12 month advanced notice)
11. Properties which are unoccupied but furnished:
12. No discount is applied which means an empty furnished property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
13. A second home premium will also be applied to these properties and will therefore attract an additional 100% charge
14. 200% council tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty but furnished, regardless of any change in ownership.

Empty & unfurnished property

15. Properties which are unoccupied and unfurnished:
16. No discount is applied which means an empty & unfurnished property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
17. 100% Council Tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty and unfurnished, regardless of any change in ownership.
18. This 0% discount is known as a 'Prescribed Class C' (or 'PCLC') discount
19. After two years, prior to the 1st April 2024 additional premiums for long-term empty homes will apply. (See below)
20. From the 1st April 2024 these additional premiums will now apply after one year

Uninhabitable property

21. Properties which are uninhabitable:
22. No discount is applied which means uninhabitable property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
23. 100% council tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty and uninhabitable, regardless of any change in ownership.
24. This 0% discount is known as a 'Prescribed Class D' (or 'PCLD') discount
25. The maximum length of this discount is one year, after which, if it is empty and unfurnished, it will change to a 0% Prescribed Class C discount (100% charge)
26. After two years, prior to the 1st April 2024 additional premiums for long-term empty homes will apply.
27. From the 1st April 2024 these additional premiums will now apply after one year.
28. Some exceptions will apply once confirmed by the government

Long term empty property - 'Empty Homes Premium'

29. Prior to 1st April 2019, properties which had been empty and unfurnished for two years or more were charged an additional 50% 'empty premium' which generated a Council Tax charge of 150%. During the period 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2024 properties which are empty and unfurnished for two years or more are charged an additional 100% 'empty premium' which generates a Council Tax charge of 200%.
- From 1st April 2024 onwards, a 100% 'premium' will apply to homes empty over 1 year, generating a Council Tax charge of 200%.
 - From 1st April 2020 onwards, a 200% 'premium' applies to homes empty for over 5 years, generating a Council Tax charge of 300%.
 - From 1st April 2021 onwards, a 300% 'premium' applies to homes empty for over 10 years, generating a Council Tax charge of 400%.

The appropriate premium shall apply in all cases 2, 5 or 10 years from the date the premises first became empty.

Some exceptions will apply to the additional charge after 12 months and these are to be confirmed by the government.

Appeals

30. Liable parties can appeal under S16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) if they disagree with either:
- the decision to treat a property as empty and hence apply empty property charges on a particular account based upon facts of that *individual case*; and/or
 - the levy of an Empty Homes Premium on a particular account based upon facts of that *individual case*
31. In the case of an individual appeal under S16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, appeals should initially be made in writing to Sandwell MBC. If still aggrieved, appeals may be made to the Valuation Tribunal Service.
32. However the principle itself of applying 0% discount on empty property and/or the levy of Empty Homes Premium charges in Sandwell is *not* open to general appeal as it is the resolution of the Council and as such can only be appealed via Judicial Review

Policy Review

33. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Equalities

34. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy
(Under S13a 1C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992)

Meeting Ambition 10

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Introduction

1. Section 13a 1C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 allows the Council to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable.
2. Legislation does not dictate the circumstances in which reductions apply and therefore the Council must use discretion in deciding whether or not to use these powers.
3. The Council is required to pay for any awards applied under this legislation out of its own funds and therefore awards must meet the underlying principal of offering value for money to tax payers.

General principles / regulations

4. Section 13a (1c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003) gives power to a Billing Authority (the Council) as below:
 - Where a person is liable to pay Council Tax in respect of any chargeable dwelling for any day, the Billing Authority for the area in which the dwelling is situated may reduce the amount which he is liable to pay as respects the dwelling and the day to such extent as it thinks fit.
 - The power under subsection (1) above includes power to reduce an amount to nil.
 - The power under subsection (1) may be exercised in relation to particular cases or by determining a class of case in which liability is to be reduced to an extent provided by the determination.

Process for services

4. Policy overview
5. The purpose of this policy is to outline the conditions that should be satisfied in order for Sandwell MBC to consider a reduction under section 13A (1c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
6. The policy is intended to enable the Council to provide a reduction to those people in need of help due to severe financial hardship and those most vulnerable residents.
7. Each case will be treated strictly on its own merits in accordance with the criteria and process laid down by the Council.

8. The features of the Sandwell's Section 13A (1c) policy are that:
- It is a discretionary reduction - There is no statutory right for any council taxpayer to receive a discretionary reduction.
 - The operation of the reduction is for the Council to determine
 - The Council may choose to vary the way in which funds are allocated according to community needs
 - If the applicant is dissatisfied with any decision taken on a claim that they have made they can ask for a review/make an appeal in line with Section 3.4 of this Policy
9. Where the scheme relates to a Government Scheme, as referenced but not limited by Section 3.2, the features of the scheme will be as defined by Government or, where local discretion is allowed, as defined by the Council for that specific instance.
10. Requests for Council Tax Discretionary reduction in liability should be made by contacting the Council to discuss your circumstances. We will issue a 'Section 13A' application form where appropriate, which should then be completed and submitted to the Revenue and Benefits Service.

Criteria for using powers

11. Each application shall include the following information:
- The amount of reduction being requested
 - The reason for the request (i.e. why is the reduction needed)
 - The period of time the reduction is required (e.g. the full financial year, part of a financial year or some of that period of time)
 - The steps that have been taken to meet or mitigate the Council tax liability (i.e. any other discounts or reductions awarded)

Section 3.2 Circumstances where reduction will be considered

Exceptional Financial Hardship

12. In accordance with Schedule 1a of the Local Government Finance Act, the Council has a Council Tax Reduction Scheme which provides support, through a discount, to those deemed to be in need of financial help. The Scheme has been designed to take into account the financial and specific circumstances of individuals through the use of applicable amounts, premiums and income disregards.

13. Applications will be accepted under this part of the policy from people who have qualified for support under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme but who are still experiencing severe financial hardship. Other taxpayers may also apply; however the Council would normally expect the taxpayer to apply for Council Tax Reduction in any case where there is potential entitlement.

14. As part of the process of applying for additional support, the taxpayer must supply evidence to substantiate their application including but not limited to:

- Making a separate application for assistance.
- Providing full details of their income and expenditure.
- Being able to satisfy the Council that they are not able to pay their Council Tax either in part or full.
- Accepting assistance from either the Council or third parties such as the Citizen Advice (CA) or similar organisations to enable them to manage their finances more effectively including the termination of nonessential expenditure;
- Identifying potential changes in payment methods and arrangements to assist the applicant.
- Assisting the Council to minimise liability by ensuring that all discounts, exemptions and reductions are properly granted.
- Being able to demonstrate that all reasonable steps have been taken to meet their full Council Tax liability including applications for employment or additional employment, alternative lines of credit.
- Having no access to assets that could be released and used to pay their Council Tax.
- Maximising their income through the application for other welfare benefits, cancellation of non-essential contracts and outgoings and identifying the most economical tariffs for the supply of utilities and services generally.

15. The Council will be responsible for assessing applications against this policy and an officer will consider the following factors in the decision-making process:

- Current household composition and specific circumstances including disability and/or caring responsibilities.
- Current financial circumstances.
- Determine what action(s) the applicant has taken or needs to take to alleviate the situation.
- Consider alternative means of support that may be available to the applicant by:
 - Re-profiling council tax debts and/or other debts.

- Applying for a Discretionary Housing Payment for Housing Benefit (where applicable);
 - Maximising other benefits.
 - Reducing Council Tax debt by way of any applicable reductions
 - Council Tax Support (CTR)
 - Council Tax statutory exemptions
 - Council Tax discounts
 - Council Tax reductions for disabilities
 - Determining whether in the opinion of the decision maker the spending priorities of the applicant should be re-arranged.
- Requests can be made at any time, however the reduction will generally be awarded from the date the council identifies that the conditions for the discount are met or from the 1st April of the current financial year, whichever is later.
 - Where extenuating circumstances are identified, the reduction may be backdated into a previous financial year.

Crisis – subsidence, fire etc.

16. The Council will consider requests for reduction from council tax payers who, through no fault of their own, have experienced a crisis that has made their property uninhabitable, such as a fire, subsidence, flooding caused by burst pipes etc.
17. This discount no longer relates to weather related flooding, which is now covered by a specific government scheme
18. To be considered, the resident must remain liable to pay council tax at the property. They must have no recourse to compensation/ insurance payments, nor have recourse to any statutory exemptions or discounts.
19. All such requests must be made in writing detailing the exact circumstances of why the reduction is required and specifying when the situation is expected to be resolved.
20. In order to consider applications the council may need to consult with other organisations as appropriate.

Government Schemes

21. From time to time Government may introduce a specific scheme in response to an event such as a natural disaster (e.g. flood relief schemes).
22. The Council will not consider requests from taxpayers where government guidance or policy provides for a reduction in liability in specific circumstances.

Care Leavers

- The Council will consider granting a discount of up to 100% for care leavers aged from 18 to 25.
 - The relief will be granted whether the resident care leaver is jointly liable with another person.
 - The discount will also apply to qualifying care leavers living in Houses of Multiple Occupation; however the Council would expect the landlord to evidence that they have reduced the rent for the care leaver accordingly. If not, any care leaver discount awarded may be removed from the landlord's Council Tax account
 - This award will offer help to young people whose only support is from the Council by relieving some of the initial financial pressure felt when moving into independent accommodation and having to pay Council Tax for the first time.
 - This reduction would sit alongside a number of other financial arrangements available to care leavers.
 - Applications will only be considered where the following criteria is met and evidenced:
 - Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council must have been the corporate parent of the individual until they reached the age of 18. If a young person meets the qualifying status post 18 years of age, they will also be considered for this reduction.
 - A number of care leavers will be entitled to Council Tax Reduction & this must be claimed before any discretionary reduction is applied.
 - If the care leaver moves out of Sandwell and subsequently returns, they will be entitled to a reduction for any period they are liable for Council Tax in Sandwell as long as the other conditions are satisfied.
23. The amount and period of reduction will be as follows:
- A maximum discount of up to 100% may be awarded to any care leaver between the ages of 18 and 25 living in Sandwell.

- A discount of 25% will be awarded if the care leaver lives with another person who is not a care leaver
- A discount of 100% will be awarded if the care leaver lives alone, or lives with another person who is also a care leaver
- The reduction will only be applied after any other qualifying reliefs/ discounts have been awarded. If there is still an amount owing at this point discretionary relief will be awarded to ensure that nothing is payable.
- The reduction can be backdated to the 1 April of the financial year in which either an application for a discount is received or the council identifies that the conditions for the discount are met.
- The reduction can be backdated prior to that date if deemed appropriate.
- Where the liability started after the 1 April of that financial year, then reduction will be awarded from the date the liability started

Tenants in Houses of Multiple Occupation

24. On 01 December 2023 the Government announced changes to regulations for Houses of Multiple Occupation to ensure they are valued as a single dwelling, however, it is recognised that some tenants may have suffered financial hardship as a result of Council Tax being charged on individual rooms.
25. In cases where the property has been re-banded into multiple bands, tenants may be unaware about the change in their council tax liability and may be in arrears.
26. In such circumstances, the Council may consider using the discretionary powers under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to apply a discount to tenants' liability.
27. All such requests must be made in writing detailing the exact circumstances of why the reduction is required and the Council will make the necessary investigations into the individual's financial situation.

Other Circumstances

28. The Council may consider discretionary reduction requests based on other circumstances, however the Council must be of the opinion that the circumstances relating to the request warrant further reduction in their liability for Council Tax having regard to the effect on other Council Tax payers.
29. No reduction will be granted where any statutory exemption or discount could be granted.
30. No reduction will be granted where it would conflict with any resolution, core priority or objective of the Council.

Period of Award

31. Reduction in liability will commence from the date of application or the date when the need for financial help arose. Any reduction allowed will generally only apply in the current financial year and hence the earliest start will be 1st April of the existing financial year in which the request was received, unless good cause can be shown as to why an application was not made sooner, or there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a backdate of the reduction into a previous year.
32. The reduction will end on either the last day of the current financial year or the date on which the need for the reduction was removed, whichever date is earlier.

Administration

Responsible Officers

33. The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Director of Finance.
34. The Revenues and Benefits Service will liaise with the customer in each case to obtain sufficient evidence and information (in line with the criteria as laid out in this policy) to make a decision in their case.

Decision making process

35. The Council will decide every application for a reduction in liability where the customer has satisfied the required criteria as laid out in this policy.
36. The decision-making process will involve:
 37. Stage1: The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager making a recommendation to the Director of Finance, having considered each case on 'its merits' against the information provided by the customer.
 38. Stage 2: The Director of Finance will decide whether to apply the reduction to reduce the charge accordingly.

Changes of circumstances

39. The customer has a duty to notify the Council where a change in circumstance would affect the granting of the reduction.

Notification

40. The Council will notify a customer of any entitlement to a reduction within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.
41. The Council will notify a customer of any changes to entitlement within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

The right to seek a review and appeals

42. Appeals against the Council's decision may be made in accordance with Section 16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
43. The Council Taxpayer must in the first instance write to the Council outlining the reason for their appeal. Once received the Council will reconsider its decision and notify the Council Taxpayer accordingly.
44. Where the Council Taxpayer remains aggrieved, a further appeal can then be made to the Valuation Tribunal. This further appeal should be made within 2 months of the decision of the Council not to grant any reductions. Full details can be obtained from the Councils website or from the Valuation Tribunal <http://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk>

Notification of review/re-determination of decision

45. The Council will aim to notify a customer of its decision within 14 days of receiving a request for a review/re-determination.

Payment of Award

46. All awards will be made by crediting the award value to the Council Tax account to which it applies.
47. If by crediting the award, the account moves to an overall credit balance, a refund of that balance will be considered in the normal manner.

Overpayment of reduction

48. If the council becomes aware that the information contained in an application for a reduction was incorrect, or that relevant information was not declared (either intentionally or otherwise) the Council may seek to recover the value of any award made as a result of that application.
49. The award will be removed from the relevant Council Tax account and any resulting balance will be subject to the normal methods of collection and recovery applicable to such accounts.

Fraud

50. The Council is committed to protecting public funds and ensuring funds are awarded to the people who are rightfully entitled to them.
51. An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a reduction by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.
52. Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

Complaints

53. The Council's 'Compliments and Complaints Procedure' (available on the Councils website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this policy.

Policy review

54. The policy will be reviewed annually by the Revenue and Benefits Service, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

55. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.
56. However, due to the discretionary nature of decision making the Revenues and Benefits Service will randomly sample decisions made to ensure consistency.

Revenues and Benefits
Service Flood Relief Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

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Introduction

1. In a severe weather event with significant wide area impacts, local authorities may need central support to help their communities and businesses return to normal.
2. Section 13a 1c of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 allows the Council to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable and Sandwell's existing Discretionary Policy provides for assistance where flooding occurs in a one-off situation.
3. In December 2017 the government introduced a Flood Recovery Framework which provides local authorities in England with a core package of business and community recovery support.
4. The government will decide when this support will be made available as weather incidents with localised impact will not usually trigger a recovery support package. Funding might typically be deployed when facing severe weather which impacts multiple numbers of local authorities, such as those where nationwide storms take place.
5. This policy is provided to ensure the Council is prepared should a core scheme be activated and will allow suitable preparations to be made in respect of planning for flood events.

General Principles / regulations

6. The core package introduced through the Flood Relief Framework comprises of the following schemes:
 - Community recovery grant
 - Business recovery grant
 - Council Tax discount scheme
 - Business Rates relief scheme
7. If the government instruct the Council that a core scheme is activated any upfront funding provided will be distributed based on the initial estimated numbers of eligible households and businesses reported by the authority.

Community recovery grant

8. Scheme Overview
9. A £500 grant will be paid to the Council for each eligible household badly affected by the relevant weather event. Authorities will be expected to pass these grants directly onto eligible households.
10. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant based on the number of households estimated to be eligible.

11. Eligible Households
12. Primary residences – Households whereas a result of the relevant weather event flood water entered the habitable areas of the residence or
Flood water did not enter into the habitable areas, but the Council regards that the residence was otherwise considered unliveable for any period of time.
13. Second homes, empty homes and student accommodation are not eligible under the scheme.
14. HMO's should be considered 'one front door' except where they are separated for Council Tax purposes and blocks of flats should be treated in the same way.

Business recovery grant

15. Scheme Overview
16. A £2500 grant will be paid to the Council for each eligible business to help support recovery in the aftermath of a severe weather event. Authorities will be expected to pass these grants directly onto eligible businesses.
17. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant based on the number of businesses estimated to be eligible.
18. The scheme covers small and medium sized businesses within flooded areas. Where larger businesses have been seriously affected this should be discussed as early as possible with the Council's MHCLG Recovery Liaison Officer and DLUHC. Councils should consider any other ways in which it can help larger businesses.
19. Eligible Businesses
20. Small and medium sized businesses:
 - Directly impacted by the weather event, for instance where there was flood damage to the property, equipment, and/or stock, or;
 - Indirectly impacted by the weather event and as a result of flooding have directly suffered a loss of trade. This might apply where for instance there was flood damage to the property, equipment and or stock or the business has no/restricted access to premises, equipment or stock, restricted access to customers, suppliers and/or staff.
21. Funding should not be used to reward poor business practice or for routine expenses or costs that are recoverable elsewhere.

Council Tax discount scheme

22. Scheme Overview
23. Local authorities have discretion to reduce Council Tax liability under S13A 1C where the Flood Relief Scheme is activated following severe weather. The following discounts can be applied and will be refunded back to the Council by DLUHC:

24. 100% discount for a minimum of 3 months or while anyone is unable to return home if longer for primary residences whereas a result of the relevant weather event:
- Flood water entered into the habitable areas or;
 - Flood water did not enter the habitable areas but the local authority regards that the residence was otherwise considered unliveable for any period of time
25. And
- 100% Council Tax reduction on temporary accommodation for anyone unable to return to their home, in parallel with the discount on their primary residence where applicable.
26. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant and will typically be paid retrospectively considering actual spend at the end of the financial year.
27. Eligible Households
28. Primary residences – Households whereas a result of the relevant weather event flood water entered the habitable areas of the residence
29. Unliveable households may be determined based on the guidelines below:
- Where access to the property is severely restricted (e.g. upper floor flats with no access);
 - Key services such as sewage, drainage and electricity are severely affected;
 - The adverse weather has resulted in other significant damage to the property such that it would be, or would have been, advisable for residents to vacate the premises for any period of time, regardless of whether or not they actually vacate;
 - Flooded gardens or garages will not usually render a household eligible but there may be exceptions where it could be demonstrated that such instances mean effectively that the property is unliveable
30. Residences impacted in multiple flood events can receive repeat support where it is made available by the government in respect of separate weather events.
31. Where the scheme is activated concurrently for two separate instances of flooding within 3 months of each other, the two discount periods would run concurrently.

Business rate relief scheme

32. Scheme Overview
33. Where the Business Rates Relief Scheme is activated following severe weather the government will provide funding up to State Aid de minimus levels for eligible authorities to grant 100% rate relief of three months, or until the business is able to resume trading from the property if longer.
34. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant and will typically be paid retrospectively in light of actual spend at the end of the financial year.
35. Eligible Businesses

- The hereditament was directly impacted by the relevant weather event, for instance flood damage to the property, equipment, and/or stock; or the business could not function due to lack of access to premises, equipment and/or stock as a result of the relevant weather event, and no alternatives were available

36. And

- Business activity undertaken at the hereditament is adversely affected as a result; and
- The rateable value of the hereditament is less than £10 million

37. Hereditaments occupied by the Billing Authority are not eligible.

38. In considering whether the business activity has been adversely affected the Council should consider the impact of the flooding in the full context of all business activities undertaken at the hereditament. Very small or insignificant impacts should not be considered for this scheme.

39. The Council could decide to offer further discretionary discounts outside of this scheme.

40. The relief should be calculated ignoring any prior year adjustments in liabilities which fall liable on the day.

41. Ratepayers that occupy more than one property may be granted relief within the scheme for each of their eligible properties.

42. Businesses impacted in multiple flood events can receive repeat support where it is made available by the government in respect of separate weather events.

43. Where a new hereditament is created as a result of a splits or merger from a hereditament which for the day immediately prior to the split or merger met the criteria for the scheme, funding will be provided to allow relief to be given for the remaining balance of the three months.

44. If the ratepayer in a hereditament changes the relief will continue to be given.

45. Hereditaments empty at the time it was flooded will not qualify for a payment via this scheme. If it becomes empty after the flood, then it will receive the normal 3 or 6 months empty property rate free period or will continue to receive the balance of the flooding relief.

46. Where a seriously damaged property is taken out of the rating list it is not liable for business rates. Once the property returns to the rating list it may be eligible for any remaining period of flood relief.

Scheme Administration

47. Responsible Officers

48. The Revenues and Benefits Service will primarily oversee the award of grant payments applicable to any of the schemes and reductions in Council Tax and Business Rates as detailed in this policy.
49. Decision making process
50. The government will determine when a severe weather event has taken place and in turn when the Flood Recovery Framework applies.
51. Where an extended recovery period is anticipated, DLUHC Recovery Liaison Officers will take over from DLUHC Government Liaison Officers to act as a single point of contact between local authorities and central government for the duration of the recovery period.
52. The Council's designated Liaison Officer should be informed of any property, infrastructure or wider impacts that may be cause for concern to aid cross-government discussions around the need for particular recovery support.
53. Decision making process
54. The Council will notify a customer of any entitlement to a grant or relief within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.
55. The Council will notify a customer of any changes to entitlement within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.
56. Reviews and re-determination of a decision
57. The Council will investigate any challenges against decisions made in respect of the scheme and will aim to notify a customer of its decision within 14 days of receiving a request for a review/redetermination.
58. Payment of Awards
59. Awards payable through Community Recovery Grant or Business Recovery Grant Schemes will be made payable through the Councils electronic finance systems into customer bank accounts.
60. Awards payable through the Council Tax Discount and Business Rate Relief Schemes will be made by crediting the award value to the Council Tax or Business Rates account to which it applies.
61. Overpayment of Awards
62. If the council becomes aware that the basis of information received to pay a grant or relief was inaccurate or incorrect or that relevant information was not declared (either intentionally or otherwise) the Council may seek to recover the value of any award.
63. Awards will be removed from the relevant Council Tax or Business Rates account and any resulting balance will be subject to the normal methods of collection and recovery applicable to such accounts.

64. Fraud
65. The Council is committed to protecting public funds and ensuring funds are awarded to the people who are rightfully entitled to them.
66. An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a relief by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.
67. Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.
68. Complaints
69. The Council's 'Compliments and Complaints Procedure' (available on the Council's website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this policy.

Policy review

70. This policy will be reviewed annually by the Revenue and Benefits Service, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

71. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.
72. However, due to the discretionary nature of decision making the Revenues and Benefits Service will randomly sample decisions made to ensure consistency.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (DHP)

Meeting Ambition 10

Policy Statement

1. Sandwell MBC's objective is to treat every application for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) on its individual merits.

Introduction

2. Discretionary Housing Payments were introduced in July 2001 and the Local Authority is responsible for administration of the DHP scheme.
3. A DHP may be awarded where the Local Authority determines that a Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claimant requires further financial help towards their housing costs.
4. A DHP can be awarded to help cover:
 - Shortfalls between the rental liability and payment of Housing Benefit or payment of Universal Credit (Housing element)
 - One off DHP award to help towards removal costs
 - One off DHP award to help with rent deposits
 - One off DHP award for rent in advance.
5. Effective operation of the DHP scheme contributes to Sandwell Councils 2030 vision.

General principles/ regulations

6. The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (SI 2001/1167) ensures the DHP scheme covers the introduction of Universal Credit.

Process for services

7. The purpose of this policy is to specify how Sandwell Revenues and Benefits Service will operate the scheme and to indicate some of the factors that will be considered when deciding if a DHP can be awarded. Each case will be treated strictly on its own merits and all claimants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.
8. The Revenues and Benefits Service is committed to working with the local voluntary sector, social landlords and other interested parties in the Borough to maximise entitlement to all available state benefits and this will be reflected in the administration of the DHP scheme. The Revenues and Benefits Service operates within the Council's anti-poverty strategy and is committed to the equitable operation of a DHP scheme.

Statement of objectives

9. The Revenues and Benefits Service will consider making a DHP to all claimants who meet the qualifying criteria as specified in this policy. In administering the scheme, the Revenues and Benefits Service will give consideration to the guidance produced by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Revenues and Benefits Service will treat all applications on their individual merits and will seek through the operation of this policy to:
- Alleviate poverty
 - Support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life
 - Help and encourage residents to sustain and maintain housing
 - Prevent and reduce homelessness
 - Keep families together
 - Support the vulnerable in the local community to maintain their health and wellbeing
 - Support disabled people living in significantly adapted accommodation – including any adaptations made for disabled children; and foster carers, whose housing benefit is reduced because of a bedroom being used by, or kept free for, foster children
 - Help claimants through personal crisis and difficult events
 - Assist persons within the area who qualify for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Element to move or obtain premises more suitable to their requirements
 - Support people affected by welfare reform changes.
10. The Revenue and Benefit Service considers that the DHP scheme should be short-term financial assistance. It is not and should not be considered as a long-term solution for any current or future entitlement restrictions set out within the Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Legislation.

Main Features of the DHP scheme:

- The scheme is discretionary. A claimant may be entitled if Housing Benefit or Universal Credit (Housing Element) is in payment.
- The amount that can be paid out by the Local Authority in any financial year is cash-limited by the Secretary of State.
- DHP's are not a payment of Housing Benefit / Universal Credit. However, the claimant must have an entitlement to Housing Benefit / Universal Credit (Housing Element) for the weeks that a DHP is being considered for
- There is a need for financial assistance.
- The claimant must reside in Sandwell.

DHP scheme cannot cover:

11. The following elements of a claimant's rental charge or shortfall in Housing Benefit / Universal Credit (Housing Costs) that cannot be met by a DHP are:

- Ineligible charges: service charges that are not eligible for Housing Benefit/Housing Costs cannot be covered by a DHP.
- Sanctions and reductions in benefit.
- Suspended payments of Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Costs element
- Shortfalls caused by Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Costs overpayment recovery.
- Universal Credit reclaims of payments on account
- Council Tax Reduction.

What is a shortfall

12. A shortfall between the rental liability and payment of Housing Benefit or payment of Universal Credit (Housing element) can occur due to:

- The rent determined by the Rent Officer / Local Housing Allowance being lower than the claimant's eligible rental liability
- Under occupation charge being applied due to the size of the claimant's household
- Reduction in Local Housing Allowance rates for under 35's
- The 65 per cent taper being applied to a claimant Housing Benefit entitlement
- A non-dependant deduction being made to the claimant's eligible rent
- The Benefit Cap has been applied
- The Family Premium being removed (From April 2016)
- The limitation of dependant's addition being applied (from April 2017)
- Where the claimant can demonstrate that they are unable to meet the housing costs from their available income

How to Claim a DHP

13. A claim for a DHP must be made via the online claim form on www.sandwell.gov.uk. Verification of information will normally be required.

Commencement of a DHP Award

14. The start date of an award is determined by the Revenues and Benefits Service and can be either:

- The date that the claim for a DHP is received by the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- The date on which the need arose upon request from the customer.

Period of a DHP Award

15. In all cases, the Revenues and Benefits Service will decide the length of time for which a DHP will be awarded based on the evidence supplied and the circumstances of the claim.
- The minimum period for which the Revenues and Benefits Service will award a DHP is one week.
 - The Revenues and Benefits Service will usually award a DHP for not less than 3 months or 13 weeks where it is to meet a shortfall.
 - The Revenues and Benefits Service will not normally award a DHP for a period exceeding 12 months.
 - Where a claimant is disabled, living in specially adapted accommodation the Revenues and Benefits Services recognise that it may be appropriate to make long-term DHP awards, exceeding 12 months

Award a DHP

16. Decisions regarding an award of DHP will be reported to the Director of Finance.
17. In deciding whether to award a DHP, the Revenues and Benefits Service will consider the following:
- The shortfall between Housing Benefit/Universal Credit housing costs element and the rent liability
 - Any steps taken by the claimant to reduce their rental liability
 - The financial and medical circumstances (including ill health and disabilities) of the claimant, their partner and any dependants and any other occupants of the claimant's home
 - The income and the essential expenditure of the claimant, their partner and any dependants or any other occupants of the claimant's home
 - Any savings or capital that might be held by the claimant and/or partner
 - The level of indebtedness of the claimant and/or partner
 - The nature of the claimant's and/or partner's circumstances
 - The amount allocated up to the cash limit set by the Secretary of State at the time of the application
 - Any other special circumstances brought to the attention of the Revenues and Benefits Service.
18. When calculating the claimant's and partner's income Disability Living Allowance (both care and mobility components), Attendance Allowance, Personal Independent Payments and Carers Allowance will be fully disregarded.

19. The Revenues and Benefits Service will decide how much to award based on the individual circumstances. This may be an amount below the difference between the rent liability and the Housing Benefit/Universal credit housing costs element.
20. An award of a DHP does not guarantee that a further award will be made at a later date even if the claimant's circumstances have not changed.

Change in Circumstance

21. The claimant has a duty to notify the Revenues and Benefits Service of any change in their circumstances. They must report the change as soon as possible and not later than one month from the change occurring.
22. The Revenues and Benefits Service can revise a DHP award to take account of a change in circumstances at any time whether to the advantage or disadvantage of the claimant.

Payment of DHP

23. The Revenues and Benefits Service will decide the most appropriate person to pay based upon the circumstances of each case. This could include paying:
 - The claimant
 - Their partner (if resident in the household)
 - An appointee
 - Their landlord (or an agent of the landlord)
 - Any third party to whom it might be most appropriate to make payment.
24. The Revenues and Benefits Service will pay an award of DHP by the most appropriate means available in each case. This could include payment by but is not restricted to:
 - Electronic transfer (e.g. BACS)
 - Crediting the claimant's rent account.
25. Where the DHP award is made on an ongoing basis the payment frequency will normally be aligned to the Housing Benefit/Universal Credit payment cycle.

Notification of the DHP award

26. The Revenues and Benefits Service will inform the claimant in writing of the outcome of their application upon receipt of all information. Where the application is unsuccessful, the Revenues and Benefits Service

will set out the reasons why this decision was made and explain the right of review. Where the application is successful, the Revenues and Benefits Service will notify the claimant of:

- The weekly / Monthly amount of DHP that has been awarded
- The period of the award
- The requirement to report any change in circumstances

The Right to seek a review

27. DHP decisions are not Housing Benefit/Universal Credit decisions and are therefore not subject to the statutory dispute mechanism.
28. A claimant (or their appointee or agent) who disagrees with a DHP decision in relation to:
- The refusal of a DHP award
 - The Amount of the DHP award
 - Backdate decision
 - Recovery of DHP overpayment
29. may request a review of the decision. A review must be made in writing to the Revenues and Benefits Service within one calendar month of the written DHP decision being issued.
30. Upon receipt of a review, the DHP request will be re-considered by an independent officer considering any further information provided.
31. When the review has been completed notification of the decision will be made in writing. The decision will be final with no other right of appeal.
32. Where the claimant is still not satisfied, the decision may only be challenged via the judicial review process or by complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

DHP overpayment recovery

33. The Revenues and Benefits Service will seek to recover DHP's found to be overpaid. A decision letter will be issued detailing an explanation of how and the amount of the overpayment has occurred which will be included how to request a review.
34. The recovery will usually involve issuing an invoice to the claimant (or their appointee or agent).
35. The Revenues and Benefits Service will consider offsetting overpaid DHP against any future awards and will endeavour to recover all DHP overpayments to maximise the funds that are available.

36. Under no circumstances will recovery be made from any amounts of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit. It is most unlikely that recovery of any overpayment caused by a Sandwell official error will be sought

Publicity

37. The Revenues and Benefits Service will publicise the scheme and will work with all interested parties to achieve this. A copy of this policy statement will be made available for inspection and will be posted on the Sandwell Council website. Information about the amount spent will not normally be made available except at the end of the financial year.

Fraud

38. The Revenues and Benefits Service is committed to identifying and subsequently investigating suspected fraudulent claims to benefit and DHP. Individuals who falsely declare their circumstances in order to claim DHP will have committed a criminal offence, which may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

Reporting

39. On a monthly basis a report detailing all DHP applications received, decisions made and DHP fund available is forwarded to the Director of Finance for approval.

Policy review

40. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

41. An equality assessment has been carried out on this policy in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.
42. However, due to the discretionary nature of decision making the Revenues and Benefits Service will randomly sample decisions made to ensure consistency.

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Local Welfare Provision (LWP) Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

Introduction

1. The Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme is to assist and support vulnerable residents of Sandwell in meeting their day to day needs for subsistence or financial support or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community. This will be aligned to the Council's key principles of tackling inequality and reducing poverty.

Policy statement

Local Welfare Provision

2. LWP will enable the Local Authority to provide assistance / support to vulnerable people in hardship situations. The overall intention is to use LWP to complement the existing support that the Council and its partners give to residents.
3. When making a decision consideration will be given to the following priorities:
 - To support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life
 - Safeguard Sandwell residents in their homes
 - Help those who are trying to help themselves
 - Keep families together
 - Help provide stability to children
 - Support the vulnerable in the local community
 - Prevent homelessness for those at risk of losing their home
 - Help customers through personal crisis and difficult events
 - Support people affected by domestic violence

General Principles

Considerations for an award

- The scheme is purely discretionary; a resident does not have a statutory right to an award
- The process will be based on application being made and will be dependent upon a need and eligibility-based assessment.
- Awards will be made by way of vouchers or goods.

The LWP will consist of 2 key aspects of support:

Planned Support

4. Intended to help vulnerable people over the age of 18 (young adults aged between 16 and 18 may also be considered where they are unable to receive assistance through Section 17), live as independent a life as possible in the community. This form of support can be considered where the applicant is in receipt of benefit and is moving into independent living.
5. Planned support is also available to people if they are leaving accommodation in which they received significant and substantial care and supervision and they expect to be discharged within 6 weeks. Examples of such accommodation:
 - hospital or another medical establishment
 - care home
 - hostel
 - staff intensive sheltered housing
 - local authority care
 - Prison or detention centre
6. *Unless there are exceptional circumstances such as someone who lives at home and receives support from their family or family members are unable to assist due to the demands of their own financial, health or general circumstances, applications from single people living with other family members will not be awarded as they are likely to have access to assistance from other family members.*

Responsive / Emergency Support

7. To meet a need that has arisen as a consequence of an emergency, disaster, exceptional circumstances or a pressing need that is strikingly different from the pressures generally associated with managing a low income and is the only way of preventing or mitigating serious risk to health or safety to the claimant or a member of their immediate family, which cannot be met by another source.

Forms of Support

- *Planned / Responsive support* will be the direct provision of furniture subject to meeting the eligibility criteria and the need assessment. The following items may be provided:
 - Second-hand furniture
 - White goods
- Emergency Support will be the direct provision of:
 - Food Bank Vouchers
 - Pre-payment Vouchers for fuel and travel

Process for services

Eligibility

8. Consideration will be given when the person or family has a reasonable need for an item or items to support or sustain independent living, subject to the availability of the items and the budget has sufficient resources to meet the need.
9. In cases where DWP or other Government departments have a primary responsibility to residents, The Local Authority will first advocate for residents to secure entitlements.
10. Individuals may receive support if they are age 18 and over and in receipt of:
 - Income Support
 - Income based Jobseekers Allowance; or
 - Income related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Pension Credit Guaranteed
 - Contribution based Job Seekers Allowance*
 - Contribution based Employment and Support Allowance*
 - Universal Credit (means tested maximum award rate/where the award does not include an earnings disregard)
 - Reside in Sandwell
11. *Claims will only be considered under these circumstances where the claimant and/or their partner has no dependants or any other income / capital.

Exclusions

12. Local Welfare Provision will not be awarded for any items that a government department or Council service has a statutory responsibility to provide.
13. The following people are excluded for support in all circumstances:
 - Prisoners and people lawfully detained, including those released on temporary licence (but not those released on parole or on bail pending a court hearing)
 - Members of a religious order who are fully maintained by the order
14. The following people are excluded from support except in very limited circumstances:
 - Full-time students can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster
 - Someone who is a 'person from abroad' (i.e. who fails or would fail the habitual residence test for the purpose of Income Support, Pension Credit, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Income Related Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit) they can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster
 - Customers who are subject to the Benefit Cap. As it deemed that they have an income in excess of more than £20,000
 - A customer who has savings of more than £1K

Benefit Sanctions

15. People subject to certain disallowances or sanctions to their Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit or Universal Credit or equivalent welfare benefits will not normally be eligible for support.
16. However because of the nature of benefit sanctions each case will be considered on its own merits and where it is clear that failing to provide support would present significant risk to the claimant or, their immediate family or dependant which cannot be met by another source then support may be provided.

Universal Credit – Waiting period

17. People who have made a claim for Universal Credit (UC) and are waiting for their first payment will not normally be eligible for support through LWP.
18. However, because of the actual time taken for the first payment of UC to be made there may be circumstances where support through LWP is required. Each request will be considered on its own merits and where it is clear that support cannot be obtained from any other source (such as payments in advance from the Department for Work and Pensions, savings or lieu of notice pay) and failing to provide support would present significant risk to the claimant or their immediate family, support through LWP will be considered.

How to request Support

19. Applications can be made via the online claim form on www.sandwell.gov.uk. sufficient information will need to be submitted with the application to enable an assessment of eligibility and need.

Decision making process

20. Decision making for any request for support will be processed by the LWP Team in the Revenues and Benefits service area.

- Once all relevant data / information has been collected and the eligibility has been satisfied. An officer from the team will contact both successful and unsuccessful residents. If successful, the awards will be provided in line with the resident's needs.
- If unsuccessful the resident will be given the reasons for the decision and details of the appeals process. Also, what other options are available to them i.e. advice and information on other services.
- If the information is incomplete or further supporting evidence is required, an officer will contact the resident for the necessary information. Once all relevant data has been collected a decision will be made.
- Local Authority may request any reasonable evidence in support of an application. Such requests may be requested by phone or in writing.
- Local Authority reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the resident in appropriate circumstances.
- If the resident is unable to or does not provide the required evidence, the local authority will still consider the request and will take into account any other available information.

Value of Awards

21. Each case will be assessed on individual circumstances. The value of the items provided will be at the discretion of the Local Authority but will be based on standard prices for items including the cost of delivery and installation where appropriate.

22. Awards will be limited to 3 awards within any 12-month period.

Outcome

23. Once all information to support a request has been received, the referral will be processed within 14 working days.

24. The LWP Team will provide written notification of an award of support to the Resident or the officer representing the individual and the supplier of goods.

25. Written notification will include details of:

- The support to be provided
- How, when and where the award can be accessed

26. To avoid unnecessary delay, residents may be asked for alternative contacts methods such as email or telephone to speed up the outcome confirmation.

Out of Hours Arrangements

27. Local Welfare Provision will not operate outside of normal office working hours.

Review / Reconsideration

28. A resident can ask for reconsideration if they can demonstrate there has been a factual error based on the decision made, an oversight on a significant piece of evidence or where new evidence has come to light, that was not provided with the original request form. In either circumstance, the resident must provide the relevant details.

29. Such requests must be made in writing to the Revenues and Benefit Service.

30. The review will be carried out by the Revenues and Benefits Service by an independent officer. Their decision will be final with no other right of appeal.

Monitoring Arrangements

31. The central coordinating function sitting with the Revenue and Benefits service area will monitor the number and amount of awards / refusals in relation to planned and emergency support on a monthly basis to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently and in line with the Council's equality duties.

Policy review

32. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

33. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Non-Domestic Rates Hardship Relief Policy

NDR Hardship Relief Policy – Contents

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Policy statement

1. The objective of Sandwell MBC is to treat each and every application for Section 49 Hardship Relief on its individual merits.

Introduction

Legislation

2. The Council is aware of its duties and powers in accordance with section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. This Policy sets out how the Council will use its powers and the criteria that must be satisfied.
3. Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 gives a Billing Authority the ability, if it so wishes, to reduce amounts due for Non-Domestic Rates.
4. An Authority may reduce or remit the amount payable, to do so it must be satisfied that:
 - (a) the ratepayer would sustain hardship if the authority did not do so.

and

- (b) it would be reasonable to do so having regard to the interests of other persons subject to its Council Tax charges.

General principles / regulations

Purpose

5. The purpose of this policy is to specify how Sandwell MBC will administer requests for relief from payment of Non-Domestic Rate and to indicate some of the factors that will be considered when deciding if relief may be granted.
6. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly.

Statement of objectives

7. Sandwell MBC will consider applications for relief from payment of Non-Domestic Rate under the provisions of Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
8. In administering applications, Sandwell MBC will ensure that each application will be given due regard on its merits in accordance to the criteria and process laid down by the Council.
9. It should be noted that the test of hardship need not be confined to financial matters; all relevant factors should be considered, including the impact on the local community.

Process for services

Applications

10. Applications will need to be made in writing by any ratepayer wishing to apply for assistance.
11. In all cases, evidence will be required from the ratepayer. Where this is requested, the authority would expect the required evidence to be provided within 14 days of the request unless otherwise stated by the authority.
12. Where no or insufficient information is provided by the ratepayer, no relief shall be granted.

Criteria for using powers

13. The Council will consider using its powers to reduce or remit Non-Domestic Rate liability for any Non-Domestic Rate payer.
14. There is a cost implication of any relief awarded which is borne locally and met from the authority's general fund. A reduction or remission of rates on the grounds of hardship should therefore be the exception rather than the rule.
15. The test of hardship will not be confined strictly to financial hardship. All relevant factors affecting the ability of a business to meet its liability for rates should be considered.
16. Each case will be considered on its own merits - however the following points should be considered for each application:
 - The interests of council taxpayers in an area may go wider than direct financial interests. For example, where the employment prospects in the area would be worsened by a company going out of business, or the amenities of an area might be reduced by, for instance, the loss of the only shop in the vicinity.
 - Where the granting of relief would have an adverse effect on the financial interests of council taxpayers, the case for a reduction or remission of rates payable may still, on balance, outweigh the costs to council tax payers.
 - The financial position of the business ratepayer. This will need to be established by the provision of audited accounts for the three years preceding the date of the application for remission / reduction (except in the case of a new business where the previous twelve months accounts should be produced).
 - The fact that a ratepayer suffers a trading loss in one year should **not** be construed as evidence that the ratepayer would suffer hardship if the rates were not remitted or reduced.
 - Any other factors put forward by the ratepayer would be considered on their specific merits.

- Consideration must be given to the amount of relief that can be granted and the effect this will have on the ability of a business to continue to trade.
 - Whether the business claiming the relief at the very least pays any employees the National Minimum Wage
 - No more than 50% of the total number of employees must be on zero-hour contracts.
 - At least 50% of employees should be living in Sandwell
17. Where a business is making a repeat application, this will only be considered if it can be shown that the circumstances surrounding the application have changed, the details of the application differ and the business has taken reasonable steps to improve its situation.
18. Where there is a national crisis/pandemic affecting a significant number of businesses and there is government funding available to assist no award will be made.

Period of relief

19. Relief will only be granted (as a maximum) to the end of a tax period in which the reduction or remission is requested.

Responsible Officers

20. Delegation of authority to reduce or remit non-domestic rates under the provisions of Section 49 has been granted to the Director of Finance for amounts up to and including £20,000. The responsibility for making decisions regarding amounts above £20,000 lies with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.
21. The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager will liaise with the customer in each case to obtain sufficient detail (in line with the criteria as laid out in this policy) to make a decision in their case.

Decision making process

22. The Council will decide every application for relief where the customer has satisfied the required criteria as laid out in this policy.
23. The decision-making process will involve:
24. Stage1: The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager makes a recommendation to the Director of Finance after considering each case on 'its merits' against the information provided by the customer.
25. Stage 2: The Director of Finance will decide whether to award a reduction or remission.

26. Stage 3: Where the reduction or remission is greater than £20,000, the Director of Finance will make a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.

Requirement to Make Payments

27. Ratepayers must continue to pay any amount of Non-Domestic Rates that falls due pending the outcome of the application.
28. The Council may apply its normal recovery procedures in cases where payments are not received.

Changes of Circumstances

29. The customer has a duty to notify the Council where a change in circumstance would affect the granting of relief.
30. The change in circumstances must be notified to the authority within 14 days of its occurrence.
31. The Council can revise relief to take account of a change in circumstance.

Notification

32. The Council will notify a customer of its decision by letter or email within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Payments

33. All awards of relief or discount will be credited against the applicant's business rates account to reduce the amount payable.

The right to seek a review

34. Under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, there is no right of appeal against the Council's use of discretionary powers. However, the Council will accept a customer's request for a re-determination of its decision.
35. A request for a review / re-determination must be made within four weeks of receipt of notification of the decision and must set out the reasons for the request and any supporting information.
36. The review process will involve re-consideration of the request on its merits by the Director of Finance. The Council will consider whether the customer has provided any additional information against the required criteria that will justify a change to its decision.

Notification of review / re-determination decision

37. The Council will notify a customer of its decision within **28** days of receiving a request for a review or re-determination.

State Aid/Subsidy Control Regulations

38. State Aid guidance was withdrawn on 1 January 2021. The Brexit transition period has ended and new rules on Subsidy Control now apply. For current information and to see how this may affect your business please go to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/state-aid>
39. If you believe your business will exceed the new subsidy control limits you must contact the Business Rates team using our online contact us form located at <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> to ask for any relief already awarded to be removed from your account

Policy review

40. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and / or changes to legislation.

Equalities

41. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010.
42. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

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The LWP will consist of 2 key aspects of support

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Introduction

1. Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) allows a reduction in Non-Domestic Rates of up to 100% where certain provisions are satisfied. The decision to grant or not grant relief is a matter purely for the authority. The Revenues and Benefits Service work closely with the Voluntary Sector Funding Team to administer this policy.
The Council recognises the important role played by the Voluntary Sector in Sandwell, not only in the area of service delivery, but also as an indicator of civic engagement and the health of the social fabric of the borough.
The regulations relating to DRR can be found in Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended).
Registered charities registered friendly societies and community amateur sports clubs automatically qualify for a mandatory reduction to their rates bill of 80%. The Council can consider granting DRR to these organisation's on the remaining 20%.
DRR enables the Council to support a wide range of voluntary and community groups in Sandwell, providing a significant reduction to an organisation's running expenses.

General principles/ regulations

Policy overview

2. The purpose of this policy is to outline the conditions that should be satisfied for Sandwell MBC to consider relief under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and associated legislation.

Processes for services – reliefs available

3. The following reliefs are available in Sandwell under the banner of 'Discretionary Relief' for Business Rates:
 - Charity and Non-Profit Making Organisations 'Top Up'
 - Reliefs made available under the Localism Act 2011:
 - (i) 'Section 69' Localism Relief
 - Part Occupied/Part Void Section 44A Relief
 - Discretionary Relief Introduced April 2023:
 - (i) Supporting Small Business Relief
 - Discretionary Reliefs introduced during 2023/24 and 2024/25
4. The criteria for each of these reliefs is listed below, together with details on how to apply and any restrictions, where applicable

Charity and non- profit organisations

5. Some charities and non-profit organisation's are entitled to 80% mandatory 'Charity' rate relief. However, Local Authorities have the option to 'top up' that relief to 100%. Organisation's that meet the requirements of this policy and the relevant criteria who are eligible for the 80% mandatory rate relief, may receive a top up of 20%.

Sandwell needs a healthy Voluntary Sector, particularly local voluntary and community organisations. This supports citizens of the borough by providing:

- Local community-based services – many voluntary and community sector organisations are community based and may therefore be better able to work with harder to reach groups. This complements the Council's town and neighbourhood-based approach to service delivery
- Choice – by supporting voluntary and community sector organisations the Council hopes to provide a greater choice for local people in terms of the services they can access
- Independence – voluntary and community sector organisations are independent bodies and are often well placed to take on a campaigning or advocacy role on behalf of local people, providing an important challenge role for the Council
- Opportunities for people to participate – as volunteers as well as service users
- Specialist services – many voluntary and community sector organisations develop specialism's around the particular needs of a client group

Definition of terms

6. Voluntary organisation:

A formal organisation run by a management body made up of volunteers who are engaged in that activity for environmental, economic, or social good.

7. Community group:

A community organisation is a less formally organised body run by a management body made up of volunteers who are engaged in that activity for environmental, economic, or social good.

Who Can Apply?

8. The following organisations could apply for DRR 'Top Up':

- Charities (including charity shops that are ratepayers occupying premises used for charitable purposes).
- Non-profit organisations (that are not charities but the objectives of which are 'charitable', 'philanthropic' or religious, or concerned with education, social welfare, science, literature or the fine arts' or who use the premises mainly for recreation).

9. Examples of these organisations include:

- Voluntary organisations
- Community groups
- Tenants and residents' groups
- Faith groups
- Housing Associations
- Co-operatives and social enterprises (that are set up to benefit of the public at large rather than its members)
- Sports organisations
- Mutules
- Grant making trusts.

Eligibility Criteria

10. To be eligible for DRR, organisations must occupy the property for which they are seeking DRR and must:
- be used for the purposes of delivering the organisations' objectives to benefit citizens of Sandwell
 - be based in or delivering services in Sandwell
 - be non-governmental
 - be value driven, for the social good
 - be non party political
 - not use profit that is normally reinvested into the organisation, to pay management a salary
 - reinvest at least 50% of their financial surpluses for community benefit in Sandwell. Regional and national organisations will need to reinvest at least 50% of their financial surpluses that arise from their work in Sandwell for community benefit in the borough
 - not be funded directly from taxation by any government department or agency in the provision of any function under any statutory duty

Levels of DRR

11. Organisation's that meet the requirements of this policy and criteria, in receipt of 80% mandatory rate relief, will receive a top up of 20%. All other successful applicants will receive 100% discretionary rate relief.

Effective Date of DRR Award

12. Prior to 1st April 2024 an application for the **previous** financial year had to be received and assessed by 30th September.
13. *For example:* An application for backdated relief for 2022/23 (covering the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023), is received by the Council in time for it to be assessed and approved before 30 September 2023, then DRR would be backdated to 1 April 2022, or the date of occupation if later). From the 1st April 2024 the local authority is able to operate relief without restriction in respect of the financial year 2023/24 onwards.

How to apply

14. If you are advised that an application for DRR is required by the Council, it must be made using the authority's application form which is available on the Council's website <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/business-rates/charitable-relief>
15. Details of the criteria and guidance notes are also available on the Council's website <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/33/charitable-and-discretionary-relief>
16. All applications under this policy will be considered by the Director of Finance

Unsuccessful DRR Applications

17. There is no legal right of appeal against the Council's use of discretionary powers. However, the Council will accept a customer's request for a re-determination of its decision. Any further appeal must take place via judicial review.

18. If an application for DRR has been refused, applicants have the opportunity to request a re-determination. All requests must be made in writing, within one month of the Council's decision. Requests will be considered by a panel of 2 officers who were not involved in the original decision.
19. If an unsuccessful applicant decides to make a request for re-determination, they will still need to continue to pay their business rates. If the request is successful, an amended bill will be issued.

RELIEF INTRODUCED BY THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

20. This involves the following relief:

- i. Section 69 'Localism' Relief

Section 69 'Localism Act Relief'

21. Section 69 of the Localism Act 2011 amends Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The changes came into effect from 1st April 2012 and extended the existing provision relating to the granting of DRR.
22. From 01 April 2012 any ratepayer may apply for this relief. The costs of such relief are borne solely by council taxpayers of the borough, therefore it is essential that relief is only given to those ratepayers who will bring significant benefit to the area.
23. The amount of relief granted is not fixed and will be dependent on the individual circumstances of each application.
24. To be considered the ratepayer must meet all of the following criteria:
 - The ratepayer must occupy the premises
 - The ratepayer must be relocating from outside Sandwell, or where already existing within Sandwell must operate within one of Sandwell's priority sectors, namely: -
 - Diversified manufacturing: including high value-added engineering, food production, offsite construction and health products
 - Business, financial and customer services
 - Green industries; including environmental technologies, waste recycling and resource management and research investment
 - The ratepayer must provide significant investment in premises and/or capital equipment.
 - The ratepayer must provide significant new job creation and/or safeguarding of existing jobs.
 - The premises and organisation must be of significant benefit to Sandwell's residents
 - The premises and organisation must relieve the Borough of providing similar facilities.
 - The ratepayer must provide facilities to certain priority groups such as the elderly, disabled, minority groups, disadvantaged groups, or provide the residents of the borough with such services, opportunities or facilities that cannot be obtained locally or are not provided locally by another organisation
 - The ratepayer must be paying its employees at least the national minimum wage
 - Not more than 50% of the ratepayer's employees must be on zero-hour contracts
 - At least 50% of the ratepayer's employees must be living in Sandwell

and

- The ratepayer must demonstrate that Discretionary Relief will only be required short-term and that the business /operation is financially viable in the medium/long term; and
- The ratepayer must show that the organisation will comply with all legislative requirements and operate in an ethical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly manner at all times.

25. Enquiries relating to this relief should be directed to the Business Rates team via our online contact us form

<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates>

Community Benefit Clause

26. Any businesses benefitting from this relief must engage with the Council's Think Local Recruitment team to assist with the recruitment of any new staff.

27. Businesses benefitting from this relief must also consider apprenticeships or develop existing employees to gain recognised qualifications e.g. NVQ's,

28. The business should use www.thinksandwell.co.uk to advertise any supply opportunities resulting from the building of new premises etc.

PART OCCUPIED/PART VOID SECTION 44A RELIEF ('s44A')

General Explanation

29. If a property is only partly occupied, the Council has discretion to request that the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) apportion the property's rateable value between its occupied and unoccupied parts, provided it '...will remain so for a short time only'

30. Partially occupied rate relief (often referred to as 'Section 44A' or 's44A' Relief) is not intended to be used merely where part of a property is temporarily not used. The intention is aimed at situations where there are practical, financial or economic difficulties in occupying or vacating all of the property, or exceptional circumstances may have arisen meaning the area is incapable of occupation at that time unique to the business

31. The effect of the reduction under s44A would be to reduce the rates on the premises to the same level as would be payable if the unoccupied part formed a separate hereditament

32. If a visit to the property is required to assist in making a decision on an application, the ratepayer must allow a Council Officer accompanied access to the property by appointment during normal working hours at a time and date mutually agreed. The Council Officer may take measurements and photographs as evidence during the inspection. Full rates remain payable until the visit is concluded and a decision has been made whether or not to award the s44A Relief

33. Every application will be considered on its own merits, but the Council will have particular regard to the effect on its Collection Fund and the interests of local Council Taxpayers when considering whether it is reasonable to award the relief or not. Confirmation is required that the business claiming the relief, at the very least, pays its employees the National Minimum Wage and/or the National Living Wage, as appropriate to their age and circumstances

34. Following any inspection of the premises but before being referred to the VOA, applications will need to be approved by the Council's Section 151 Officer.
35. If awarded, relief in the Sandwell area will only normally start from the date stated on the application and will only be awarded for up to a maximum of three months (or six months for an industrial hereditament) in a financial year. In exceptional circumstances, consideration will be given to awarding relief across financial year, for example application made late in the year.
36. Consideration will also be given in exceptional circumstances to awarding relief for a retrospective period where the ratepayer can demonstrate good cause for not submitting the application earlier
37. For any application approved, details with regards to the unoccupied area will be forwarded to the VOA. The VOA must then issue a certificate confirming the rateable value of the unoccupied area in order for the s44A relief to be awarded. Once the VOA has issued a certificate, relief must be awarded in accordance with it.
38. This is a discretionary relief and full rates will remain payable on a partially occupied property if the Council chooses not to exercise its power in this respect

Decisions by the Council

39. Every application will be considered on its own merits however, in addition to the effect on the Collection Fund and local Council Taxpayer, when considering an application for Section 44A Relief, the following factors will be taken into account:
 - The circumstances leading to the partial occupation
 - Previous awards of Section 44A Relief to the same business/ organisation and the net effect on Council Taxpayers
 - The intention of the business in relation to unoccupied area(s)
 - The reasonableness of the ratepayer requesting an alteration of the rating assessment from the VOA
 - The availability of evidence that the unoccupied area(s) will be empty for a short period only
 - Full occupation being phased in over a period of time or full vacation occurring in stages over a period of time, if applicable
40. Relief will *not* normally be considered where:
 - Access is refused and/or it has not been possible to verify the application
 - Part occupation is likely to exceed a short time
 - The area is not clearly defined
 - Part occupation is seasonal or due to the nature of the business
 - The premises are partially empty due to essential maintenance or upgrading
 - The company is moving out of Sandwell
 - There have been repeated requests on an annual basis, as this is not deemed 'temporary' relief
 - There is a national crisis/pandemic affecting a significant number of businesses.
 - Government funding is available to assist

Applications for Relief under this scheme

41. Applications must be in writing. An MS Word application form is available via the following link <http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200308/business-rates/2954/partly-occupied-property-relief-section-4-4a>

42. As much information as possible must be provided to the Council as detailed on the application form in order for the request to be considered. This must include a plan(s) of the premises clearly showing the unoccupied area(s) and should include measurements where possible
43. Once an application has been received, if a visit is required an officer from the Council will contact the ratepayer to arrange a suitable date to allow accompanied access for an inspection of the premises

Amount of relief

44. Where Sandwell MBC agrees to the award of a Section 44A relief, notification will be sent to the VOA to seek a reduction in the rateable value
45. The amount of relief is calculated on a statutory basis, based on the rateable value of the empty area(s) of the property. The appropriate rateable value is provided to Sandwell MBC by the VOA England

Variation and amendment of relief under the scheme

46. The period of relief will end on the day on which any of the following occurs:
 - There is a change to the extent of the partial occupation
 - The end of the three months/ six-month relief period, or the end of the financial year, whichever is first
 - A new period of relief under a new application starts
 - The premises become fully occupied or completely unoccupied
 - The ratepayer ceases to be the person or organisation liable to pay rates in respect of the premises
 - The Council is unable to verify, following reasonable notice, that the area remains unoccupied
47. If there is a change in the rateable value, relief will be apportioned or removed as appropriate

Notification of Decision

48. The Council will notify the ratepayer of their entitlement to relief by the issue of an amended demand notice. Where an application is refused, businesses will be informed by the council of this decision in writing.

Decision Review Process

49. There is no statutory right of appeal against a decision made by the Council regarding discretionary rate relief, including Section 44A applications. However, the Council recognises that ratepayers should be entitled to have a decision reviewed if they are dissatisfied with the outcome
50. The Council will accept a written request for a review of its decision. The request should include the reasons for requesting a review and any supporting evidence
51. A request for review must be made within one calendar month of the date of refusal
52. The ratepayer will be notified of the outcome of the review in writing.
53. This review process does not affect a ratepayer's legal right to seek to challenge a decision by way of Judicial Review

Supporting Small Businesses Scheme ('SSBR')

Supporting Small Businesses Scheme ('SSBR')

Eligibility and Level of Relief

54. The Government announced at the 2022 Autumn Statement that for 2023/24 to 2025/26, SSBR is to provide support to businesses losing eligibility for some or all Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Rate Relief as a result of their rateable value increasing through the 2023 revaluation.
55. The relief ensures small businesses do not have to pay more than £600 increase per year effective from 01 April 2023.
56. Charities and Community Amateur Sports clubs, who are already entitled to mandatory 80% relief, are not eligible for 2023 SSBR.
57. A change of ratepayers will not affect eligibility for the SSBR Scheme, but eligibility will be lost if the property falls vacant or becomes occupied by a charity or Community Amateur Sports Club.
58. There is no second property test for eligibility for the 2023 SSBR scheme. However, those ratepayers who during 2022/23 lost entitlement to Small Business Rate Relief (because they failed the second property test) but have, under the rules for Small Business Rate Relief, been given a 12 month period of grace before their relief ended - can continue on the 2023 SSBR scheme for the remainder of their 12 month period of grace.
59. Period of Entitlement to 2023 SSBR
60. The 2017 SSBR scheme was provided to support small and medium ratepayers who had seen large increases in their bills at the 2017 revaluation, and those ratepayers have had 6 years of support to allow them to adjust to their full 2017 bills. Therefore, for those ratepayers receiving 2017 SSB relief in 2022/23, any eligibility for 2023 SSBR will end on 31 March 2024. Relief for these ratepayers is awarded for one year only.
61. All other eligible ratepayers receiving 2023 SSBR will receive relief for either 3 years or until they reach the bill they would have paid without the scheme.

Sequence of Reliefs

62. SSBR is to be awarded after any eligibility to Transitional Relief and Small Business Rate Relief.
63. All other discretionary reliefs, including those funded by section 31 grants will be considered after the application of 2023 SSBR.

Subsidy Control

64. The 2023 SSBR is likely to amount to a subsidy. Therefore, any relief provided by local Authorities under this scheme will need to comply with the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations.

65. The local authority is seeking to provide relief that falls below the Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) thresholds, the Subsidy Control Act allows an economic actor (e.g. a holding company and its subsidiaries) to receive up to £315,000 in a three-year period (consisting of the 2023/24 year and the two previous financial years). MFA subsidies cumulate with each other and with other subsidies that fall within the category of 'Minimal or SPEI financial assistance'. BEIS COVID-19 business grants and any other subsidies claimed under the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance limit of the Trade and Co-operation Agreement should be counted under the £315,000 allowance.
66. In those cases where it is clear to the local authority that the ratepayer is likely to breach the MFA limit then the authority will automatically withhold the relief.

Applying the relief

67. Sandwell MBC has identified the businesses that are eligible for the 2023 SSBR scheme. Ratepayers eligible for the scheme starting in the 2023/24 financial year have been automatically awarded a reduction in line with the new scheme to help off-set the increase in their business rates.
68. The amount of relief awarded under Supporting Small Business Relief scheme will be recalculated in the event of a change of circumstances, including changes such as a backdated change to the rateable value or the property or the award of another relief.

DISCRETIONARY RELIEFS INTRODUCED DURING 2023/24 and 2024/25

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2023/24

69. The Government announced in the Budget on 17 November 2022 that it will provide a Relief of 75% up to a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business for retail, hospitality and leisure properties.
70. As these measures are 2023/24 only, the Government is not changing legislation, however it will reimburse local authorities that use its discretionary powers, introduced by the Localism Act (under Section 47 of the Local government Finance Act 1988, as amended) to grant relief in line with eligible criteria. Central Government will reimburse local authorities for their share of the discretionary relief under the rates retention scheme.
71. Prior to 1st April 2024 an application for the previous financial year had to be received and assessed by 30th September.
72. *For example:* An application for backdated relief for 2022/23 (covering the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023), is received by the Council in time for it to be assessed and approved before 30 September 2023, then DRR would be backdated to 1 April 2022, or the date of occupation if later).

From the 1st April 2024 the local authority is able to operate relief without restriction in respect of the financial year 2023/24 onwards.

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2024/25

73. The Government announced in the Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023 that it would extend the Relief of 75% up to a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business for retail, hospitality and leisure properties. As these measures are 2024/25 only, the Government is not changing legislation, however it will reimburse local authorities that use its discretionary powers, introduced by the Localism Act (under Section 47 of the Local government Finance Act 1988, as amended) to grant relief in line with eligible criteria. Central Government will reimburse local authorities for their share of the discretionary relief under the rates retention scheme. From the 1st April 2024 the local authority is able to operate relief without restriction in respect of the financial year 2023/24 onwards.

Key Criteria for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief Financial Year 2023/24 and 2024/25

- i) 75% relief for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 or 75% relief for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025
- A cash cap of £110,000 per business subject to:
 - The Property must be occupied
 - There is no rateable value limit
 - The Property must be used wholly or mainly as:
 - a) a shop, restaurant, café, drinking establishment, cinemas or live music venue.
 - b) for assembly and leisure; or
 - c) a hotel, guest or boarding premises, or self-catering accommodation
 - The eligible ratepayer has not refused the relief. (The eligible ratepayer cannot withdraw their refusal for either all or part of the financial year).

Who can apply?

74. The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities has issued guidance outlining what they consider eligible property uses to mean, including:

- a) Shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas, and live music venues:
- Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of goods to visiting members of the public:
 - Shops (such as: florists, bakers, butchers, grocers, greengrocers, jewellers, stationers, off licences, chemists, newsagents, hardware stores, supermarkets, etc)
 - Charity shops
 - Opticians
 - Post offices
 - Furnishing shops/display rooms (such as: carpet shops, double glazing, garage doors)
 - Car/caravan show rooms
 - Second-hand car lots
 - Markets
 - Petrol stations
 - Garden centres
 - Art galleries (where art is for sale/hire)
 - Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public:
 - Hair and beauty services (such as: hairdressers, nail bars, beauty salons, tanning shops, etc)
 - Shoe repairs/key cutting
 - Travel agents
 - Ticket offices e.g.: for theatre
 - Dry cleaners
 - Launderettes
 - PC/TV/domestic appliance repair

- Funeral directors
 - Photo processing
 - Tool hire
 - Care hire
- Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of food and/or drink to visiting members of the public:
 - Restaurants
 - Takeaways
 - Sandwich shops
 - Coffee shops
 - Pubs
 - Bars
- Hereditaments which are being used as cinemas
- Hereditaments that are being used as live music venues:
 - Live music venues are hereditaments wholly or mainly used for the performance of live music for the purpose of entertaining an audience. Hereditaments cannot be considered a live music venue for the purpose of business rates relief where a venue is wholly or mainly used as a nightclub or a theatre, for the purposes of the Town and Country planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).
 - Hereditaments can be a live music venue even if used for other activities, but only if those other activities (i) are merely ancillary or incidental to the performance of live music (e.g. the sale/supply of alcohol to audience members) or (ii) do not affect the fact that the primary activity for the premises is the performance of live music (e.g. because those other activities are insufficiently regular or frequent, such as a polling station or a fortnightly community event)
 - There may be circumstances in which it is difficult to tell whether an activity is a performance of live music or, instead, the playing of recorded music. Although we would expect this to be clear in most circumstances, guidance on this may be found in Chapter 16 of the statutory guidance issued in April 2018 under Section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003.

b) For assembly and leisure:

- Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of sport, leisure and facilities to visiting members of the public (including for the viewing of such activities):
 - Sports grounds and clubs
 - Museums and art galleries
 - Nightclubs
 - Sport and leisure facilities
 - Stately homes and historic houses
 - Theatres
 - Tourist attractions
 - Gyms
 - Wellness centres, spas, massage parlours

- Casinos, gambling clubs and bingo halls

- Hereditaments that are being used for the assembly of visiting members of the public:

- Public halls

- Clubhouses, clubs and institutions

c) Hotels, guest & boarding premises and self-catering accommodation:

- Hereditaments where the non-domestic part is being used for the provision of living accommodation as a business:

- Hotels, Guest and Boarding Houses

- Holiday Homes

- Caravan parks and sites

75. This guidance is not exhaustive, and it is for Authorities to determine whether properties not listed in the guidance notes are broadly similar in nature and if so, to consider them for relief. Conversely, properties that are not broadly similar in nature to those listed should not be eligible for the discount. Ratepayers that occupy more than one property will be entitled to a discount for each of their eligible properties, subject to any cash cap applicable in year 2024/25.

Retail Discount Exclusions

76. The Government does not consider the following types of use to be retail use for the purposes of this discount:

- Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public:

- Financial services (e.g.: banks, building societies, cash points, bureaux de change, short term loan providers, betting shops)

- Medical services (e.g.: vets, dentists, doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors)

- Professional services (e.g.: solicitors, accountants, insurance agents/financial advisors, employment agencies, estate agents, letting agents)

- Post office sorting offices

- Hereditaments that are not reasonably accessible to visiting members of the public

Claiming Retail Discount

77. New applicants are required to complete an online application form available at through the link at: https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200308/business_rates/4268/retail_relief

78. Further information regarding the application process can be found on the same web page

Maximum Award

79. The total amount of Government funded discount available for each property under the 2023/24 and the 2024/25 scheme is 75%, of the bill after all mandatory and discretionary reliefs have been applied but after discretionary reliefs granted under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act, for example: Hardship Relief and Discretionary Rate Relief for charity and not for profit organisations. The maximum discount awarded will not exceed the net liability.

Notification

80. Where the application is successful, a revised bill will be issued.
81. Where the application is not successful, the applicant will be notified accordingly
82. Requirement to make payment of amounts falling due
83. Ratepayers' must continue to pay any amount of business rate that fall due pending the outcome of an application. The Council may apply its normal recovery procedures in cases where payments are not received.

Heat Network Relief

84. In its Final Report of the business Rates Review published in October 2021, the government announced a 100% relief for eligible low-carbon heat networks that have their own rates bill.
85. The relief is targeted at hereditaments being used wholly or mainly as a heat network which have their own rating assessment. The relief will be for those networks generating from a low carbon source.
86. Heat networks take heat or cooling from a central source(s) and deliver it to a variety of different customers such as public buildings, shops, offices, hospitals, universities and homes. By supplying multiple buildings, they avoid the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building. Heat networks have the potential to reduce bills, support local regeneration and be a cost-effective way of reducing carbon emissions from heating.
87. At the Spring Statement 2022, the Chancellor announced that the heat network relief will apply from 1 April 2022 and will be delivered by Local Authorities using their discretionary relief powers. This approach has also been confirmed for the relief to be continued to be provided in the financial year 2023/24.

Eligibility

88. In order to be eligible for Heat Network Relief the hereditament must be:
 - a) wholly or mainly used for the purposes of a heat network.
 - b) The heat is over the next 12 months (based on a forecast) expected to be generated from a low carbon source (irrespective of whether that source is located on the hereditament or on a different hereditament).
89. Wholly or Mainly used for the purpose of a heat network
90. For these purposes, a heat network is a facility, such as a district heating scheme, which supplies thermal energy from a central source to consumers via a network of pipes for the purposes of space heating, space cooling or domestic hot water. Hereditaments wholly or mainly providing heat for a different purpose (such as an industrial process) are not eligible
91. The test will be applied to the hereditament as a whole and heat network relief is not available on part of a hereditament. Many small and medium scale heat networks, such as common heating systems in multi-occupied buildings or estates, do not give rise to a separate business rates bill. In these cases, the heat network forms part of the services of the properties which have a wider purpose (e.g. offices) and therefore would not be eligible for Heat Network Relief.

92. The test is on thermal energy. This means that the purposes of generating electricity does not count towards meeting the wholly or mainly test and, as a result, the government does not anticipate hereditaments comprising power stations and a heat recovery and network system to qualify.
93. The Heat is generated from a low carbon source
94. A low carbon source is a source of which at least
- a) 50% is renewable
(A renewable source is any of the sources listed in Class 1(e) of the Schedule to the Valuation for Rating (Plant and Machinery) (England) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No. 540))
 - b) 50% is waste heat.
(Waste heat includes heat or coolth unavoidably generated as a by-product of another process, which would be wasted if not used for the purposes of a district heating network)
 - c) 75% is cogeneration heat (where cogeneration' means the simultaneous generation in one process of thermal energy and electrical or mechanical energy), or
 - d) 75% is a combination of the sources above

Reliefs Awarded

95. Relief is available at 100% of the chargeable amount for the hereditament for any day on which the eligibility criteria are met. Therefore, for eligible hereditaments the rates liability will fall to nil from 1 April 2023.
96. The heat network relief will be applied after mandatory reliefs but before any other discretionary reliefs.
97. The amount of heat network relief will be recalculated in the event of a change in circumstances. This could include, for example, a backdated change to the rateable value or to the hereditament. This change of circumstances could arise during the year in question or during a later year.

Subsidy control

98. The Heat Network relief is subject to the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations. Businesses eligible for relief will need to fulfil any requirements in place to ensure compliance with those obligations in advance of, during, and after claiming relief.

Claiming Heat Network Relief

99. There is no application form for this relief. To apply please use our online contact us form <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> giving full details of why you think your business should be considered for this relief and provide all information you think is relevant to support your application.

Local Newspaper Relief

100. From 1 April 2017 the Government provided funding to local authorities so that they can provide a discount worth £1,500 in year 2017/18 and 2018/19 for office space occupied by local newspapers. The Autumn budget 2018 extended this relief to financial year 2019/20.
101. In a Written Ministerial Statement 27 January 2020, the Government further extended this relief to apply in the financial years 2020/21 to 2024/25.
102. Please note that this relief will cease at the end of the 2024/25 financial year

Eligibility Criteria

103. This relief is administered under the local powers discount contained in Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
- The relief is available to local newspapers only
 - The property must be occupied by a local newspaper and used wholly or mainly as offices for journalists and reporters
 - Only one discount is available per newspaper title and per property
 - Subject to subsidy limits

Exclusions

104. Exclusions to this relief are local council newspapers, online publications and local magazines

Applications

105. There is no application form for this relief. To apply please use our online contact us form <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> giving full details of why you think your business should be considered for this relief and provide all information you think is relevant to support your application.
106. For the relief to be granted, the council must make a decision within 6 months of the end of the financial year

The Maximum Award

107. The total amount of government funded relief available is £1,500 for each financial year 2017/18 to 2024/25 for one local newspaper title and property
108. The relief will be applied against the net bill after all other reliefs

Notification

109. Where the application is successful, a revised bill will be issued.
110. Where the application is not successful, the applicant will be notified accordingly.

Requirement to make a payment of amounts falling due

111. Ratepayers' must continue to pay any amount of business rate that fall due pending the outcome of an application. The Council may apply its normal recovery procedures in cases where payments are not received.

Future Reliefs in 2024/25

112. Should the government introduce further Business Rates Reliefs during 2024/25 we will implement these in accordance with any legislation and/or Government guidance issued, and we will update the guidance contained in the Discretionary Relief Policy document accordingly

Discretionary rate reliefs and state aid/subsidy control

State Aid/Subsidy Control Regulations

113. State Aid guidance was withdrawn on 1 January 2021. The Brexit transition period has ended and new rules on Subsidy Control now apply. For current information and to see how this may affect your business please go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complying-with-the-uks-international-obligations-on-subsidy-control-guidance-for-public-authorities>
114. If you believe your business will exceed the new subsidy control limits you must contact the Business Rates team via our online contact us form at <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> to ask for any relief already awarded to be removed from your account

Policy review

115. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments, feedback and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

116. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified because of this policy.

Housing Benefit
War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Disregard Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

Introduction

1. War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation will be paid to those persons eligible to receive it and Sandwell have decided to disregard this income when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit. This will be aligned to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Policy with key principles of tackling inequality and reducing poverty.

Policy statement

2. The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 make provision for the first £10.00 of income from War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme to be disregarded in any benefit assessment. The cost of this disregard is fully reimbursed to the Council.
3. The Social Security Administration Act 1992 gives the Council discretion to disregard any amount it chooses in addition to the statutory provision. The Council has taken advantage of this provision and fully disregarded income claimants receive from the War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Schemes.

General Principles

4. The Council will fully disregard income from War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit.
5. The 100% disregard of funds received as War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme awards aims to:
 - Ensure that members of the armed forces who have been disabled during service or the widows or surviving civil partner of those who died in the service of their country, should not be penalised by having their pensions or payments made in relation to their service, taken into account in the calculation of their Housing Benefit entitlement
 - Ensure income from the schemes is treated consistently when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit
 - Ensure continued alignment between treatment of these incomes under the Housing Benefit scheme set by the Department for Works and Pensions and Sandwell Council's own Council Tax Support Scheme
 - Ensure that everyone gets fair treatment and equal opportunity
 - Promote a transparent and simple assessment methodology that is easily understood
 - Provide staff with guidance for making reasonable, fair and consistent decisions

Process for services

Administration of the scheme

6. A statutory disregard of £10 is required from current payments of War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme in accordance with the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006. These payments include:
 - War disablement pension
 - War Widows/widowers pension
 - Guaranteed Income Payments (GIP's) under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (AFRFCS) payments
 - Service Attributable Pension (SAP) injury or illness attributable to service on or before April 1975
 - Any comparable payment paid by Government of a country outside Great Britain
 - A pension paid under the law of the Federal Republic of Germany or Austria to victims of National Socialist Persecution
7. But not pre-1973 War Widow's Special Payments which are already disregarded in full.

Legislation

8. The Regulations providing for this are:
 - The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 paragraph 40(2) and schedule 5
 - Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the age qualifying for the State Pension Credit) Regulations 2006 paragraph 33(9) and schedule 5
 - Sections 134 and 139 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 provide the Council with the discretion to modify the Housing Benefit Scheme by disregarding a further amount, or all, of specified war disablement pensions and payments. The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (War Pension Disregards) Regulations 2007 (as amended) which prescribe which pensions and payments these are.

Policy review

9. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

10. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Written Questions
Director:	Brendan Arnold – Interim Director of Finance Mike Jones – Assistant Director Legal and Assurance

The following written questions have been received: -

5(a) From Councillor Fisher to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment

For the past several years I've had residents who live in high rise flats being trapped in their home due to constant breakdowns with the lifts. Elderly and disabled residents have been unable to attend hospital or GP appointments or go out for essential food items.

The latest breakdown was on 24th February and not repaired until 27th February, that's 3 days some residents were unable to get out of their home. It then broke down again 2 days later on the 29th of February.

Can the cabinet member please let me know what she can do sort this ongoing problem so residents that live in Willow, Beech and Aspen on Charlemont Farm are able to attend appointments or shop for essential food items and that swift repairs are carried out.



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

Can I congratulate the Cabinet Members for Children, Young People and Education and Public health on the launch of a mobile family hub – it is excellent news for the residents of Sandwell who require advice on parenting support and health & wellbeing. Can I ask the Cabinet Member what the availability is in each town and is it necessary to make an appointment?

5(c) From Councillor Pall to the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities

As we celebrate International Women's Day, could the Cabinet lead for Community Safety provide an update on efforts to address gender inequality in Sandwell, particularly focusing on initiatives aimed at supporting and empowering women and combating gender-based violence and discrimination?

5(d) From Councillor Chidley to the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism

Forge Mill Farm is a popular attraction for children and adults – there is so much for families to do and many councillors have received so much positive feedback from residents on events such as pancake making and lambing.

Construction work currently happening close to the walking trail - can the Cabinet Member let us know what is happening there and when it will be completed.

5(e) From Councillor Hinchliff to the Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Education

National Careers week is being held between the 4th and 9th of March 2024. Can I ask the Cabinet Member what work is being done not just in this week but all year round to provide our young people with the careers advice they need to give them the best start to their working lives?



5(f) From Councillor Maycock to the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism

Sandwell is a borough of animal lovers, so it was brilliant news to see that a new policy for Animal Welfare at Forge Mill Farm in Sandwell Valley has been adopted and approved by Cabinet. I understand that Forge Mill Farm looks after a variety of rare breeds and it is great news that it has recently won a trophy.

I also understand that the farm is looking to become a Centre of Excellence - can the Leader inform us when this will be completed and also out of interest what rare breeds live at Forge Mill?

5(g) From Councillor Mayo to the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities

I understand that a new prohibition has been put in place relating to BBQ's and fires on public land including campfires. This is great news as I know that members of the public are worried about the damage that grass fires can cause throughout the summer. Can I ask the Cabinet Member what will happen to a person who is caught by the council having a BBQ or lighting a fire while on public land?

5(h) From Councillor Millar to the Leader of the Council

What an accolade for Sandwell to receive praise from Minister Simon Hoare, Conservative MP during a debate in Parliament. Can I ask the Leader to clarify to this council what positive remarks were made about Sandwell Council's improvement journey?

5(i) From Councillor Owen to the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism

'Boost your Club' was an incredible opportunity for clubs to apply for funding from Sandwell Council. The fund was set up to help the club kick start their project in getting people active which is an excellent opportunity for residents to get fit. Is the Cabinet Member able to tell us how many applications were received from local clubs and when will Town leads receive what applications were successful in each town?



5(j) From Councillor Kaur to the Cabinet member for Public Health and Communities

Frozen and slush-ice drinks are popular amongst our children. In August 2023, the Food Standard Agency (FSA) issued new voluntary industry guidance on glycerol in slush-ice drinks, advising that they should not be sold to children under four years of age and parents have been warned not to let toddlers near the frozen drinks.

February 2024 two infants almost died after consuming them. Both children, aged three and four, were hospitalised. Doctors who treated the children blamed glycerol in the frozen drinks.

Consumption of glycerol is dangerous in high concentrations or quantities, Dr Duane Mellor, a registered dietitian and senior lecturer at the Aston Medical School in Birmingham, has commented -

“This is why children, who are smaller than adults, are more at risk of drinking dangerous amounts. If too much glycerol is consumed too quickly and in too large a volume, it can potentially change the blood concentration”.

How have we informed Sandwell residents of the risks to children of consuming iced slushy drinks?

5(k) From Councillor Randhawa to the Cabinet member for Regeneration and WMCA

I have read that Swan Lane in West Bromwich is to receive a makeover and extensive regeneration – it is excellent news for West Bromwich and it is news that the businesses in area will welcome. Can I ask the Cabinet Member to explain what the current situation/plans are for developing the land?



5(l) From Councillor Smith to the Cabinet member for Finance and Resources

The household support fund helps in subsidising some key services that the council provides. Can I ask the Cabinet Member if the government has made any announcement yet on the household support fund that will be needed for services to support the vulnerable including children?

5(m) From Councillor Trumpeter to the Cabinet member for Environment and Highways

We are receiving regular and multiple complaints about parking issues on Hollyhedge Road, Stanhurst Way, Harrington Croft and the streets off Beaconview Road. Parking problems are generally caused by large vans parking on pavements, or on grass verges. Sometimes it is down to just down to inconsiderate parking. What can Highways do to assist our residents with these matters?



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Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Improvement Plan Progress – Grant Thornton Follow-up Report 2023
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 Council receive Grant Thornton’s Value for Money Governance Review Follow Up Review Report of December 2023.

2. Reasons for Recommendations


- 2.1 Grant Thornton conducted a Value for Money Review of the council’s governance arrangements in Autumn 2021. Their report was received by Cabinet on 15 December 2021 and Council on 18 January 2022. Their report made three statutory recommendations, which the council are legally required to respond to and address. These were incorporated into the council’s Improvement Plan, approved in June 2022.
- 2.2 As part of the council’s assurance framework for the Improvement Plan, Grant Thornton reviewed progress in a follow-up review in Autumn 2022. At that point, Grant Thornton retained the three statutory recommendations and made four new key recommendations and improvement recommendations against the Key Lines of Enquiry of the Value for Money Governance Review. These recommendations were



built into the refreshed Improvement Plan approved by Cabinet in March 2023.

- 2.3 Grant Thornton have conducted a further follow-up review in Autumn 2023 to determine the council's progress in addressing the statutory recommendations made in 2021, as well as the key and improvement recommendations of their 2022 follow-up review. This external perspective is a key source of evidence of the council's improvement journey under government intervention.
- 2.4 The Improvement Plan is a 'live' document and is updated on a quarterly basis to reflect progress and incorporate new activities. The recommendations made by Grant Thornton in their 2023 follow-up review will be incorporated into the Improvement Plan to ensure that the council's improvement journey continues to address the key issues arising.

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

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

4.1 Governance Review – Background and Scope

4.1.1 Grant Thornton's Value for Money Governance Review was conducted in the Autumn of 2021. The scope of the review covered seventeen key lines of enquiry, split into two categories:

- Services and Management; and
- Meetings, Complaints and Relationships.

4.1.2 In their original report, Grant Thornton made a series of 45 recommendations, made up of:

- 3 Statutory Recommendations
- 5 Key Recommendations
- 37 Improvement Recommendations

4.1.3 These recommendations, along with those from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and CIPFA's Financial Management Review, were incorporated into the council's single overarching Improvement Plan.

4.1.4 At the time of publishing the original report in late November 2021, Grant Thornton had not completed their investigation into the line of enquiry relating to the 'Governance and Legal Support to Director of Public Health'. This line of enquiry was concluded in Autumn 2022, and Grant Thornton reissued their full report in December 2022 to include four additional improvement recommendations to the council.

4.1.5 In their first follow-up review in Autumn 2022, Grant Thornton recognised the significant progress made on a number of their original recommendations. At this point, the statutory recommendations remained in place with a further four Key Recommendations and 25 improvement recommendations. In some cases, these recommendations built on those made in 2022 and recognising the progress made on the council's improvement journey to date. The council's response to these 29 new recommendations and the four additional recommendations from the updated 2021 report (a total of 33 recommendations in 2022) was reported to Cabinet in March 2023. The actions required to address the recommendations were incorporated into the refresh of the Improvement Plan at the same time.

4.1.6 The follow-up review of December 2023 considered progress against the three statutory recommendations and the 33 key and improvement



recommendations made in 2022. The scope of Grant Thornton’s 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 Key Findings and Recommendations

4.2.1 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*”.

4.2.2 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*”.

4.2.3 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.

4.2.4 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.

- 4.2.5 The key recommendations and the further 26 improvement recommendations made by Grant Thornton in their 2023 report will be integral to reframing the council's improvement journey to ensure it continues to focus on key issues and that improvements made remain sustainable. These recommendations 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 Risk Management

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

- 4.1.2 Within the Improvement Plan Risk Register, a number of risks identified Grant Thornton's follow up report as part of the assurance as to the likelihood of those risks materialising. The Risk Register will be reviewed as part of the regular programme management of the Improvement Plan,



and the impact of the follow-up report on risk scores will be reported to Cabinet as part of the next quarterly update

5 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Resources to deliver the Improvement Plan have been allocated from within existing commitments in the majority of cases. Where one-off funding is required to deliver improvements, this will either be funded from the Improvement and Capacity Fund or from earmarked reserves created from 2021/22 underspend position. Allocation of this funding was approved by Council with the Improvement Plan on 7 June 2022.</p> <p>Where funding is required for longer-term change, this will be incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.</p> <p>There are no land or building implications associated with the Improvement Plan as a whole.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The Governance Review was conducted under Sections 20 and 21 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, and the council is legally required to demonstrate that action is being or will be taken to address issues raised in the report.</p> <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 the Improvement Plan and achievement of the desired outcomes will meet the remainder of the Directions.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively</p>



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



	and linking them to the Corporate Plan objectives, the council will be able to maximise its social value return.
Climate Change:	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. Green in everything we do is one of the Fairer Sandwell principles running throughout the Corporate Plan. Any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to embed this principle and further the climate change agenda.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no Corporate Parenting implications of this report.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report, December 2023

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:
 - [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
 - [September 2023](#)
 - [June 2023](#)
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [January 2023 \(External Review Reports\)](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
 - [June 2022](#)
 - To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
 - [September 2023](#)
 - [June 2023](#)
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)
- External Review Reports
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report 2022](#)
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review December 2021 – reissued October 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report 2022](#)



- [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report February 2022](#)
- [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2022](#)





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

Year ended 31 March 2023

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.

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.

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 in 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

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.

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.

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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

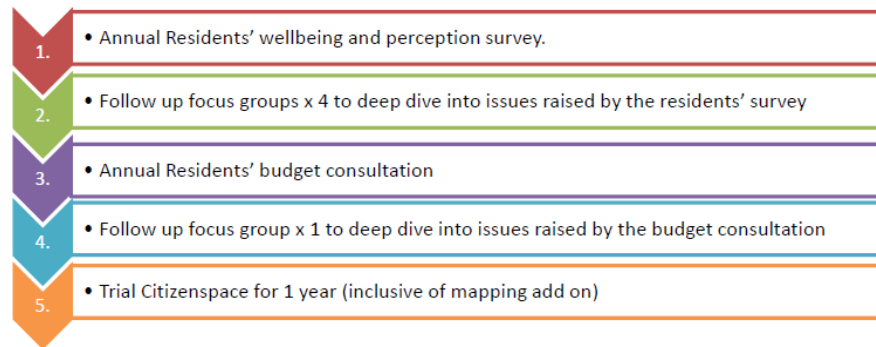
The Council undertook its first residents' survey in 1988 but had only occasionally repeated this exercise, the last time being in 2017 to support development of Vision 2030. Regular consultation on budgetary plans had not been conducted with residents since 2010 although annual consultation is carried 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

Page 417

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 #
Page 418	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.

Page # 419

	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 # 420

	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 # 421

	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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Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Reports from the Council's representative on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, Transport for West Midlands, Police and Crime Panel and West Midlands Combined Authority
Director:	Assistant Chief Executive – James McLaughlin james_mclaughlin@sandwell.gov.uk Mike Jones, Assistant Director Legal and Assurance and Monitoring Officer Mike1_Jones@sandwell.gov.uk
Contact Officer:	Stephnie Hancock Stephnie_Hancock@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council receives updates from the Council's representatives on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, Transport for the West Midlands, Police and Crime Panel and West Midlands Combined Authority.

2 Reasons for Recommendations







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



to ask questions of the relevant members and the Council on these reports.

Reports are attached in respect of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (Councillor Jalil), Transport for the West Midlands (Councillor Choudhry), West Midlands Police and Crime Panel (Councillor Khatun) and West Midlands Combined Authority (The Leader).

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

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

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Council will receive an update on the work undertaken by West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, Transport for the West Midlands, Police and Crime Panel and West Midlands Combined Authority from the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 It is usual practice to receive six monthly update reports.

6 Implications

Resources:	There are no strategic resource implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	Under Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985, arrangements have been made for enabling questions on the discharge of a joint authority's functions to be put in the course of the proceedings of any constituent district council. A member is nominated by the joint authority for that purpose (the Section 41 member).



	It is customary for the Council to receive six monthly reports from those members appointed pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to answer questions put to them at council meetings relating to the discharge of functions of joint authorities. This was the case in respect of the West Midlands Police Authority until the Police and Crime Commissioner [PCC] took office on 22 November 2012. The West Midlands Police Authority ceased to exist at that point. The West Midlands Police and Crime Panel, on which the Council is represented, now holds the Police and Crime Commissioner to account.
Risk:	There are no direct risks associated with this report.
Equality:	There is no requirement for an equality impact assessment.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no direct health and wellbeing implications from this report.
Social Value	There are no direct social value implications from this report.
Climate Change	There are no direct implications arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting	There are no direct implications arising from this report.

7. Appendices

- Appendix A – West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service Update.
- Appendix B – Transport for West Midlands update.
- Appendix C – West Midlands Police and Crime Panel update.
- Appendix D – West Midlands Combined Authority update.

8. Background Papers

None



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**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Section 41 Report – March 2024
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

‘Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier’

Report by Councillor Rizwan Jalil

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Membership of the Authority

The Members of the Authority for the Municipal Year 2023-24 are as follows:

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

*Section 41 member

Cllr Matt Ward (Labour) replaced Councillor Chris Bott (Labour) as of 18 September 2023, Cllr Simran Cheema replaced Cllr Matt Ward from 8 January 2024.

Service Performance against Strategic Plan Q3 2023/24 (up to end of December 2023)

Please note these are the latest figures for Q3 2023/24 (to the end of December 2023), so they may be subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Response times to the most critical and high-risk incidents remain within target, and are well within target for all other categories of incident. The total number of accidental dwelling fires is on target. Injuries from these fires is also on target, and the overall number remains low.

The total number of Safe and Well points is below target, but the average assessment point score per safe and well visit remains high, which positively indicates our success in targeting prevention activity to the most vulnerable.

Deliberate fires in derelict buildings is well above target – this continues to be an area of particular focus for the service and all our command areas are looking to work with partners to address the risks associated with these fires, including securing (e.g. boarding up) properties when they become derelict, and working with building owners to ensure they are safe from fire.

False alarms due to equipment – normally as a result of faults – are above the desired target for both domestic and non-domestic premises. While the service continues to work with repeat offenders and Alarm Receiving Centres to drive down these types of incident, we have also taken steps to reduce our overall attendance at false alarms to reduce costs and ensure our resources remain available for emergencies. We have already introduced a more proportionate level of response – a smaller vehicle crewed with one or two people - to hospitals and other managed forms of building such as university accommodation, unless there’s a confirmed fire. This has allowed us to keep resources available while ensuring we can support premises to meet their fire safety duties.

Indicator	Target	Performance
Risk Based Attendance Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 (high risk) – 5 minutes Category 2 – 7 minutes Category 3 – 10 minutes Category 4 – 20 minutes 	Category 1 (high risk) – 4.55 Category 2 – 5.35 Category 3 – 5.10 Category 4 – 6.18
Accidental dwelling fires	347	330
Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (requiring hospital treatment)	9	9
Safe & Well points achieved by the Brigade (visits to higher risk people bring a bigger point score)	65,000	39,368
Deliberate fires in dwellings	43	46

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Deliberate rubbish fires	267	279
Deliberate fires in derelict buildings	17	24
Accidental fires in non-domestic premises	81	86
False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment – dwellings	1,292	1,459
False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment – non-domestic	336	395

Sandwell area performance and key statistics

In addition to the service level performance indicators above, specific statistics are available for the Sandwell area for Q3 2023/24 (to the end of December 2023). As above, these are the latest figures, so they are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Indicator	Performance	Notes
Accidental Dwelling Fires	26	Positively, accidental dwelling fires are well below target, improving on Q1 and Q2 figures.
Deliberate Rubbish Fires	39	This is over target but there is no evidence of specific trends in relation to these fires.
False Alarms (Equipment) – Dwellings	135	As with the service as a whole, this remains above target
False Alarms (Equipment) – Non-domestic	44	As with the service as a whole, this remains above target
Safe and Wells completed	576	Encouragingly, 59.5% of all SAW are referred from partners.
Average Assessment Points*	7.97	While slightly below the service average, average assessment points remain high, and is up from 7.84 in Q2.

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

WMFS activities during the last six months

1. Death of Chief Fire Officer Wayne Brown.

On 24 January 2024, we were devastated to learn that our Chief Fire Officer Wayne Brown had been found dead at his home address. His death has not been treated as suspicious. Wayne had served with West Midlands Fire Service since 2019, firstly as Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and then as Chief Fire Officer from December 2022. Prior to that Wayne had distinguished 27 year career with London Fire Brigade.

Wayne's funeral took place on 1 March 2024 at Southwark Cathedral, London with a service held simultaneously at St Martin in the Bullring, Birmingham. Our thoughts remain with Wayne's family, friends and colleagues.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Jo Bowcock, supported by the senior management team, has stepped into the role of Acting Chief Fire Officer until such time as an interim CFO can be appointed.

The service's [online book of condolence](#) remains open for those that wish to read the tributes paid or leave one of their own.

2. WMFRA agrees 2024/25 Budget.

On 19 February 2024, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority agreed its budget for the year 2024/25. The Net Revenue Budget Requirement for 2024-25 has been set at £133.634 million. This includes a 2.99% increase in the first service precept, with the precept for a Band D property now sitting at £75.20 – still one of the lowest of any FRS in the country.

Like most public services across the country, WMFRA faces increasing pressures through the effects of inflation, single year settlements and the continuing impact of the cost of living. The budget targets future savings to address a £1.9m gap in the budget, while ensuring that vital services provided to the community remain a priority to make the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier.

[The full budget report can be found on the WMFRA CMIS site.](#)

3. Service Strategy and Community Risk Management Plan documents agreed.

WMFRA have also approved the service Strategy and the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2024-2027. The new three-year Strategy builds upon previous iterations to set out a number of strategic goals more clearly for the service, with specific performance indicators against each.

The CRMP has been created following a period of public consultation in summer 2023. The document draws on public, partner and staff feedback as well as a thorough analysis of risks in the West Midlands to set out how our prevention, protection and response activities and resources will be used to tackle fires and other emergencies.

[The CRMP and Strategy reports can be found on the WMFRA CMIS site.](#) Full versions of both documents will be published on the WMFS website in early April 2024.

4. Fire Service issues warning on high carbon monoxide fuels.

WMFS have issued an urgent warning after a number of families were affected by Carbon Monoxide (CO) after using poorly labelled wood-charcoal fuels. The charcoal is advertised as being suitable for use indoors to fuel incense, shisha pipes or to light other fuels, but producing large quantities of CO. At one incident, crews detected CO concentrations as high as 600 parts per million – a potentially fatal level.

Communities have been advised, when using wood charcoal products:

- to check the safety labels of any products they use.
- not to burn these products in an unventilated environment.
- to not use the product if they are unsure about its safety.
- to install carbon monoxide alarms in their home in the same room as any fuel-burning appliance.

[WMFS has more information about this issue on their website.](#)

5. WMFS respond to flooding in West Midlands and further afield.

WMFS Firefighters responded both within the West Midlands and in neighbouring services during flooding caused by heavy rain and storms in January 2024.

This included a dramatic rescue by a member of the public of a mother and child trapped in fast moving water in [Hall Green, Birmingham](#), as well as deployment to [Nottinghamshire](#) and Worcestershire following flooding on the rivers Trent and Severn.

In all cases, communities are reminded to avoid entering floodwater whether on foot or in their cars.

6. WMFS launches safe battery disposal campaign with Sandwell Council.

Sandwell Council, Serco and WMFS have joined together to warn residents of the dangers batteries and electrical items going into bins pose and advising them on how to dispose of them. The move follows a spate of fires in the back of refuse and recycling vehicles, and at waste facilities across the country due to batteries being disposed in household bins.

As well as traditional batteries, many everyday household items including laptops, mobile phones, electric toys, e-cigarettes, bluetooth devices, shavers, electric toothbrushes and power-bank chargers contain hidden batteries. This can make them hard to notice or separate. Lithium-ion batteries in particular, which carry the highest risk of combustion, have become increasingly popular in recent years.

[WMFS provides more information on battery safety on their website.](#)

7. Service triumphs at Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards 2023.

The Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards in December 2023 saw WMFS take home two awards for the second year running, with Julie Farruggia crowned Neurodiversity Champion of the Year and the late Iain Hughes recognised for his fundraising efforts with the Unsung Hero Award.

The service was also nominated for Resilience and Learning from Major Incidents for work at Babbs Mill, where four young boys lost their lives, Project of the Year for the service's Fire Control National Operational Guidance team and Team of the Year for our work at Babbs Mill.

8. WMFS crowned UK's most inclusive employer for a second year running.

For an unprecedented second year in a row, WMFS has been named as the UK's Most Inclusive Employer. The accolade was announced at an awards event in London in December 2023.

Now in its eighth year, The Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers List shines a light on best practice across all strands of diversity including age, disability, gender, LGBT+, race, faith and religion.

In 2022, WMFS jumped to the No 1 spot after being placed ninth in 2021.

[Read more about this prestigious accolade on the WMFS website.](#)

National Fire and Rescue Service developments

9. Government response to Fire Reform White Paper published.

In December 2023 the Home Office published the long-awaited response to the Fire Reform White Paper, which had been first published in May 2022. The response outlines the range of consultation responses received from fire authorities and other stakeholders, as well as the government's proposals to either take forward or pause other proposals.

It describes the government's plans to create a College of Fire and Rescue to raise standards and develop best practice, as well as nurturing future leaders. It sets out their intention to legislate to create Operational Independence for Chief Fire Officers, but also that they won't be mandating governance change. There is also a focus on people and development, including the wider role out of consistent background checks for fire service employees and consideration of consistent entry requirements between services.

[The full consultation response can be found on the gov.uk website.](#)

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Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)

March 2024

1. Local Transport Plan (LTP)

Previous updates for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) provided context on development of the LTP development that remains unchanged. Summarising:

- Developing the LTP is a statutory requirement and the responsibility of WMCA in the metropolitan area.
- The new LTP is called Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands and will be comprised of multiple parts; a Core Strategy, 6 Big Moves, 4 Area Strategies, and an Implementation Plan.
- Information on the new LTP is available online via tfwm.org.uk/wmltp5
- The Core Strategy has already been developed, consulted on and agreed by WMCA board. It sets out the overarching aims and principles of the LTP.
- 6 Big Move strategies have also been developed. These set out more detailed policies, principles and in some cases implementation proposals that apply across the region on a range of thematic areas of policy:
 - Behaviour Change
 - Accessible & Inclusive Places
 - Walk, Wheel, Cycle and Scoot
 - Public Transport & Shared Mobility
 - A Safe, Efficient and Reliable Network
 - A Green Transport Revolution

Consultation was undertaken on the 6 Big Moves including engagement with underrepresented groups in responses to previous consultations. It is currently proposed that final versions of the Big Moves will be presented to WMCA for agreement at the same time as the Area Strategies and Implementation Plan (see below).

- TfWM has been working with local authority officers to develop 4 Area Strategies and a single Implementation Plan for the LTP. The Area Strategies will set out and assess the impact of local proposals across the West Midlands – a mix of local authority and TfWM sponsored proposals. The single Implementation Plan will detail local proposals across the West Midlands as well as cross-cutting regional proposals (for example proposals for ticketing that cover the whole region). Details such as funding estimates, funding allocations, development stage and proposal timelines will be set out in the Implementation Plan. TfWM is working with SMBC and Black Country Transport officers to develop the Black Country Area Strategy and the Implementation Plan. As part of the WMCA's Strategic Transport Board, SMBC's lead transport portfolio member provides direction on LTP development and the latest round of work

on Area Strategies and Implementation Plan will be discussed with Strategic Transport Board in the coming months.

Subsequent to the previous update in October and the update to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in November there have been substantial national policy developments that have affected progress and timescales. In particular, changes to Government's plans for HS2 and the repurposing of funds for "Network North", the publication of the "Plan for Drivers", and ratification of WMCA's "Deeper Devolution Deal" including maturation of proposals to develop a Single (Funding) Settlement and associated Single Outcomes Framework for the WMCA area.

WMCA's Transport Delivery and Overview Scrutiny (TDOS) Committee also received an update on LTP development on 22 January 2024 providing an update on these factors. Membership of TDOS from Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) includes Cllr Aqeela Choudhry (LAB) and Cllr Steve Melia (LAB).

The TDOS report can be found [here](#), but the most relevant excerpt is as follows:

6.1 *The original programme for the LTP would have seen the draft Area Strategies and Implementation Plan presented to WMCA Board in early 2024. However, following discussions with the WMCA Lead Member for Transport and Strategic Transport Board the Area Strategies are now planned to presented to WMCA Board during the summer of 2024. There are a number of reasons for this:*

- *Government is still yet to publish updated guidance on Local Transport Plans. Based on earlier drafts seen by TfWM we are confident that WM LTP5 is broadly in line with the approach that Government will set out, however, following the publication of 'Plan for Drivers' it is considered sensible to try and wait until the final guidance has been published.*
- *The outputs of the Area Strategy work are demonstrating that whilst there are some positive impacts of the current proposals, there remain some significant gaps and a need to consider how we could improve the impact against outcomes. There are significant questions about how best to respond to the wider challenges facing the transport system including the future shape of the public transport network and how we might tackle the wider issues of behaviour change.*
- *The recent announcements on funding following the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham and the Network North announcements mean that there has now been a significant uplift in the amount of funding that will be available as part of the second City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS 2) from 2027 (from £1.3bn to £2.6bn). This now provides the need to revisit the proposed pipeline of schemes as part of the second delivery period and ensure that development can start to allow the region to be ready to deliver from 2027.*
- *Linked to this the region will need to show Government how well it is delivering against outcomes / targets linked to the Single Settlement process and the LTP, as the functional strategy for transport within the Single Settlement, will need to ensure we are*

achieving the agreed outcomes using the funding being devolved to the region. The workstreams around the Single Settlement, functional and place-based strategies and the single outcomes framework which are linked to the LTP and CRSTS 2 mean that a revised timetable which lands the Area Strategies in Summer 2024 should help ensure improved alignment with these wider policy positions, and in particular the local authority led place-based strategies.

- 6.2 *To inform the on-going work, informal engagement on the Area Strategy outputs / Investment Strategy options will take place with residents using the Keeping the West Midlands Moving Online Community early in 2024. This will help provide local views on the issues and the options within the Area Strategies that would most likely be supported. This in turn will inform formal consultation and wider engagement later in 2024 which will be undertaken in collaboration with local authorities.*

As a result, drafting and development of the area strategies and implementation plan is still ongoing and plans now mean that the drafts will not be able to be considered by WMCA board until after the Mayoral election. It is currently proposed that WMCA board may consider the drafts in September 2024,

The additional time that it will take to develop and make public the draft area strategies and implementation plans will allow for interim informal engagement with residents which will be valuable information for members performing scrutiny and policymaking functions.

TfWM will arrange furthermore detailed update to SMBC on the development of the Black Country Area Strategy and the Implementation Plan to continue to enable local scrutiny via the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in due course.

2. Bus Network

Background

Buses in the West Midlands accommodate more than 4.8 million passenger journeys each week. Fare paying passenger numbers now exceed pre-covid levels although use amongst citizens eligible for an older and disabled persons bus pass (ENCTS) is slightly behind. Passenger travel patterns have changed with a higher proportion of trips now being undertaken at the weekend and Monday and Friday showing reduced patronage. We believe this is a reflection of how travel patterns have changed post pandemic.

Post pandemic there remains significant financial challenges for operators to continue to provide the current local bus network. Whilst fare revenue has returned to near post-pandemic levels and WMCA have maintained ENCTS as pre-pandemic levels, the costs of operating buses has significantly increased. Operators are reporting that costs have increased by c. 25% and subsequently TfWM have seen the costs of tendered services by 25 to 30%. The main drivers to these increased costs are

significant increases in wages, engineering, uncertainty over fuel costs and inflationary pressure on all general operating costs.

At the last significant service change date at the start of November 2023, the network had reduced by just over 12% as a direct result of these challenges of cost increases and reduced revenue. From the start of the pandemic bus operators have been supported by national and local funding grants to minimise the impact for passengers and economic recovery of the regions from any significant reductions in services. This Bus Recovery Grant funding was due to come to an end in June 2023. Without further financial support operators were preparing to withdraw additional 40% of all bus services.

To secure the existing services with bus operators until December 2024, TfWM has secured agreement from the Department for Transport to repurpose approximately £40m of the transformational Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding allocated to WMCA. This reprofiling of the funding has been formally agreed with Operators and Local Authorities through the Enhanced Partnership which was formally 'made' on 12th September 2023. A further £21m of support has been devolved to WMCA from DfT and up to £19m of local support has also been identified from WMCA reserves. In total over £80m of support will be available to operators from July 2023 to end of December 2024 to retain the network.

The provision of the funding to operators is governed by a set of wide-ranging Terms and Conditions which TfWM have developed. One of the key terms is that operators cannot reduce the commercial services they operate by more than 2% which was largely actioned in the service changes of November 2023. The Terms and Conditions also cover:

- An agreed mechanism for reviewing fares.
- Ensuring that all marketing for bus services is agreed and coordinated through TfWM.
- Sale of National Express Walsall depot to WMCA.
- Driving improvements in reliability of bus services by only paying grants for the proportion of operated mileage not scheduled.
- Open book accounting process.
- Provision of data to monitor performance.
- Parent Company Guarantee from Mobico to cover any short fall in revenue assumptions and costs for National Express.

This agreement is due to come to an end in December 2024 which aligns with the end of the National Express financial year.

Network Review

At the point the network support funding comes to an end it is expected that there will be significant changes to the commercial bus network. By implication this will require changes to the subsidised network and, subject to funding, an increase in the number of supported services. TfWM are currently working with operators to undertake a network review to deliver an optimised and sustainable bus network from January 2025. This process will include engagement and input from Local Authority partners to ensure their views are considered in this review process.

West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan

In 2022 the West Midlands Combined Authority secured £87,857,760 of Phase 1 funding to deliver defined projects within the scope of the West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

Initial guidance from the DfT was for this grant to be utilised on defined projects in the region to bring about transformation to the bus network aligned to the governments National Bus Strategy. The original objectives of the scheme included £39m towards a passenger led recovery program through incentivising new long-term customers through offering initial free or reduced fares, nearly £24m for bus network transformation and £18.5m towards a fares freeze.

To prevent the 40% reduction in Bus Services described above and following a change control mechanism with the DfT through their Project Amendment Report (PAR) process, the Phase 1 BSIP funding was amended to deliver the following:

- Fares freeze to July 2023 - £7.708m
- Bus Passenger Incentive Programme - £23.3m (£19.8m for operator reimbursement of discounted ticketing and £3.5m to support the scheme, through software development, marketing and promotion and staff time).
- Bus Service Transformation - £10.781m
- Bus Service Network Support - £39.953m
- Introduction of Transport Safety Officers (TSO's) - £0.7m
- Network Performance - £3.2m
- Bus Network Scheme Development - £1m
- BSIP Delivery Support - £1m
- Customer Charter and Monitoring - £0.216m

Delivery of these schemes is underway and on program and subject to monitoring and reporting to the DfT, the West Midlands Bus Alliance, West Midlands Enhanced Partnership Reference Group and WMCA governance processes.

On 23rd October 2023, the Government announced the indicative allocation of a further £150 million of 2024-25 funding for LTAs to improve bus services, as set out in their BSIPs and as part of Network North. This is part of the third phase of BSIP funding and is intended for transformation rather than network support.

WMCA have provisionally been allocated up to £16,604,000 of revenue funding to support delivery of the West Midlands BSIP in 2024/25. This is additional to the £87.9m Phase 1 funding.

Subject to approval of the DfT and the WMCA Board at its meeting on the 15th March it is proposed to allocate the funding to the following projects;

- Pilot use of Bus Auto Vehicle Location (AVL) to provide bus priority at traffic signals.
- Expansion of the Transport Safety Officers (TSOs) initiative.
- Enhanced Marketing and Promotion of Bus network including engagement with harder to reach groups to March 2025.

- Retention of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) pilot in Coventry to Spring 2025.
- DRT, Ring & Ride and Community Transport capacity enhancements to March 2026.
- Development and Improvement of at stop Passenger Information including supporting roll out of Real Time Everywhere initiative.
- Better supporting ticket sales across the region.
- Support for Transformational bus service enhancements to March 2026.

We are expecting approval to commence delivery of these projects in early April 2024. Delivery and monitoring will be managed through the existing BSIP Governance process.

3. Rail Network

Rail Industrial Action

Industrial action continues to have a significant impact upon the customer experience, both locally and nationally. The latest round of strike action (called by driver's union ASLEF) occurred between 29 January and 6 February. This action followed the pattern established before Christmas, with a week of an overtime ban (also known as action short of a strike, or ASOS) punctuated by different days of strike action for different train companies.

A route to resolving this national dispute with ASLEF is unclear. An offer linking pay to reform was rejected by the union in 2023, and no new offer has been forthcoming. In more positive news, in late 2023 the RMT union accepted a pay deal worth 5%, bringing their dispute with the rail industry to a close.

Station Retail Reform Consultation

On 31 October 2023 the government announced that it had asked the 13 train operators who were consulting on changes to railway station booking office opening hours to withdraw their proposals. This followed the decision of passenger watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch to formally object to all of the proposals put forward by the train operators.

Whilst each set of proposals were slightly different, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch identified a number of overarching issues that applied to most. These were:

- The need for – and absence of - a nationally agreed, and enforceable, queuing time metric for Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs);
- The need for – and absence of - an alternative engagement/consultation mechanism for any future material changes in staffing at a station; and
- The need for greater clarity on how proposed station Welcome Points/Zones would work in practice (these Points/Zones were an idea developed by the rail industry after the consultation period started, and thus customers were unable to comment on them, another point made by the watchdogs).

The outcome of this decision by government is that stations in the West Midlands run by Avanti West Coast, Chiltern Railways, West Midlands Trains and Great Western Railway will continue to operate as they do today.

Rail Industry Reform

The King's Speech in November confirmed the expected lack of legislation for Great British Railways (GBR) in the final session of parliament before the General Election. In a surprising move, it did provide for the pre-legislative scrutiny of a Draft Rail Reform Bill, something which may be helpful in demonstrating continued government commitment to rail reform. It may also support with the Bill's passage once the legislation is laid, however, it still essentially means that there is no firm date for the formation of GBR and that, therefore, the current rail industry structure will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

The Labour Party position on rail reform, important in the context of the upcoming General Election, has been gradually becoming clearer over the last few months. In a recent media interview, shadow Secretary of State Louise Haigh articulated a position of "bring[ing] decisions around the infrastructure...and the operators into one body", which would seem to indicate a similar type of organisation to the proposed GBR. More detail on the Labour policy position is expected shortly.

At a regional level, WMRE's work with the Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) to develop a partnership continues. The first Partnership Oversight Group, the most senior level of governance for the partnership involving WMRE, GBRTT, the Department for Transport and Network Rail, took place in late 2023 and marked the formal start of partnership development. The lack of clarity on the formation of GBR has presented some barriers to developing the long-term shape of a future GBR/WMRE relationship. WMRE remains resolute that, despite these difficulties, the partnership must not lose focus on this longer term aim, which will ultimately deliver the commitments in the Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal (DDD) to greater local accountability for the rail network in the region.

The partnership is also being used to investigate how work which GBRTT has already done could be focussed in a more specific way in the West Midlands to help support our ambitions, for example, in helping to generate a regional rail customer experience vision.

Midlands Rail Hub

Work continues on Midlands Rail Hub (MRH) and the Government confirmed its commitment to fund £123M to take the project on to Full Business Case. The Secretary of State launched this stage of the project at Moor Street station on 29 February.

WMRE has secured a formal role in the governance of MRH as a client partner alongside Midlands Connect, and we will be working closely with all partners as the detailed development of the scheme continues.

West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy

The new West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy (RIS) was published on the WMRE website in early September alongside a summary report on the consultation that was held in late 2022. However, the strategy (along with those of Network Rail and

Midlands Connect) was predicated in large part on the assumption that the recently cancelled sections of HS2 would have been built.

Unless there is any further HS2 policy change, the RIS and similar rail strategies will need to be revised. In the meantime, WMRE is liaising with Network Rail, DfT and Midlands Connect to identify any urgent changes required to previous proposals which need to be addressed in the short term.

Fares and Ticketing

Significant activity continues on the development of a Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) ticketing solution for the West Midlands and associated fares reform. WMRE and TfWM officers are engaging with multiple workstreams with the Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT), DfT, Rail Delivery Group, operators and other partners and stakeholders.

The PAYG ticketing and fares reform elements are linked but separate workstreams. The PAYG ticketing solution will build on TfWM's existing Swift Go product which already provides best-value capping on the bus and metro network in the TfWM area. Under Swift Go passengers would sign up for an account and be sent a Swiftcard which can be used to touch in/touch out at readers which are being installed at every railway station. The system would then calculate the best value combination of rail fares over a week and debit that amount from the passenger's account.

4. Project Delivery Programme

A headline summary of activity is set out below:

Sprint

Sprint phase 2 (SP2) is split into 5 packages, but only package E will take place in Sandwell. The works for SP2 are to a minimum, with the works mainly consisting of signing, lining, litter bins and construction groundworks for removal of existing bus shelters and installation for the larger required bus shelters for the multi-door articulated vehicles.

Specifically, it will consist of two sets of construction works, mainly within the vicinity of Merrions Close, and will include the installation of the enlarged bus shelters and stopping areas.

We are currently in the Early Contractor Involvement (ECI) period, with Taylor Woodrow who were awarded as the principal contractor through the Midlands Highway Alliance (MHA) and it is anticipated to be completed by mid-April 2024.

Dudley Port Interchange Transformation Programme

Work is ongoing in partnership with Sandwell Council to transform Dudley Port Railway Station into an Integrated Transport Hub.

The programme is split into a series of phases which seeks to provide enhanced interchange, a significantly improved environment and better access from surrounding

areas in the short to medium term, followed by proposals to redevelop the railway station in the longer term.

£2.4m from the City Region Sustainable Transport Fund has been allocated to support the delivery of short-term measures ready for when Metro arrives in late 2024 and to align with wider schemes being delivered within the area by the end of March 2027. The focus of “Phase 1” is to create a lighter, brighter and safer feeling interchange which provides more accessible routes to and through the interchange with enhanced customer facilities and information.

Phase 1 is being designed to complement adjacent projects including the Active Travel Fund 3 proposals along the A461 and the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Sustainable Access Measures being led by the Black Country Transport Group and Sandwell & Dudley Councils as well as the Metro delivery.

The Programme Business Case for the Dudley Port Interchange Transformation Programme was approved in June 2023, releasing £495,000 for the next stages of development. This includes a Business Justification Case for Phase 1 which will include options selection and detailed design allowing for delivery to commence in the latter half of 2024. The development funding released will also support the Business Justification Case for Phase 2 and some preliminary work to look at the longer-term major railway station redevelopment as well as any short-term rail measures which could be delivered in the interim.

The longer term plans to transform the railway station include options to provide an additional platform, lengthened island platform, step free access and new passenger facilities. While this is currently unfunded, including it in the Programme Business Case allows us to undertake further development to understand what a scheme could look like and costs which can then be used to identify funding opportunities. It also supports Network Rail’s Access for All bid where Dudley Port is identified as the regional top priority for step free access. We expect to hear the outcome of that bid in the six months.

The Dudley Port Interchange Transformation Programme is being undertaken in partnership with Sandwell and Dudley Councils and the Black Country Transport Group alongside Network Rail, West Midlands Trains and the Canal & River Trust. Local consultation will form part of the ongoing development of the scheme.

West Midlands Rail Programme

The West Midlands Rail Programme is delivering new stations which will improve connectivity across the region and beyond, helping people to enjoy the wealth of jobs, educational opportunities and leisure pursuits available across the region.

in 2022 we delivered a new station at Perry Barr and improvements at University Station, to help ensure that our rail network was fit for Birmingham’s once-in-a-lifetime Commonwealth Games. We have just opened the expanded buildings at University, in support of the West Midlands’ world-class institutions. We are continuing to work hard to:

- Build new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston, slashing travel times by public transport to Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall by more than half.
- Build new stations on the Camp Hill Line in Birmingham, which will see services resume for the first time in more than eighty years.

As well as benefits to rail users, these stations will benefit travellers across the region by helping to reduce congestion on our roads.

Metro Programme

The Metro programme is based on the latest funding position and current project status. Work continues to progress with all extension projects being undertaken by the Midland Metro Alliance (MMA). During this period, the following activity has been undertaken:

Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension – Work continues to proceed on this extension, and in particular in Dudley Town Centre and at the Wednesbury connection into the existing line. After a lot of discussion across the WMCA and reviewing of finances, the commitment to deliver the full line was re-confirmed, but that the project will be delivered in two phases: to Dudley and then beyond to Brierley Hill. Funding has been identified subject to value for money checks, WMCA, DfT & DLUHC approval to delivery of the second phase from Dudley town centre to Merry Hill stop.

WMCA continue to work on resolving the financial shortfall to deliver to Brierley Hill. MMA continue to progress with works to Dudley resulting in an increased level of activity along the route with nearly all of the structures now installed and track installation progressing in Dudley centre. Service is expected to start to Dudley in Autumn 2024.

Birmingham Eastside Extension (BEE) – Work has now completed on Section 1 on Lower Bull St with tracks, paving and soft landscaping installed. Demolition of King's Parade was completed in June 2023 and we are commencing some works on site in parallel to completing the assurance exercise on the costs and delivery for Section 2 to continue delivering all the work on Section 2, through to the Clayton Hotel. Section 5 works in Digbeth High Street have completed on the North side and the works on the south side will be completed in the coming weeks with a few outstanding commissioning and snagging items to close out.

Due to delays from HS2 project, Metro will not be able to start work on the middle section of the extension until January 2026, and so open the line in Spring 2027. In addition, due to cost increases approval of the Section 2 is subject to a refresh of the business case and confirmation the full project still offers value for money. In view of this we will be working towards operating to the Clayton Hotel by summer 2025 in advance of the full route being opened.

Road Programme

Hagley Road – Hagley Road Corridor formed part of the CRSTS funding and the Strategic Outline Business Case has recently been submitted to the WMCA assurance process. This includes a request for funding for bus priority measures to be delivered prior to 2027 and a medium term study to consider further option appraisal for rapid transit along the corridor, including Metro.

5. Metro Operations - Midland Metro Limited (MML)

Tranche 2 work to repair the cracking on the 2G fleet has been completed. There is a further tranche of work required but this is currently paused whilst we work with CAF

around assurance of the repair solution and the repair process. As a result of this and CAF findings elsewhere work is expected to start on Tranche 3 later in 2024. Due to these issues CAF will be moving out of the Very Light Rail (VLR) centre in Dudley.

TfWM has worked with the supplier CAF to bring the new 3G fleet into the UK ahead of schedule, and all the new vehicles have been delivered. To date this fleet is performing well. In late 2023 MML added additional services to the morning and evening peak periods.

Patronage levels continue to perform well. Likewise, the number of lost kilometres remains low. Where kilometres have been lost this has been due to 3rd party activities (protest marches) and staff availability.

Work continues to plan for the tie in of the Brierley Hill extension to Line One at Wednesbury. This will see significant disruption from the 23rd March to the 9th April inclusive, as services will be unable to operate south of Wednesbury. In addition, TfWM and MML have worked with Officers within Sandwell to enable Sandwell to complete works to Dudley Street Bridge. Whilst most of this work will run concurrent with the delta work the Dudley Street bridge programme is slightly longer which will require early closure of the network overnight and a further blockade over the weekend of the 4th May and 5th May 2024.

6. Active Travel

Active Travel Fund (ATF)

Sandwell's ATF Tranche 3 programme includes:

- A461 between Dudley Port and Great bridge part of WBHE Sustainable Access Scheme – in construction

Cycling for Everyone

- Cycling for Everyone 23-24 is in delivery with a suite of activities to encourage communities to enjoy cycling as an everyday way to travel and stay active. This programme focuses on removing barriers to accessing active modes of transport to those from protected characteristic groups and areas of deprivation. The project focuses upon the following wards:
 - Langley
 - St Paul's
 - Soho and Victoria
 - Oldbury
 - West Bromwich Central
 - Greets Green and Lyng

The programme includes Dr Bikes, Adult and Child Cycle Training and Cycle Maintenance Training. Sustrans have completed a series of Dr Bike/Cycle Security Measures in Sandwell over the Autumn and Winter and a further series of Dr Bikes is planned for Spring and Summer 2024. Living Streets have been appointed to deliver three Walking Zone Community Street Audits within Sandwell. Each of the following routes have been selected in collaboration with the Local Authority:

- High Street to Langley Green Railway Station

- Friar Park & Yew Tree to Tame Bridge Railway Station
- Black Country Core Walking Zone in Rowley Village Blackheath

Living Streets will be returning for a further set of Community Street Audits from April 2024 onwards. The locations are to be agreed with the Local Authority.

Living Streets Walk to School Programme

In September 2023, the Department for Transport announced the National allocation of £5m towards the continuation of Living Street's Walk to School Outreach Programme. This funding will help more pupils enjoy the fresh air, freedom and fun that walking to school brings in Sandwell. Living Streets will continue to work with us in the West Midlands until 31 March 2025.

Data collected from the Autumn Term (September to December 2023) shows that Sandwell had 14 schools involved in the Living Streets 'Walk Once a Week' Programme. There were 5,140 pupils logging their journeys and there had been a decline in car journeys all the way to school by 26%. There are targets to recruit more Sandwell Schools to the programme over the Spring and Summer Terms to intensify progress.

West Midlands Cycle Hire (WMCH)

West Midlands Cycle Hire consists of 1,500 bikes across the seven Local Authorities, with 10% of the fleet being e-Bikes. Pedal bikes were launched within Sandwell in June 2021, with e-Bikes added to the fleet in December 2021.

Bikes are available to hire across 8 docking stations in Sandwell, focused around West Bromwich. Sites include close to the West Bromwich Metro stop, Dartmouth Park and Sandwell and Dudley Rail station. Key statistics/observations from Sandwell have been detailed below for reference:

- Total rides within Sandwell to-date: Pedal bikes, 7,363 journeys; e-Bikes, 698 journeys
- Average ride time per journey – 32 minutes
- Average distance travelled per journey – 3.19km
- Journeys within Sandwell are roughly a 50/50 split between A-A journeys, whereby the user returns the bike to the same dock that they hired it from, and A-B journeys, whereby the bike is returned to a different location. This indicates a good scheme mix between leisure and utility journeys.
- 93% of bikes within Sandwell are returned to docking stations, representing positive customer behaviours. This compares favourably to other regions, where additional staff resourcing is required to return informally parked bikes to docking stations.

Walking and Cycling Programme

Development Work Stream

Sandwell will be using TCF funding to complete a study on the route A457 Corridor, Oldbury Town Centre to Smethwick High Street and Smethwick Galton Bridge Station.

The Outline Business Case for the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Corridor Access Improvements was submitted by Sandwell and Dudley to WMCA Corporate Assurance and is now approved.

The area under the bridge at the WBHE and A4123 is being widened to accommodate a cycle route and pedestrian access. This has been funded through TCF (£2m) and is being delivered by Midland Metro Alliance.

A third tranche of ATF3 was awarded to WMCA which included additional funding for Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Corridor Access Improvements at stops for cycling. There is also funding for a regional School Streets programme. Ferndale Primary School will have school street delivered as part of the programme, with Glebefields Primary School a possibility in the future.

TfWM completed a self-assessment for Active Travel England (ATE), which was a requirement ahead of the Capability and Ambition Fund (CAF, formerly Local Authority Capability Fund) and the fourth tranche of ATF. In 2023 WMCA was awarded a score of 3 overall (out of a maximum of 4) following a submission of evidence. A further self-assessment was carried out in late 2023 and submitted to ATE in December 2023 with the expectation that our self-assessment score of 3 will be retained. A decision from ATE is expected within the next few months. We are one of the few authorities in the country who have received this higher score.

ATE have awarded WMCA £3.4m of CAF following an application process which was submitted on 30 September 2022. The following schemes are being progressed through the development project cycle (e.g. feasibility studies, concept design) with this funding: Blackheath to Oldbury WM LCWIP route, A457 Oldbury to Smethwick Black Country LCWIP route and WM LCWIP Route – Tipton to West Bromwich. A further £1.7m of CAF funding was awarded in late 2023 which will enable the development of further schemes in Sandwell.

An ATF4e (extension) bid of £1.355m was submitted by WMCA to ATE in November 2023 which includes the Sandwell, Blackheath to Oldbury Cycleway (Ph1) scheme. The outcome will be known later this financial year.

Workwise

TfWM's Employment Outreach team works with Job Centres to promote discounted travel to those gaining new employment. This approach has been successful and was extended to include libraries, local employers and training providers.

A popular discounted travel scheme is Workwise which offers discounted tickets in the first three months of employment.

The offer includes two 4-week tickets FREE then a third 4-week ticket at a 50% discount from the standard price on selected bus, tram and nNetwork passes.

119 applicants in the Sandwell area were helped with travel to work through Workwise in the last seven months¹.

The Employment Outreach team continues to expand promotion to a portfolio of virtual advertising and engagement activity alongside non-virtual activity. This includes online recruitment events, online jobs fairs and social media engagement tools as well as digital newsletters and information packs.

Non-virtual activity includes attendance at jobs fairs, careers fairs and meetings throughout Sandwell. Partnerships with job centres in the Sandwell area have been established to help provide support for their clients in the transition from benefits to their first pay days in employment.

¹ Figures are from June 2023 to December 2023 to be in line with report dates

7. Safety, Security and Emergency Planning including Regional Transport Co-ordination Centre

The Safer Travel Partnership is a collaboration of organisations including TfWM, West Midlands and British Transport Police forces, Transport Operators and the 7 regional local authorities. They work together with the purpose of making the public transport network safer.

The Partnership is responsible for delivering the Safer Travel Partnership's 'Safer Travel Plan' the latest version was agreed with West Midlands Police Crime Commissioner, The West Midlands Mayor and the British Transport Police Authority in March 2022.

Since 2021 Safer Travel have employed 3 Transport Safety Officers (TSOs) whose primary role is to provide a visible presence on the Public Transport Network in the West Midlands, providing good Customer Service to Staff and Passengers to tackle low level Anti-Social Behaviour and improve the perception of safety for users of the transport network. The approach to be followed by the TSO's can be summarized as Engagement, Education, Encouragement and where necessary Enforcement. Following a successful bid to the Department of Transport last year, there are now 7 active TSOs in post. An additional 6 TSOs have joined us in January 2024. All of the 13 TSOs are trained in all Civil Interventions (including Byelaws) as well as their Traffic Power to stop and direct traffic. They will be receiving some new training for Violence Against Women and Girls and linked behaviours.

In the calendar year 2023, the Transport Safety Officers have been on patrol for **10,406** hours, **8,845** of which were directly linked to our Tasking priorities. A milestone figure of **6,052** Verbal warnings were given out, **208,654** interactions with travellers and staff were made and **51,295** engagements with travellers and staff were carried out.

The Transport Safety Officers have provided a highly visible presence around the transport interchanges in Sandwell, the three bus stations at Cradley Heath, Wednesbury and West Bromwich, Metro stations and bus shelters and they have travelled on all modes of public transport dealing with issues identified in the Safer Travel Tasking process or by partners.

They have visited West Bromwich Bus garage to meet with drivers to inform them of their role and to encourage reporting of incidents by drivers. They assisted with our Metro colleagues with the uplift in patronage due to the high profile West Bromwich Albion Home games. They have also continued to work closely with the West Bromwich Neighbourhood Policing Team to deal with the long-term issue of Street Drinkers at West Bromwich Bus Station with members of the group receiving ASB warning letters and being dealt with for breaches of a criminal behaviour order as well as joint patrols with the West Brom BID team.

There have been several drone flights carried out by the qualified TSOs in support of Traffic Management issues linked to West Bromwich Albion match day traffic specifically at M5 junction 1 and the Black country spine route in the Great Bridge area. Images from Wednesbury Bus Station were circulated on Social Media which allowed Safer Travel to identify two young offenders for a series of criminal damage offences, those involved are proceeding through the criminal justice system.

The RTCC continues to work with and alongside Sandwell Council Highways team monitoring performance around West Bromwich Interchange, a known hotspot for congestion. This will progress towards the end of October when signal upgrade works commence with temporary signals in place. The RTCC will monitor performance and coordinate with internal and external stakeholders to ensure the junction runs as efficiently as possible, with supplementary CCTV being installed giving sight of all key routes towards the interchange.

Additionally, the RTCC, along with Traffic Network Coordination colleagues, have been monitoring the key corridor of the A41 from West Bromwich Interchange and into Birmingham due to an anticipated increase in vehicular use, following significant works commencing on the SRN (M6 J6-7) meaning there is no dynamic hard shoulder available through to June 2024. This is anticipated to increase traffic levels through Sandwell as road users divert. As always football events at The Hawthorns are closely monitored due to the uplift in congestion at ingress / egress times.

The Events and Emergency Planning Team contribute to Sandwell's Safety Advisory Group, seeking to minimise any transport disruption that may result from local events such as religious processions and West Bromwich Albion football fixtures as well as looking for opportunities to improve the travel experience for event attendees.

Both teams also liaise closely with the regions Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to ensure resilience communication and situational awareness is maintained across the region. Most recently, the Events and Emergency Planning team helped to create a snow based severe weather exercise for the LRF which was delivered to multi-agency partners, including Sandwell's Resilience team, in November 2023. The team are now developing a heatwave-based exercise for this Spring.

Appendix 1 – Network Monitoring

Monitoring ensures TfWM understands changes in the performance of the transport system arising from schemes, for example the punctuality of public transport, modal usage, patronage and customer satisfaction. Covid-19 has had a major impact on the public transport network, but patronage is now starting to increase across all modes.

- Headline Measures

The table below shows performance change in December 2023 compared to the previous report (August 2023). Annual data (2021/22 and 2022/23) is also provided where available. Data is annualised (unless stated otherwise) and for the whole of the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

All data is annualised	Aug-23	Dec-23	% Change	2021/22	2022/23	% Change
Bus Patronage	217.0m	223.6m	+3.0%	174.7m	210.9m	+20.7%
Rail Patronage	55.9m	55.0m	-1.6%	39.8m	56.6m	+42.0%
Tram Patronage	7.5m	8.4m	+11.2%	4.8m	5.5m	+15.80%
Ring & Ride Patronage	170.5k	193.7k	+13.6%	113.3k	159.3k	+40.6%

Bus

Since January 2021 bus patronage has started to recover each month with current annualised bus patronage (January 2023 – December 2023) standing at 223.6 million an increase of +7.9% compared to 207.2 million in December 2023 (annualised). Bus patronage in 2022/23 increased by +20.7% compared to 2021/22. Monthly bus patronage (December 2023) is now at 86.9% of pre-covid levels (December 2019).

During 2022/23 81% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 78% in 2021/22. (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2022/23 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM).

Rail

Rail patronage has also been impacted by Covid-19. Current annualised rail patronage is approximately –5.8% of pre-covid patronage and stands at approximately 55.0 million per year (an increase of +0.1% compared to December 2023). Rail patronage in 2022/23 was 56.6 million (+42.0%) compared to 39.8 million in 2021/22.

During 2022/23 90% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 85% in 2021/22 (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2022/23 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM)

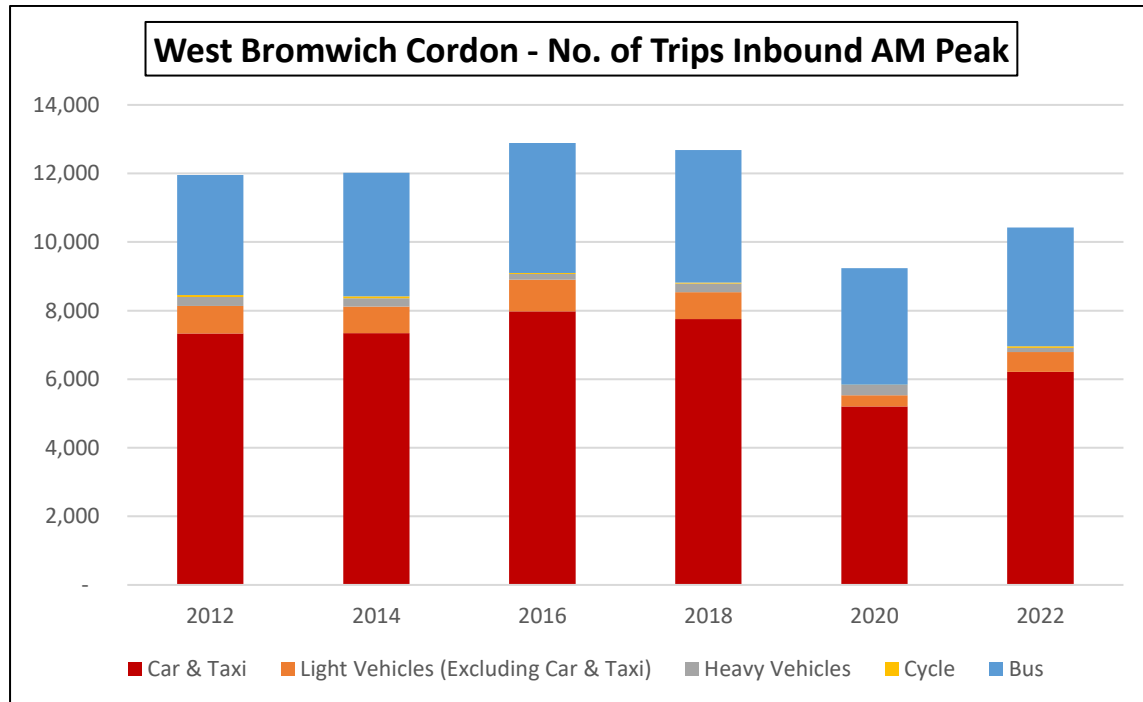
Tram

Tram patronage is now higher than pre-covid levels at 8.4 million passengers (Annualised December 2023); an increase of +75.4% compared to December 2022 and +6.2% compared to December 2019.

During 2022/23 98% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 95% in 2021/22. (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2022/23 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM).

Modal Share West Bromwich

The latest West Bromwich cordon survey was undertaken in March 2022 and will be undertaken again in March 2024.



The AM Peak (07.30-09.30) public transport mode share has decreased slightly in 2022 to 40.0% (bus 35.3%, tram 4.7%) from 40.4% in 2020, mainly due to an increased in trips using private vehicle modes (except heavy vehicles) and a decrease in tram trips.

Bus trips have increased by +2.0%, cycle trips by +370% (37 extra cycles), car and taxi by 19.4% and light vehicles by +73.2%.

Heavy vehicle trips decreased by -58.4% and tram trips by -18.6%. Overall public transport trips decreased by -0.9%.

Overall, all trips into West Bromwich (March 2022) have increased by +11.0%. The previous survey in West Bromwich was in March 2020, 2 weeks before the national lockdown.

Further details on modal share for all strategic centres can be found here: <https://community-engagement-tfwm.hub.arcgis.com/pages/modal-split>

The following table shows data patronage and occupancy data across the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

Patronage/Occupancy	Jan-2023	Dec	% Change (Previous Year)	Jan-Dec 2019	% Change (Pre-Covid)
Swift Commercial Bus/Tram Boardings	41,510,019		-0.5%	Not Available	
Swift Concessionary Bus/Tram Boardings	34,387,999		+7.8%	Not Available	
Bus Boardings	223,623,490		+7.9%	257,456,542	-13.1%
Annualised Rail Boardings	55,028,140		+0.1%	58,398,050	-5.8%
Tram Boardings	8,367,444		+75.4%	7,878,908	+6.2%
Ring & Ride Journeys	193,708		+29.1%	678,477	-71.4%
WMCH Journeys	277,456		-5.6%	Not Applicable	
Cycle Counts at Park & Ride Sites (average weekday usage)	262		+5.3%	522	-49.8%
Park & Ride Occupancy (average weekday usage)	3,779		+3.0%	8,231	-54.1%

The following table shows data patronage and occupancy data for Sandwell.

Patronage/Occupancy - Sandwell	Jan- Dec 2023	% Change (Previous Year)
Swift Commercial Bus/Tram Boardings	3,993,112	-0.04%
Swift Concessionary Bus/Tram Boardings	4,615,982	+7.9%
Ring & Ride Journeys	20,134	+3.5%
WMCH Journeys	1,365	-54.4%
Cycle Counts at Park & Ride Sites (average weekday usage)	12	+4.7%
Park & Ride Occupancy (average weekday usage)	1,200	+4.5%

West Midlands Police and Crime Panel Update March 2024

Sandwell Metropolitan District Council

Date: March 2024

Report of the Panel Lead Officer: Kevin O' Keefe Chief Executive Dudley MBC

1 Purpose

- 1.1 Bi-annual reports on the activities of the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel are presented to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council for consideration. This report reflects on the work of the Panel between November 2023 and February 2024.
- 1.2 Sandwell is represented on the Panel by Cllr Syeda Khatun. Cllr Mohammed Jalal Uddin and Cllr Vicki Smith are named substitute members.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the information contained in the report be noted.

3 Role of the Police and Crime Panel

- 3.1 The Panel is a joint scrutiny body of the West Midland authorities with a dual role to 'support and challenge' the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).
- 3.2 The Panel acts as a critical friend to the PCC on behalf of West Midlands residents and must perform the following statutory functions:
 - Review and comment on the PCC's draft Police and Crime Plan.
 - Review the PCC's Annual Reports.
 - Scrutinise decisions and actions of the PCC.
 - Review (with the power to veto) the PCC's proposed Council Tax precept.
 - Hold confirmation hearings before the PCC makes certain senior appointments (Chief Constable, Deputy PCC, Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer), with the power to veto the Chief Constable appointment.
 - Handle non-criminal complaints about the conduct of the PCC and Deputy PCC, referring serious complaints to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (task delegated to the Birmingham Monitoring Officer).
 - Appoint an acting PCC if required.
 - Suspend the PCC if charged.
- 3.3 The Panel's work programme consists of statutory tasks (listed above) and wider exploratory work to build knowledge and insight into the strategic policing,

community safety and criminal justice landscape to fulfil its role to hold the PCC to account.

- 3.4 The Panel must maintain a strategic focus when scrutinising the work of the PCC, rather than operational detail.
- 3.5 Proposed changes to police governance arrangements whereby the PCC functions transfer to the WM Mayor are subject to ongoing legal and parliamentary processes. However, the Police and Crime Panel would continue to perform its statutory functions irrespective of any police governance changes.

4 Panel Membership

- 4.1 The Panel consists of 12 councillors representing the 7 West Midland districts. The membership reflects the political balance of the region and are appointed annually. Named substitutes are appointed for each councillor member. Three independent members also serve on the Panel.
- 4.2 The Panel elected Councillor Jasbir Jaspal (City of Wolverhampton) as Chair and Kristina Murphy (Independent Co-opted Member) as Vice Chair for the 2023/2024 Municipal Year.

5 Meetings and agenda papers

- 5.1 The Panel meets approximately six times a year at venues across the region. Meeting papers, meeting dates, published reports, together with more information about the Panel can be found on the [Panel's website: www.westmidlandspcp.org.uk](http://www.westmidlandspcp.org.uk). Meetings are livestreamed for the public. Links to web streams are published on our website alongside the meeting papers.

6 Panel Resources and Officer Support

- 6.1 The Panel continues to operate within the limits of the Home Office Grant. The Panel agreed in 2012 that councillor members would not use this to draw special responsibility allowances, but travel and carer expenses can be claimed.
- 6.2 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's Chief Executive provides lead officer support. Birmingham City Council acts as secretariat and provides legal support. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council supports the Panel with its scrutiny of the PCC budget and precept.

7 Key activities by the Police and Crime Panel (November 2023-March 2024)

- 7.1 **November 2023:** The Panel fulfilled its statutory duties in reviewing the Commissioner's **Annual Report** and scrutinising the PCC on his reported progress against his Police and Crime Plan objectives. [The Panel published a report with recommendations for the PCC](#) to consider for improving the content of the report for the public.

- 7.2 **December 2023:** The Panel reacted to the publication of the His Majesty's Inspector for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (**HMICFRS**) '**notice of concern**' that placed West Midlands Police in Engage Status of enhanced monitoring. An extraordinary panel meeting was called to seek assurance from the PCC on actions planned to address the HMICFRS findings and his oversight of improvements made by the Force. To inform this work and understand the context of the inspection findings, Panel members received an information briefing from the HMICFRS on its inspection regime.
- 7.3 **January 2024:** Scrutiny of the PCC's oversight of the performance of West Midlands Police continued. The Panel discussed recently published 2022/2023 full **HMICFRS PEEL Inspection** report of West Midlands Police. The Panel also scrutinised the PCC's police and crime plan commitments to tackle **drugs** and learnt about the diversionary and prevention work to address the underlying causes of substance misuse that is a key driver of acquisitive crime.
- 7.4 **February 2024:** The Panel invited the Chief Constable to provide ongoing reassurances on actions to address the four areas of concern raised by HMICFRS and the wider recommendations in the PEEL Inspection Report. The Panel has programmed further updates. The Panel also conducted its formal review of the Commissioner's proposed **policing precept** for 2024/25. To understand the context of the proposals, the Panel also examined the Commissioner's proposed budget, capital programme and reserve's policy. Following the meeting, [the Panel published its report and recommendation to the PCC.](#)
- 7.5 In February, Panel members have continued to undertake **training** to support their roles as well improving core knowledge on policing functions. During January and February all panel members were invited to a training session on police finance. A second briefing session was facilitated by the Panel secretariat to prepare members for conducting the review of the precept.
- 7.6 The Police and Crime Panel meets again on 18 March 2024.

8 **Public Questions**

- 8.1 The Panel has not received any public questions during this reporting period. Anyone who lives, works or studies in the West Midlands can ask a question relating to the Panel's role in scrutinising the PCC. Questions should be submitted in writing to the Panel Officer. More details can be found on the [West Midlands Police and Crime Panel getting involved webpage.](#)

9 **Forward Plan**

- 9.1 In May district councils will appoint panel members for the 2024/25 Municipal Year. Members will then shape its work programme for the coming year to assess the impact, actions and decisions of the PCC. Panel members are encouraged

to develop dialogue with local scrutiny committees on policing, community safety and criminal justice to feed into the panel work programming process.

10 Finance Implications

10.1 There are no direct finance implications associated with this update report. The cost administration of the Panel is met by a ringfenced Home Office grant.

11 Legal Implications

11.1 A Police and Crime Panel must be maintained to carry out scrutiny functions and responsibilities as set out in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. The Panel membership must represent all the districts and reflect the political composition of the region.

12 Equalities Implications

12.1 This Police and Crime Panel is a joint committee of West Midlands Local Authorities. Therefore, it has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

12.2 The Panel considers these duties during work programme development, the scoping of work, evidence gathering and making recommendations. Including how policy issues impact on different groups within the community, particularly those that share a relevant protected characteristic; whether impact on particular groups is fair and proportionate; whether there is equality of access to services and fair representation of all groups within the West Midlands; and whether any positive opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and/or good relations between people are being realised.

12.3 There are no direct equalities implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

13 Background Papers

13.1 [WMPCP agenda and minutes November 2023 - February 2024](#)

13.2 [Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#)

14 Contact officers:

Panel Lead Officer: Kevin O' Keefe Chief Executive Dudley MBC
Overview and Scrutiny Manager (Birmingham City Council): Sarah Fradgley
wmpcp@birmingham.gov.uk

Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	West Midlands Combined Authority - Update
Director:	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
Contact Officer:	Senior Lead Officer, Jane Alexander Jane_Alexander@sandwell.gov.uk

1. Recommendations


1.1 That Council notes the update report and is asked to consider any other opportunities for the Borough arising in connection with the West Midlands Combined Authority.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This is a follow up report to the previous report submitted to Council on 24 October 2023, giving an update on key developments.
- 2.2 Being a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority offers Sandwell Council access to funding and initiatives that positively impact the borough and the people of Sandwell.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Participation as a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority offers opportunity to contribute positively to all strategic outcomes contained in the Corporate Plan.
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4. Context and Key Issues

Deeper Devolution Deal

- 4.1 The Deeper Devolution Deal (DDD - formerly referred to as the Trailblazer Devolution Deal) provides additional funding to the West Midlands Region and some additional powers to make local rather than national decisions.
- 4.2 The detail of the DDD was subject of a report to Cabinet on 13th September 2023, whereby Cabinet authorised the Leader to vote in favour of the DDD when considered by the WMCA Board. The Cabinet report can be accessed via the following link:
<https://sandwell.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MIId=6576&Ver=4>
- 4.3 That report noted that further decision points would be required as the process for implementation of the DDD is developed. At the meeting of Cabinet on 13th March 2024 authority is to be sought for the Leader of the Council to endorse Sandwell Council's entry into the Single Settlement Memorandum of Understanding when the matter is determined at West Midlands Combined Authority Board.
- 4.4 The single settlement represents a significant change to how the region will receive funding from HMG for the relevant functions. In particular, it will enable Local Authorities, including Sandwell, to develop place-based strategies, which will set out how the functions of the single settlement,



and other sources of public and private investment, will come together in places to drive inclusive economic growth over the long-term. This will be additional to the funding that will continue to apply across the region as a whole.

- 4.5 The single settlement will provide the region with multi-year certainty over a consolidated funding allocation. This will enable a long-term, joined-up approach to funding delivery, which will, in turn, support the development and delivery of locally-led place-based strategies.

Levelling Up Zones/Growth Zones

- 4.6 Officers continue to work with WMCA to develop proposals for a Levelling Up Zone along the new Wednesbury to Tipton metro corridor. The purpose of the Levelling Up Zone is to retain wealth in Sandwell by capturing business rate growth along the Metro corridor and reinvesting this back into regeneration and economic growth activity. The Levelling Up Zone will also act as an inward investment tool by raising awareness of the development opportunities that are being created along the Metro corridor.
- 4.7 A report to 13 March 2024 Cabinet sought approval to set the geographical boundary of the Levelling Up Zone in Sandwell, and, approve the Growth Zones sites whereby business rate growth (above a baseline) will be able to be retained by Sandwell Council for 25 years to enable reinvestment in to Levelling Up. Eight development sites within the Levelling Up Zone have been identified for business rate retention (above a baseline for 25-years) and collectively form the Growth Zone. Twenty-seven other development sites have been identified as regeneration opportunities within the Levelling Up Zone. The amount of business rates that could be retained is difficult to estimate because of uncertainty about the deliverability of development and subsequent business rate growth within the Growth Zone. Due diligence and high-level financial modelling work undertaken by consultants on behalf of the Council and WMCA suggest that the Growth Zone could generate up to £42 million over a 25-year period. This figure assumes that all the sites within the Growth Zone will come forward for business rate generating uses. However, additional technical work is required to understand the deliverability and viability challenges at each site.



City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS)

- 4.8 The City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) is a five-year capital settlement to enable the city regions to achieve their ambitions in terms of transport investment. The fund is overseen by the Department for Transport (DfT) and in the West Midlands it aligns with emerging Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5). CRSTS commenced in 2022-23 with £8.9m previously allocated to the West Midlands in 2021-22 to assist with preparation and delivery of the settlement.
- 4.9 CRSTS is the main source of transport capital funding for local transport schemes with a scheme cost of £50m or less. CRSTS draws under one heading, a number of transport funding streams including the final year of the (already allocated) Transforming Cities Fund (TCF), as well as the Integrated Transport Block (ITB) and Highways Maintenance Block (HMB). For the time being, the Active Travel Fund (ATF), which covers walking and cycling investment, remains separate.
- 4.10 The projects included in the programme bid were developed and set out against Government priority outcomes of;
- Growth and Productivity
 - Levelling up
 - Decarbonisation

In addition, Government requires that projects should, wherever feasible, deliver clear benefits for cycling, walking and public transport, prioritising these modes over the private car.

- 4.11 The approved CRSTS programme includes the following projects which are, either wholly or partially, located in Sandwell:

Project	Allocation
A34/A45 SPRINT Corridor (Phase 2)	£56.60m
A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor	£29.00m
A461 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor, Sandwell	£12.00m
Black Country ULEV Charging Scheme	£ 7.00m
Dudley Port Integrated Transport Hub (Phase 1 & 2)	£ 2.40m
Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (Black Country Package)	£ 8.00m
Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transport Package	£19.00m
Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension (Sustainable Access Measures)	£16.00m



West Midlands Metro Line 1 Upgrades	£30.00m
West Midlands Metro Wednesbury Depot Expansion	£37.90m
West Midlands Metro Traction Power (Phase 2)	£12.60m
Total	£230.50m

The projects support not only the WMCA objectives, but also the regeneration priorities of the emerging Sandwell Local Plan and Sandwell’s Regeneration Strategy and approved pipeline. In total, these projects represent over £230m of investment in the transport network with impacts in Sandwell over the five years of the CRSTS programme. Where schemes cross boundaries, it is difficult to quantify the level of investment directly on the network within Sandwell, but it is estimated that this will be in the region of £130m.

4.12 Progress on these projects as a programme was reported to Cabinet on 7th February 2024. However, the following projects have now received ‘in principle’ scheme approval following reports to Cabinet and are now proceeding through the WMCA assurance process;

- Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension (Sustainable Access Measures) - Cabinet approval on 6th December 2023
- A461 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor, Sandwell - Cabinet approval on 6th December 2023
- Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transport Package - Cabinet approval on 17th January 2024
- A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor – Cabinet approval on 7th February 2024

4.13 These four projects will be moving to their delivery stage over the next 12-18 months, whilst all CRSTS projects are anticipated to be delivered by March 2027.

4.14 As part of the 2023 Spring Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a further £8.8bn would be available nationally for a second round of funding (CRSTS2) covering five years from April 2027. The allocation for the WMCA is yet to be announced but is anticipated to be of a similar order to the original CRSTS allocation. As part of the ‘trailblazer’ deeper devolution deal between the Government and the West Midlands Combined Authority announced in March 2023, future CRSTS funding will form part of a single settlement agreement.



UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

- 4.15 UKSPF is a central pillar of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda. Its primary goal is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, with three key investment priorities around 'Community and Place', 'Supporting Local Business', and 'People and Skills'.
- 4.16 WMCA has been identified as the lead authority and accountable body for UKSPF across the seven local authority metropolitan area, with responsibility for developing its investment plan, and for delivery of the Fund. WMCA has been leading a strategic approach, working with local authorities to identify local and regional investment priorities that support the region's levelling up ambitions.
- 4.17 The overall UKSPF allocation for the region is £88.5m over the period 2022-2025. It is critical that the funds are allocated where they can have most impact for places, residents, and businesses across the region.
- 4.18 Sandwell Council has secured £6.99m of UK Shared Prosperity Funding from the WMCA for investment in business support, skills and specific place-based projects especially in one of the most deprived areas of the Borough.
- 4.19 The position for Sandwell is as follows:
- The UKSPF programme for Business Support is now fully embedded within the Sandwell Business Growth Plan, approved By Cabinet in November 2023 and is being delivered by the Sandwell Business Growth Team. For Sandwell UKSPF is part funding 4 of our 7 economic priorities: 1) Support in Sandwell 2) Grow in Sandwell 3) Net Zero in Sandwell 4) Start Up in Sandwell. Each priority includes support, advice, and funding for Sandwell Businesses. In addition, the Sandwell Business Growth Team have launched the Sandwell Start Up Hub which provides free office space for eligible start up businesses in Sandwell. The hub is located on the 2nd Floor of Jack Judge House
 - The final elements of potential benefit is where the CA have identified MULTIPLY funding and some Adult Education Budget could be allocated to more deprived LAs to compensate for the low weighting that need / deprivation has been given in the SPF allocation process.
 - A ringfenced Voluntary sector allocation was commissioned for year 2 UKSPF Communities and Place with four successful providers which included 3 consortia. These programmes aim to increase the community



engagement in local activities to provide peer support to individuals and enable them to take part in wider provision such as social action projects and volunteering. The programme has been highly successful, attracting approx. 40,000 people, generating 450 volunteering opportunities and supporting 200 people to undertake a volunteering placement.

- The People and Skills programme will begin in April 2024 and aims to support residents to engage in developing skills to progress them towards progression into employment and education. The programme focuses on Economically Inactive clients who may not have had employment before to give them the knowledge needed to find, gain and maintain work in the future.
- Within this programme £1.48m Sandwell Valley – education and community engagement outreach programme. Providing education and classroom facilities at Sandwell Valley and Forge Mill Farm to deliver an education and outreach programme that develops knowledge and community building capacity around green space development and ownership, animal welfare and conservation, and horticulture and land-based education. And to:
 - Transformation of the Railer / Cracker green corridor, Tipton:
 - Deliver major opportunities for green careers (grounds maintenance, horticulture, green spaces) and skills and community capacity building.
 - Develop this important green corridor to improve walking, running, and cycling links between residential areas and community places.
 - Develop community spaces (green space) for community empowerment and engagement initiatives (community events and activities, local sporting, community allotments).
 - Develop community based built facilities for the development of a green careers programme (thereby sustaining the development and maintenance of the land, whilst also providing pathways to green careers for all ages), with community engagement activities at the heart of this approach.
 - Deliver a Green Careers Programme and Community Place Capacity Building programme through the innovative use of this green space and improved infrastructure.



Common Wealth Games Legacy Funding

- 4.20 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council has secured upto £1.39m from the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund to support the increased energy costs for Sandwell Aquatics Centre to 31 March 2025.
- 4.21 The Skills and Employability Service are delivering a programme utilising this funding at a value of £801,714.23 for jobs and skills provision, paid work placements and NEET prevention work in schools. The funding is split into 30% this financial year, with 70% of funding due to be spent in 2024/5.
- 4.22 **Targeted Job Support** is being delivered across a number of community venues and supporting residents to gain the knowledge and skills to perform individualised job search across a range of websites. The sessions enable participants to customise their search based on their personal circumstances and fully understand the role, duties and skill requirements before being supported to complete the application. During the first quarter we supported 17 residents through the programme. Marketing and engagement activities are taking place to increase awareness of the support.
- 4.23 **Regional Career Support** is aimed at year 11 students who need additional support to identify the best careers options for them following school. It is targeted at schools and pupils where there is a risk of NEET. The programme has already worked with 35 young people and is actively engaging with others to support in the coming months.
- 4.24 **Paid Work Placements** are aimed at providing meaningful employment experience to residents in order to progress them into paid employment. The programme has been delayed due to the procurement of Vouchers that will be used as payment but there are already a number of residents signed up to take part.

Employment and Skills

- 4.25 Sandwell MBC continues to play an active role in the WMCA Employment and Skills officers group; the meeting includes representatives from all constituent member local authorities. This group also considers regional approaches and best practise sharing across the local area, with each local authority having their own Employment and



Skills partnership to feed information to and from. WMCA colleagues are being consulted in the development of the Sandwell Skill and Employment strategy to ensure plans are aligned such as the Economic Growth Plan.

- 4.26 Strategic meetings are now being held in Sandwell with Sandwell College, DWP and WMCA to discuss place-based issues and solutions. Meetings to date have focussed on the skills mismatch to vacancies and meeting employer demands for Sector based work academy provision.
- 4.27 Sandwell MBC is successfully delivering a strand of the Multiply contract supporting financial literacy in the borough, our Welfare Rights team are working alongside the Citizens Advice Bureau and Sandwell Consortium to build numeracy skills and financial resilience..
- 4.28 Multiply is aimed at supporting employed residents to gain maths skills by undertaking a financial literacy course within the community. Topics covered include understanding payslips, energy bills, savvy shopping, price comparison sites and support with household budgeting. Additional information has been requested by residents including better off calculations for those receiving benefits, planning for retirement and the threat of redundancy. The project has supported 300 residents to complete training to date across over 50 employers.

NEET reduction

- 4.29 The Council is delivering the Careers and Enterprise contract which provides additional careers support to schools including engagement of enterprise co-ordinators and advisors. WMCA are the accountable body for the Careers and Enterprise contract.
- 4.30 This includes two part funded secondments from the Connexions service with additional funding for Careers education activities.

Employment and Skills Strategy

- 4.31 WMCA have developed an Employment and Skills Strategy 2024-2027 which sets out their ambition for a more integrated employment and skills ecosystem for the region which can stimulate growth, deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses, and create healthier thriving



communities. Employment and Skills officers have been involved in the consultation for the strategy, feeding in local priorities for our residents.

Adult Education Budget 2022-2025 Strategy

- 4.32 WMCA has issued its Adult Education Budget 2022-2025 Strategy. It sets out their vision for a responsive and flexible adult skills offer which will support a people-centred approach to ensure that the skills needs of businesses are met and that everybody can benefit from economic growth.
- 4.33 WMCA key priorities are:
1. Getting residents into employment
 2. Upskilling and reskilling to respond to the regional economy and net zero
 3. Providing a good basic education up to Level 2 for those who need it and increasing higher-level provision in all local authority areas to ensure a good balanced offer is in place
 4. Supporting our communities to be stronger and benefit from inclusive growth
 5. Ensuring there is a strong Community Learning offer in place, which addresses digital inclusion, family learning, sustainability and health & wellbeing.
- 4.34 WMCA are conducting place based reviews to analyse the effectiveness of Adult education budget funded courses against the current labour market vacancies and employer demands. This information is being shared with stakeholders to inform future delivery and will be fed into the Local Skills improvement plans.

Digital Exclusion

- 4.35 The WMCA 'Connected Digital Services' project will conclude in March 2024, this has seen over 2,000 devices distributed across the local voluntary sector and donated directly to Sandwell Residents. Ongoing work with the Authority includes implementing the regions new Digital Roadmap this will look to ensure all residents benefit from digital access skills and jobs. In addition Sandwell is working to access 'Digital Divide' funding that, it is planned, will become available from April 2024 – this resource will support the digital learning journey in Sandwell focusing on an increase in digital qualifications and employment opportunities.



Wednesbury to Dudley (Phase 1) (Brierley Hill- Phase 2) Metro Extension

4.36 The 11km extension will branch off the current West Midlands Metro line just east of the Wednesbury Great Western Street Metro stop, before heading through Tipton and Dudley on its way to Brierley Hill. The extension will be delivered in two phases with the first to Dudley town centre expected to open for passenger services in 2024. The second phase will see the route further extended to Brierley Hill at the earliest opportunity. This phased approach is due to a combination of factors including a rise in construction and energy costs, at the same time as a reduction in the farebox income as a result of the Covid pandemic. This is the largest transport investment in the Black Country with a scheme value of circa £450m.

4.37 There are plans for up to 14 trams stops along the route:

- Phase one will see up to nine new stops from Wednesbury to Flood Street, Dudley
- Phase two will include the addition of five stops between Flood Street and Brierley Hill, with provision for one additional stop

4.38 Phase One is fully funded and opens to passenger services in December 2024 but Phase Two from Dudley to Brierley Hill is not currently funded.

4.39 The headline benefits of this route are...

- Attracting investment and regeneration to Sandwell and Dudley, and in phase two, to Brierley Hill
- An important driver for this route is the creation of a link from this part of the Black Country to HS2 and everywhere in-between supporting economic growth by linking jobs and people
- The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension will enhance public transport accessibility across the Black Country as a whole and reduce journey times as well as improve air quality and reduce noise



- 4.40 Main construction for the first phase of the scheme to Dudley town centre commenced in March 2020. Since then, much activity has taken place, including laying of track in Castle Hill, Dudley, utility upgrades and diversions, removal of the existing road surface, creation of concrete track beds elsewhere in Dudley town centre, and more recently preparation of the route through Tipton. Work is now underway to construct the 'Y' junction at Wednesbury which connects the extension to the existing Birmingham to Wolverhampton line.
- 4.41 Meanwhile, a number of aged railway bridges along the route were replaced in 2021 to make way for new purpose-built structures which are fit for a modern tramway. Further bridge replacement works have also taken place.
- 4.42 The metro extension from Wednesbury through Tipton also represents a 'growth corridor' for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and is the geography upon which our proposal for a Levelling Up Zone is based.

Friar Park Housing Development

- 4.43 The Council and WMCA are working together in a legally binding Joint Venture Agreement to develop a challenging brownfield site in the Borough (Friar Park) that could deliver 630 new homes including 25% affordable homes.
- 4.44 A Masterplan for the site was approved by Cabinet in March 2023 following a 6 week consultation period.
- 4.45 At that meeting Cabinet also approved the procurement strategy for developer selection and Sandwell and WMCA officers are in the process of developing necessary tender documentation. The Expression of Interest phase as part of the developer selection process has been completed, closing on 26th January 2024.
- 4.46 The challenging factor in bringing the project forward is scheme viability due to the requirement for extensive remediation. However, funding has been secured via the Levelling Up Partnership to address the viability gap.



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Become a non-constituent member of WMCA - Participation as a constituent member of the WMCA enables Sandwell to deliver improvements to the locality that would otherwise be more difficult to achieve. In addition, through WMCA activity, we can ensure that Sandwell residents have the skills to access new employment opportunities both here in Sandwell and across the region, with excellent public transport available connecting the whole of the West Midlands. These benefits would be lost if Sandwell became a non-constituent member.

6 Implications

Resources:	The contribution to the Combined Authority from Sandwell Council for 2023/24 is £0.611 million, increasing to £0.618 million for 2024/25
Legal and Governance:	Part 6 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (“the 2009 Act”) provides for the establishment of combined authorities for the areas of two or more local authorities in England. Combined authorities are bodies corporate which may be given power to exercise specified functions of a local authority under sections 104 and 105 of the 2009 Act, and power to exercise specified functions of any other public authority under section 105A of the 2009 Act.
Risk:	Section 21 of the West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendments) Order 2017 has the effect that where costs are incurred by the Combined Authority and are not met from other sources of income, then they fall to be met by the seven constituent councils, including Sandwell.
Equality:	The priorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority reflect the equality and diversity of the West Midlands, including striving to create prosperity through a strong and collective economic strategy and the policy aspiration to champion all that makes the West Midlands a Great Place to Live. The equality impact of any specific proposals will need to be



	addressed in reports to the WMCA Board or the appropriate decision-making body.
Health and Wellbeing:	All constituent members of the WMCA are be better placed to contribute and influence the Health and Social Care offer for local residents and create: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more sustainable local health and care economy; • Improved quality and experience of care; • Improved population health.
Social Value	There is potential in all schemes and initiatives, particularly those delivered directly in Sandwell, to have a positive impact on Social Value.
Climate Change	The Council will continue to work with the West Midlands Combined Authority to identify net zero projects and programmes to implement in Sandwell.
Corporate Parenting	There are no Corporate Parenting implications arising from this report.

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

Report to Cabinet on West Midlands Deeper Devolution Deal 13 September 2023



Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Performance Champions – Progress Report
Director:	James McLaughlin, Assistant Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Senior Lead Officer, Jane Alexander Jane_alexander@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that Full Council:-


- 1.1 Recognise the progress that the Performance Champions have made since June 2023; and
- 1.2 Endorse the Performance Champions' proposed next steps in further developing their work areas.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 When the new Performance Champion roles were agreed by Council on 7 June 2022, it was agreed that the Neighbourhoods and Lead Performance Champion would report to Full Council on the work of the Performance Champions.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The role of the Performance Champions is to support Cabinet members to progress key areas across the Corporate Plan, helping to improve delivery across all the strategic outcomes of the plan.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 On 7 June 2022, Council approved the establishment of the Performance Champion roles. Absorbing the previous Cabinet Advisor roles, the purpose of the Performance Champions is to provide alternative views, opinions and advice on wider, often cross-cutting issues and matters, to the Executive with a view to supporting and enabling more informed policy and strategy development. The roles enable Performance Champions to share their own experiences, areas of expertise and views/opinions from wider engagement they undertake in relation matters falling within the scope of each Performance Champion role.
- 4.2 The Performance Champions do not form part of the Executive. However, the Executive may seek their views and engage them in relation to relevant matter and issues so as that important insight, ideas, thoughts, and views can be harnessed when executive functions are considered.
- 4.3 Performance Champions provide an additional mechanism and opportunity for important views and opinions to be ascertained, in particular from the public, partners and stakeholders. This is in addition to the other functions, mechanisms already in place, such as the Council's Scrutiny function and arrangements, consultation arrangements and methodologies and the like.
- 4.4 In June 2023, the Leader re-aligned their responsibilities to support council commitments as follows:
- Neighbourhoods – Lead Champion – Councillor Maria Crompton
 - Safer Communities– Councillor Mohammed Jalal Uddin
 - Cleaner and greener – Councillor Harnoor Bhullar
 - Our Economy – Councillor Pam Randhawa



- External partnerships – Councillor Vicki Smith

Description of role

4.5 The following role description for performance champions was agreed by Council in June 2023:

- A non-decision-making role that supports Cabinet to drive performance and promote continuous improvement in service delivery and the implementation of best practice.
- To promote and develop their responsible topic, raising awareness of council activity in the community and contributing to the Council's Corporate Plan and Vision 2030.
- Encouraging and supporting measures, initiatives and/or activities that raise greater awareness and involvement by local people and communities in Council decision-making.

4.6 The Performance Champions have spent much of their first nine months undertaking the following tasks:

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

Safer Communities – Cllr Mohammed Jalal Uddin

4.7 The Performance Champion for Safer Communities has been working productively with officers, members, partners, and residents on a regular basis to understand the community safety issues that are experienced in the borough.



Progress

4.8 The following progress and activities are report –

- Meetings with Cabinet member for Public Health and Communities to identify focus of work – community safety in parks.
- Meetings with key officers to understand the initiatives underway to address resident safety and anti-social behaviour in our green spaces.
- Conversations with local residents to understand concerns about community safety in parks – for example with local residents at the Annual Eid prayer at Sandwell Valley, Birmingham & Sandwell Mela at the Victoria Park and members of Friends of Lewisham Park.
- Participation in Safer 6 campaign, where local residents, businesses and partners had the opportunity to express their views. Residents expressed their concerns that they do not feel safe or encouraged to use local park facilities due to issues such as lack of adequate lighting and police visibility in the parks during the winter period.
- Attended West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner Panel meetings to gain insight into current community safety issues, role of neighbourhood policing in tackling anti-social behaviour issues in green/spaces and parks for example, nuisance bikes.
- Meetings with local ward councillors to understand concerns in their areas.

4.9 Next Steps

Make recommendations to Cabinet Member/ scrutiny chairs with regard to:

- Install more visible signage in the parks across the borough to raise awareness of how to report ASB incidents. Such signage will also include information regarding penalties/consequences of ASB incidents, such as fines for dog fouling, BBQs/fires, Nuisance Bikes in the parks.
- Build infrastructure in our parks to support the use of deployable CCTV stock such as suitable lighting with columns that can house cameras. Any future improvements to lighting offers the option to look at lighting columns that can accommodate our deployable cameras and thus give the option for temporary deployable CCTV camera should the need arise.
- Identify hotspot areas across 6 towns to tackle issues more effectively by deploying resources where needed most by collaborating with key partners/stakeholders.



- Explore the feasibility of installing permanent CCTV cameras by entrances and exit ways as pilot for the identified hotspot areas.

Cleaner and Greener – Councillor Harnoor Bhullar

4.10 The Performance Champion for Cleaner and Greener communities has been working with officers and members involved in addressing the key issues in relation to creating a cleaner and greener Sandwell and liaising with partners at the town level to understand the issues of concern locally.

Progress

4.11 The following progress and activities are report –

- Meeting with Assistant Director Borough Economy to discuss learnings from Serco industrial action strike and how to tackle any similar situations in the future.
- Understanding about new introduction of charges regarding garden waste collection 2023 and start and end time period for collections. Also suggested putting a rolling Direct debit option for residents going forward so that residents do not have to go through the hassle of signing up every year and this leading to residents missing waste collections for a certain time period. Advised that work is already underway.
- Gained understanding of Sandwell street cleansing routines and suggested that this needs to be advertised more via various channels to the residents.
- Meeting with key officer responsible for a greener Sandwell to consider the tree strategy and the actions planned. Also discussed the ongoing works under tree strategy and the new changes being introduced.
- Attended Climate change meetings regularly and contributed actively. Main areas of interest for contribution - single use plastic, recycling and waste, community engagement, with adults and young people.

Next Steps

4.12 Make recommendations to Cabinet Member/ scrutiny chairs with regard to:

- Initiate pilot urban greening project in Oldbury ensuring it benefits the community and is managed in such as a way as to not put additional burden on council maintenance services



- Ensure consultation with local businesses/ friends groups and explore how they would like to be involved in the project
- Explore funding options for rolling out the approach to other towns

Our Economy – Cllr Pam Randhawa

4.16 The Performance Champion for Our Economy has been working to build relationships with business in Sandwell to understand their needs and articulating these views in strategic meetings.

Progress

4.17 The following progress and activities are report –

- Attending Business Ambassadors Focus Groups and engaging in discussion of the strategic issues affecting Sandwell businesses and the merits of developing our community wealth building approach.
- Meeting with Regeneration and Growth Cabinet member to discuss role and areas of focus.
- Various meetings with local businesses to explore the challenges they are facing and how we can work together and signposting to address specific issues that council can help with
- Monthly attendance at Business Ambassadors meeting, promoting work of the group with partners in the borough and feeding intelligence back to them
- Attended Care Leavers’ event run by Sandwell Childrens’ Trust, feeding intelligence back to Business Ambassadors
- Participated in Sandwell Anchor Network to develop Partnership Charter and agree with Business Ambassadors
- Attending member training on Introduction to Planning to broaden skills
- Encouraging nominations of local companies for Kings Honours and Awards – sharing criteria and eligibility information
- Contributed to Sandwell’s Cost of Living Summit to plan support for local communities and business
- Attended various events at the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool, enabling promotion of Sandwell business, networking and gathering of intelligence on business community issues nationally
- Attending West Bromwich Town Deal Board



- Attending West Bromwich Crime Reduction Partnership providing monitoring and update of issues relating to business
- Attended Sandwell Top 50 Business and Growth Team launch, promoting networking and access to support
- Contributed to partnership discussion on Vision 2030 refresh, ensuring that business community input is considered in the process.

Next Steps

4.18 Make recommendations to Cabinet Member/ scrutiny chairs with regard to:

- Working with officers to improve how business take up Council contract opportunities.
- Continuing to build relationship with Business Ambassadors by attending meetings and bridging gap with the Council.

External Partnerships – Cllr Vicki Smith

4.19 The Performance Champion for External Partnerships has been focusing on understanding the approach to social prescribing and how this can be developed and enhanced.

Progress

4.20 The following progress and activities are report –

- Initial meeting with Cabinet member to understand focus required – external partnerships around health and wellbeing and social prescribing
- Meeting with key officers in the council who work directly on social prescribing to understand the context and key issues.
- Exploration of current approach and need for a Social Prescribing (SP) Strategy.
- Based on feedback from Social Prescribers and stakeholders, the strategy document provides recommendations to offer a more cohesive and integrated service offer for Sandwell. The strategy intends to move the social prescribing environment in Sandwell into a more cohesive, comprehensive and standardised intervention that will encourage alignment in addressing the wider determinants of health and help to reduce health inequalities in our communities.
- The Health and Wellbeing Board in March 2024 will be asked to provide strategic guidance on which option the operational team



should pursue to improve social prescribing in Sandwell and ensure that:

- Social Prescribing workers are well trained and supported.
- Referrals and data collection are aligned across all social prescribers regardless of setting.
- Social Prescribing reaches those individuals who need it in a timely manner and supportively.
- Community resources are accessible, and the community and voluntary sector infrastructure is developed to respond to social prescribing demand.
- The future strategy can be clearly communicated and implemented with appropriate plans and review.

Next Steps

4.21 Make recommendations to Cabinet Member/ scrutiny chairs with regard to:

- To further engage with the development of the SP strategy and ensure that the delivery of SP is consistent across the six towns.
- Increasing awareness of SP in the community and feeding back experiences from the community.
- Increase the awareness and knowledge of elected members and recommend that member development training takes place to enable them to refer in the right way.

Lead Performance Champion - Neighbourhoods - Cllr Maria Crompton

4.22 The Performance Champion for Neighbourhoods has been focusing on dementia in Sandwell. Also attending town leads meetings to pick up issues at that level. Role to report progress of performance champions to the Deputy Leader.

Progress

4.23 The following progress and activities are report –

- Various meetings with officers, members and partners held relating to this performance area
- Meetings with two Deputy Leaders to ascertain focus required and keys areas to explore – care for dementia sufferers and their families in their home and in the community
- Attended Demetia Event Blackheath Library – Several services with information



- Attended Dementia workshop for Cabinet. Dementia service providers outlined the intelligence base and the services currently available and how these might be developed in the future:
 - Bespoke support tailored to the individual.
 - Clearer signage required in Council buildings & areas in Sandwell (colour important, particularly heritage signs).
 - Increased availability of respite for carers, especially for short periods. Better advertising.
 - Dementia specific training for all areas initially but refreshed every couple of years, including members.
- Making sure council buildings, staff and services are dementia friendly in the first place and then extend this intention to other organisations, shopping centres and businesses in Sandwell.
- Issues identified by families are that when dementia sufferers' care is required outside Sandwell, communication between services in the different areas is difficult.

Next Steps

4.24 Make recommendations to Cabinet Member/ Scrutiny Chairs regarding:

- To follow up actions being taken to improve signage and communication both within council buildings and in other public buildings and green spaces
- To focus on communication between different organisations that work together to support families experiencing dementia, ensuring the offer is improved. Particularly addressing the issue of cross boundary provision and communication between authorities and with the families involved
- Greater digital communication e.g. Facebook to let residents know when and where events are taking place over a couple of weeks.
- Organisation names more appropriate to the service they offer.

4.25 All Performance Champions will be considering the impact of the current fiscal environment and cost of living challenges on service provision in the future.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 Council could determine an alternative focus for the Performance Champion roles. However, these roles are focused on council commitments and alternatives may not be as effective in supporting Cabinet.



6 Implications

Resources:	None specifically associated with this report. The Independent Remuneration Panel previously recommended, and Full Council approved, a Special Responsibility Allowance of 33.3% of the Leaders allowance be paid to Performance Champions. Costs are met from within approved budgets.
Legal and Governance:	Whilst not part of the executive, the role of Performance Champion enables non-executive members to contribute, alongside the work of the Overview and Scrutiny function, to the direction of travel for the Council, shaping and influencing policy.
Risk:	None specifically associated with this report. However, Performance Champions may from time to time receive confidential, personal or sensitive information that will need to be managed in accordance with information governance obligations.
Equality:	Performance Champion will engage with a variety of people from different backgrounds. Ensuring such views are captured and considered is an important part of the role of Performance Champion.
Health and Wellbeing:	The remit of several of the proposed revised roles would contribute to the health and wellbeing of Sandwell's communities.
Social Value:	The remit of several of the Performance Champion roles contribute to enhancing social value.
Climate Change:	The remit of several of the Performance Champion roles contribute to addressing the causes of climate change.

7. Appendices

None



8. Background Papers

None.



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Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Corporate Parenting Board Progress Update
Director:	Interim Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles sally_giles@sandwell.gov.uk
Contact Officer:	Corporate Parenting Project Officer Rosa Da Silva Rosa_DaSilva@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council considers and comments upon the Corporate Parenting Board update.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the work carried out by the Corporate Parenting Board over the last 12 months in relation to how services are supporting children in care and care experienced young people.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people:</p> <p>Corporate Parenting aims to give children in our care the best possible beginning in life. This involves making sure that all children under our care, who consider Sandwell their “Corporate Parents,” grow up well, have a positive start, and receive excellent care. Supporting our young people as they transition into adulthood, provides them with services and assistance to help them thrive and reach their full potential.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Board has submitted 12 months of minutes to the Full Council for their consideration. The minutes cover the period between March 2023 to January 2024.
- 4.2 Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is chaired by the Elected Cabinet Member Councillor for Children, Young People and Education . It is led by Voice Of Sandwell (VOS - forum for 11-18-year olds) and Forum for Independent Adults (FIYA - forum for 18-25 year). The CPB's purpose is to focus on key areas that affect and impact our children in care and care-experienced young people.
- 4.3 Representatives on the Board include Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), Sandwell Children Trust (SCT), Education, Skills, Employment and Training, Social Care, Foster Carers, children and young people, NHS/ICB, West Midlands Police, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Elected Members including the Leader of the opposition.
- 4.4 The Board follows a 12-24 month of thematic programme of Deep Dives which was implemented in October 2022.
- 4.5 Each Deep Dive looks at the 7 identified key priorities affecting these areas:
- 19+ Education, employment and training
 - Foster friendly Sandwell
 - Emotional wellbeing and mental health
 - Physical health
 - Out-of-borough placements and stability
 - Access to Services: Local offer
 - Enable elected members and partners to have a better understanding of their service areas and provide effective change.



4.6 Between January 2023 to January 2024 the meetings covered:

- 30 March 2023: Deep dive into safeguarding and stability for Children in Care
- 7 September 2023: Deep Dive into Access to Services Care Leavers Local Offer Review
- 16 November 2024: Assurance Report for Post 16 Pathway Plans
- 25 January 2024: Deep Dive into Education Skills Employment and Training Education: Sandwell Virtual School for Children in Care

5 Alternative Options

5.1 There are no alternative options that need to be considered. The report's purpose is to provide an update to Council in relation to the corporate parenting board.

6. Implications

Resources:	The nonrecurrent funding provides uncertainty and instability of delivery services and the ability to plan for long term programmes to make a sustained impact.
Legal and Governance:	N/A
Risk:	N/A
Equality:	Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments
Health and Wellbeing:	If the services are not provided, it could likely lead to negative effects on the health and wellbeing of our communities.
Social Value:	N/A
Climate Change:	N/A
Corporate Parenting:	Without targeted service, Children in care and care leavers are more likely than their peers to have poor life outcomes and struggle with their long-term physical, mental health and emotional wellbeing.



7. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Corporate Parenting Board Minutes – Thursday 30 March 2023

Appendix 2 - Corporate Parenting Board Minutes – Thursday 7 September 2023

Appendix 3 - Corporate Parenting Board Minutes – Thursday 16 November 2023

Appendix 4 - Corporate Parenting Board Minutes – Thursday 25 January 2024

8. Background Papers

None



Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday 30 March 2023
5 – 7 pm
MS Teams

Present: Councillors Hackett (Chair), Councillor A Choudhry, Councillor N Hinchliff.

Young People: leasha Khan, Lukas Butler, Ellie Hatton, Lacey Phillips, Helen Kimber.

Officers: Michael Jarrett (Director of Children and Families), Emma Taylor (Chief Executive of Sandwell Children's Trust), Sally Giles (Strategic Partnership and Commissioning Manager), Mandip Chahal (Senior Joint Commissioning Manager – Children's Services), Claire Tate (Senior Transformation Lead for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health), Teodora Bot (Director of Practice Quality and Partnerships SCT), Rosa DaSilva (Corporate Parenting Support Officer), Abdul Kahar (Participation Team Manager), Tom Davis (Partnership and Engagement Manager), Jayne O'Reilly (Designated Nurse) – NHS, Claire Hickman, NHS, Sarah Grant (Service Manager) Suzanne Allen, Employment and Skills Manager, Elaine Bennet IRO, Stuart Richards IRO, Rebecca Greenhouse Care Leavers Team manager, Amanda Carby – notetaker.

10/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Steven Gauntley, Councillor Elizabeth Giles, Kelly Harris Balwant Bains, Gillian Douglas, Dr Indu Mahabeer, Michelle O Farrell Baines.

ACTION - Cllr Hackett would like a face to face goodbye and thank you for leasha Khan and Helen Kimber. Rosa to invite leasha and Helen to the next meeting of Corporate Parenting Board.

11/23 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 12/01/2023
Agreed.

12/23 **Action Log 12.1.23**

1. Letters of support to be sent from Corporate Parenting Board to the Health Integrated Care Board.

Councillor Hackett shared that the Appeal against this decision is to go ahead, Councillor Hackett will raise this issue further, if the second briefing paper is declined. He would advise cabinet and may make this a public issue.

A letter was processed to be presented at the ICB board to support the Care Leavers free prescriptions business case. However, before the letter could be submitted, the board approved care leavers to receive free medical prescriptions. Our NHS Partners highlighted that a further business case will be presented to the ICB for care leavers to receive free dental and optical prescriptions.

2. Participation and engagement manager to bring Access to Services: Local Offer review - Task and Finish Group to next CPB meeting on 30th March 2023. How we can fund these ideas?

The board agreed that the next deep dive would be Access to Services: The Local Offer Review. However, to ensure the most impactful financial proposal is presented to the board, the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group proposed that a further review from partners and young people would strengthen the suggested offer.

Tom Davies shared that a lot of work had been done, and requested for this to be reported at a future CPB, with an improved proposal.

3. All Council reports must show how they will impact Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The Corporate Parenting implication guidance notes were submitted to Democratic services in February 2023. All council reports will now follow the report templates to incorporate corporate parenting implications and guidance note.

4. To set up a task and finish group to focus on tackling the Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) data – 19-21-year olds.

The NEET strategy meetings have replaced the tracking group which sits alongside the NEET panel to address raised concerns.

The NEET strategy group is developing the NEET action plan and monitoring the actions, feeding back to the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group. A meeting on held Tuesday 28th March 2023 finalised the NEET action plan.

Updates:

There has been a delay with the action plan, SCGP will have sight of action plan at the next meeting, where challenge and scrutiny can take place before bringing to CPB

Confirmation the strategic priorities are in the action plan which has been reviewed and now it is a really clear and smart plan.

ACTION

- ***Update on the status of NEETs to be reported at the next CPB.***
 - ***A NEET Deep Dive exercise to be undertaken and focus on, identify the areas and approaches of work taking place (social value, apprenticeships), to look at what else can we do, identify how we will tackle specific issues?***
 - ***The NEET Action Plan to be on next CPB agenda.***
 - ***The NEET Strategy to be sent out for reminder***
- 5. Feedback to Corporate Parenting board Ofsted of Local authority children's services and the new separate judgement for care leavers: ILACS and the experiences and progress of Care leavers.**

Following a consultation with national and local practitioners and young people, Ofsted have introduced a new judgement to ensure care leavers have appropriate services available as they transition into adulthood. This came into force January 2023.

ACTION: Presentation will be shared with the board following tonight's meeting with members and partners.

Deep dive into safeguarding and stability for Children in Care:

a. Sandwell Children's Trust Services presentation and report provided from:

- Children in Care Services and Care Leaving Service
- Independent reviewing officers
- Fostering service
- Participation service

There are 84,867 under 18 YP in Sandwell, 811 children in care and 355 care leavers, 95.6% per 10,000 of children in care and care leavers.

Do we want to Move to an appendix and take out of the bulk of the minutes.

The journey of care T'seun was provided by representatives of SCT:

- He came into Care under a Court Order, and was subject to care proceedings, he was placed on a Full Care Order.
- Permanency Planning, a placement planning meeting was held within 72 hours.
- Visits to T'seun are made, one statutory review meeting within 20 days and another at 3 months. 6 months later health assessments take place, time is made for T'seun to have family time and contact with family.

IRO team – The role of the IRO is to ensure plans and outcomes that we wish for to T'seun to have. These are guided by statute in the IRO handbook. There are 18 full time IRO's, who are a stable and diverse team that follow children through all of their care journey.

- Within 3 days of T'seun coming into care, he will be allocated an IRO. T'seun will meet and speak with the IRO about reasons he is in care, the plans and gain his views
- Within 20 working days he will have his review, this is followed by a 3 month and 6-month reviews after this. If there is any clarity needed or concerns raised – will call a review for T'seun.

- We treat children as we would our own children – we speak to T'seun and ask him about his needs and devise a suitable care plan for him.
- Different ways to communicate with T'seun which is suitable for him and the best way to gain a response would be used.
- We write to child in a child friendly way, to confirm when and where things will happen, ask if they feel they have any barriers or issues. We will make sure T'seun is achieving the best outcomes and work with partners if there are highlighted issues.
- We try to make everything accessible to T'seun, we use a traffic light system for young people, we use a complaints system, we advise of an independent advocate. There is regular monitoring and audits completed.

Life and memory work for T'seun (previously known as Life Story) - we have an aspiration that every single child has a reliable, age appropriate, quality life and memory work.

- The SW is responsible to complete and bring this work together. A child needs to understand why they are in care, what is their story – the whole team (FC/IRO) also need to know and understand this.
- The child needs to have a relationship with their SW, they need to understand what has happened, be able to voice their concerns, some children need more time. These areas need to be rechecked with children and revisited and it is not a 1 off piece of work. Some children have traumatic experiences, we need a clear offer for our children to support this area.

Placement disruptions this is unavoidable for some children. With loss and trauma for our children, the impact of the pandemic, circumstance and standards of care, missed opportunities for good, quality care planning.

- We are working hard on care planning and matching is crucial for our children and for foster carers. There is an expectation of quality SW visit, oversight from the TM, and understanding and spot early warning signs, emotions, and behaviour changes.
- We hold signs of stability meetings which are critical. Occasional a change of placement can be in the best interest of the child.

Fostering – we are an independent agency in Sandwell. IFA was rated good in 2021:

1. Recruitment and Assessment
2. Mainstream support team – matching and placements
3. Connected carer support team

At present we have 97 mainstream carers and 94 connected carers. There is a continues to be a recruitment drive to increase the number of foster carers in Sandwell.

Adoption – Adoption arrangements are jointly undertaken with Adoption at Heart – it caters for children that are subject to placement orders across the Black Country and Sandwell is part of the consortium. They recruit adopters and prepare them become to become parents. The inspection outcome – a Good service. Since March 2022, 30 children in Sandwell have been adopted, the length of time for this process has significantly reduced and there is continued work to achieve positive outcomes. We are working on making further improvements with a focus on feedback from adopters.

Transition to Leaving Care – We would support T'seun from age 15 and 9 months.

- T'seun would have an allocated SW, a pathway plan, and assessment at 16. His SW would be within him until he is 18 years old.
- A PA is allocated at 17, with the aim to allocate earlier where possible. At this point the local offer will be introduced, and discussions about accommodation options and finances take place. Support is put in to ensure that opportunities are provided around education/training and health
- T'seun will be supported to help him to be resilient and start adult life with some chances and opportunities.

Participation offer for children in care

- Information is shared with children and the starting point to building relationships.
- The team share what groups are available and can be accessed, provide the website to review information. We engage with children in their spare time to look at what is available and what we can offer through Voices of Sandwell (VOS).

- We help to build their confidence and help them to meet other young people in care. We have holiday programmes, workshops, celebration events, activities for young people to access.
- Young people can join the FIYA Group as they turn 18, they have the opportunity to become a Care leaver ambassador for the Trust.

Emma - how confident are we getting at pre-empting vulnerable children and signs that a placement is breaking down. Can you assure the board?

Sarah Grant replied we have had a challenging few weeks – when we are faced with notice periods for a child, we go into action mode, tracking, updating PRF (profile) for child, we make the child safe, we have extra resilience around the placement whilst the notice period is being given, we would be trying very hard to save the placement, we would be revisiting family members, revisiting assessments of family members, fully into action mode, by the end of the notice period we have a plan for the child. We do have a placement crisis – we are working on this constantly.

Emma commented about the Notice Period and the challenge of this – for any child that comes into care they have suffered trauma and there is an element of risk of a placement breakdown. There is a clear criteria to access Camhs, as Corporate Parents we need to be proactive and be more aware of the fragility of children, with this, there needs to be more wraparound care and access to more support for EHWB to support those children.

Sally Giles – Are the council doing enough or could we do more to support the Fostering recruitment (friendly fostering) – can collectively support recruitment?

Sarah – We are currently looking with our housing partners, how we can support foster carers who want to foster more children are supported how this can be achieved – increasing bedrooms.

Teo – We are working with Housing in Sandwell and the Director of Housing, Gillian Douglas is a non-executive director

on the Trust Board, committing her time to looking at time to support foster carers. Engagement sessions have been completed within residential forums, to enable children to stay in Sandwell.

Emma – All partners need to be fostering friendly and a clear approach to how we can support internal staff who may need time off to support the child. 1 family per school would result in 100 families and increase the opportunities of placements.

Cllr Hackett - Placement Breakdowns – do we have assurance that change is happening and come back to this at a later date?

Emma – yes, it is a really challenging time, we have children with no identified placements, we need to change our mindset. The board must keep a close eye on this.

ACTION – Placement breakdown data – CPB – must keep a watching brief on this – any data to next Board?

ACTION – Fostering – SCPG to review how could we increase and encourage Sandwell's fostering number?

ACTION – Housing – how do we support housing opportunities for families wanting to be a foster carers and access to properties that can accommodate this.

ACTION – To return to CPB – For the development of the wraparound model whereby a whole multiagency offer of support is available for our young people – services then sign up to a model.

14/23

Redrafted Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference

Cllr Hackett – changes identified:

- Increase Cllr participation in CPB. In future CPB will include 8 Councillors, across all parties, from the new municipal year (May/June) the Leader and/or Deputy Leader will be members of CPB.
- Frequency of CPB meetings – to move to every 10 weeks.
- Children's Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair to be full members of the CPB.

- For an regular agenda item for the chair and vice chair Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair at each CPB meeting.

ACTION – A request for an agenda item for the Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair at each CPB meeting.

Emma – Requested to review 4 points on TOR

- Quoracy
- Membership for the Trust – Service Manager for CiC – can be taken out,
- Cancelled and postponed meetings.

ACTION – Rosa Da Silva to meet with Emma/Teo to review highlight areas and feedback to Chair.

ACTION - Cllr Hackett to make slight amendments to ToR ready for full council in May.

15/23

Redrafted Corporate Parenting Board Pledge: Pledges and Promises

FIYA and VOS Forum presented an update on the 5 Pledges We have 5 pledges and 5 promises underneath each pledge.

What are we going to do about these pledges? These need to underpin all work of CPB and also of the strategic group.

Michael - Feedback to young people – when young people share experiences, what do people do after hearing your thoughts? Do they feedback to you?

Pledge/Promise - ‘Always listen to our voice and respect our decisions’ – we all understand what this means – YP just want to be listened to, we understand children need to be kept safe, explanations around why decisions are made – could be explained to YP – ACTION - Lucas to take back to FIYA and explain to YP.

ACTION - Strategic Group to look at how we all sign up to these Pledges and Promises and fulfil them.

16/23

Corporate Parenting Week: 12 – 16 June 2023

Rosa shared that it has been agreed to host a CPB week during 12-16 June 2023. A mini task group has been set up to pull events together. Dates to be added to calendars – LGA to deliver a training session 13 June, workshop to CPB on 13 June, 15 June – virtual training session for Cllrs and others.

ACTION – Communications to be sent to all partners and communication team at SMBC to be fully involved.

17/23

Strategic Corporate Parenting Update Group – Progress Report

Teo - Highlight report – working on:

- Targeted action for NEETs
- Local offer for care leavers and participation services
- Life and memory work – will be scrutinised by group
- EHWB HUB for CiC and CL
- Thrive Board finance streams to identify options for our care leavers
- CP week in June, and awareness of being a CP.

ACTION - CPB Annual Report – to be ready for Council in May.

ACTION - leasha and Lucas to be invited to join Council meeting 23 June (via Trisha Newton).

ACTION – CPB Annual Report also to be shared with the Trust.

18/23

AOB

Meeting ended: 18:45

*Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday 7 September 2023
Sandwell Council House
5 – 7 pm*

Present: *Councillor Hackett (Chair), Councillor Fisher, Councillor Piper, Councillor Rahman*

Young People: *Lukas, Rosie Edwards, Maddie and Beth Kettle*

Officers:

*Michael Jarrett (Director of Children and Education Service - SMBC),
Sally Giles (Assistant Director – Children’s Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement - SMBC),
Steven Gauntley (Operations Director - SCT)
Mandip Chahal (Senior Joint Commissioning Manager –SMBC),
Claire Tate (Senior Transformation Lead for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health - SMBC),
Rosa DaSilva (Corporate Parenting Project Officer - SMBC),
Abdul Kahar (Participation Team Manager - SCT),
Tom Davis (Partnership and Engagement Manager - SCT),
Jayne O’Reilly (Designated children in Care Nurse - NHS),
Claire Hickman, (Designated children in care Nurse - NHS),
Suzanne Allen (Senior Training & Employment Liaison officer - SMBC),
Kelly Harris (Skills and Employability Service Manager - SMBC)
Tanya Evans (Foster Carer - SCT)
Natalie Barnes (Team Manager, Mainstream Fostering, Recruitment and Assessment - SCT)
Balwant Bains (Executive Head of the Virtual School for LAC - SCT)
Michelle O’Farrell Baines (Service Manager - SCT)
Lesley Reynolds (Minute taker - SMBC)*

1.	<p><u>Introduction and apologies</u> Members of the board introduced themselves.</p> <p><u>Apologies from:</u> Cllr Hinchliff Cllr Singh Gill Emma Taylor (Chief executive - SCT) Jacquie Smith (Chair of the Children’s Trust – SCT) Teodora Bot (Director of Practice Quality and Partnerships SCT) Rashpal Bishop (Director of Adult services) Sarah Grant (Head of Service Children in Care, Care Leavers & Fostering) Gerry Lyng (Department for work and Pension officer)</p>
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	Dr Mahabeer (Designated Doctor for Children in care)
2.	The minutes were agreed for the meeting held on Thursday 30 March 2023.
3.	<p><u>Action log – 30/03/2023</u></p> <p>1. ACTION: Cllr Hackett would like a face to face goodbye and thank you for leasha Khan and Helen Kimber. Corporate Parenting Project Officer to invite leasha and Helen to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.</p> <p>In March, the board meeting was held virtually, as a result a face-to-face send-off did not take place for leasha Khan and Helen Kimber. The CP Board Chair therefore invited the Former Chair of F.I.Y.A, the Co-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, and the former Co-Chair of F.I.Y.A to attend the Board for a formal goodbye on 22 June 2023. However, due to the SEND Ofsted inspection between 19 June to 7 July, both chairs received a send-off at the METSEC hub by Cllr Hackett.</p> <p>The Chair highlighted the need to have a cancellation policy due to Corporate Parenting Board meeting being moved to teams at late notice March and June due to the SEND Ofsted inspection.</p> <p>Where there is a need to cancel Corporate Parenting Board Meeting (Ofsted inspection or industrial action), both the Chair and the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group agree young people, Cllrs, SMBC and SCT officer's representative will hold a meeting to discuss concerns the young people may have to further improve the needs of children in care and young people.</p> <p>The young people shared their frustrations and disappointment due to the cancellation of the Corporate Parenting Board meeting in June. They hoped to share feedback from Corporate Parenting Week and take comments forward.</p> <p>The Employment, Skills and Training team reported the board's previous co-chair, leasha Khan, secured a permanent employment contract as a personal advisor with the Sandwell Children's Trust.</p> <p>2. Placement breakdown data to be provided at next Corporate Parenting board to understand concerns.</p> <p>In July, it was identified that 64 children had a placement breakdown within the last 12 months, further work needs to be done to reduce these numbers. SCT leads highlighted that whilst moves take place some of these can be positive, and they are not always due to a breakdown. There is a need to review each case to provide clarity regarding the reason for the move to ensure that the reporting data is correct.</p>

There is a national crisis regarding placement availability. Depending on placement availability, therefore identifying placements can be a prolonged process. Sandwell Children's Trust are in the process of recruiting new foster carers.

ACTION: Sandwell Children's Trust to present placement data to the board in November. The data will cover the following areas.

- **How many children are in foster care?**
- **How many are out of borough (up to 20 miles and over 20 miles)?**
- **How many have remained in borough placements?**

ACTION – Sandwell Children Trust to undertake a deep dive on placements.

ACTION: Sandwell Childrens Trust to provide assurance report on developments taking place to support the reduction of out of borough placements. Sandwell Children's Trust are to report back to the board in six months.

3. Update on the Emotional Wellbeing Pilot Programme

£400,000 of Covid funds has been identified ,this is non recurrent funding. The funding will be used to deliver emotional wellbeing support. Market engagement has been completed with providers to deliver all 3 elements until March 2025.

The service specification is due to be completed in November 2023.

There are 3 strands to the programme:

- Provision of a 'getting help' service when children first come into care
- Support for children who have experienced two placement breakdowns
- Provision of a 'getting help' service for Care leavers

4. A request for an agenda item for the Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair at each CPB meeting.

An agenda item has now been added for the scrutiny board. The is item 9 on the agenda.

5. Rosa Da Silva to meet with Emma/Teo to review highlight areas and feedback to Chair. Cllr Hackett to make amendments to Terms of Reference ready for annual council on the 23 May 2023.

A meeting was held with Emma Taylor and Teo Bot to review the Terms of Reference on 19 April 2023. The amendments were shared with the Chair, who approved the redrafted terms of reference. They were

	<p>approved by the annual council on the 23 May 2023.</p> <p>6. Strategic Group to look at how we all sign up to these Pledges and Promises and fulfil them.</p> <p>Following the LGA Corporate Parenting workshop on 13 June 2023, the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group will be reviewing actions from CP week, developing a vision and drafting a new Corporate Parenting strategy. The first meeting to start this work will take place in September.</p> <p>7. Communications for CP Week, to be sent to all partners and communication team at SMBC to be fully involved.</p> <p>CPB Annual Report to be ready for Full Council in June 2023. leasha and Lukas to be invited to Full Council and present the annual report on 13 June 2023.</p> <p>Further details item 7</p>
4.	<p><u>Foster Carer Representative</u></p> <p>The Chair presented the foster carer representative, Tanya Evans, who will sit on the Board. It was highlighted a 2nd representative will be attending from November's board meeting.</p> <p>Housing and Sandwell Children's Trust colleagues met in June and July to review the housing options of 15 foster families who would foster more children if there was increased space in their current or alternative accommodation. Sandwell Fostering Team have shared a list with the Director of Housing which includes foster carers with their own properties, and in council and privately rented properties.</p> <p>Cllr Fisher highlighted that Sandwell Council housing stock has decreased throughout the years and there is in particular a shortage of large properties. This is a barrier for foster carers wanting to accommodate more children and young people and willing to move to a bigger property.</p> <p>Housing services are to review this issue and identify a way to facilitate these needs. All partners need to be proactive in ensuring we become "Foster Friendly Sandwell".</p> <p>Sandwell Children's Trust highlighted that until recently foster carers had limited opportunities to meet and share their views. This is now being addressed through various activities and sessions.</p> <p>Sandwell Children's Trust have formed a strategic group to begin work on becoming "Foster Friendly Sandwell" this is on the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group forward plan to be addressed at the October meeting.</p> <p>ACTIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing services to provide an update on how they can provide access to larger housing options for foster families to

	<p>accommodate more children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group are to review ways to increase and promote being a foster carer, and to understand from Sandwell residents what the barriers are to becoming a foster carer. • The terms of reference to be amended so that a foster carer representative can sit on the group. • The new Director of housing is to be invited to the meeting. • Look at what other authorities are doing, examples of “Foster Friendly” good practice. Stoke are the benchmark
5	<p><u>Deep Dive into Access to Services Care Leavers Local Offer Review</u></p> <p>The Partnership and Engagement Manager presented to the board.</p> <p>In 2022 the West Midlands ADCS (Association for Directors of Children's Services) commissioned a collaborative piece of work using feedback from officers and young people across the region to develop an aspirational regional 'blueprint' local offer, with the recommendation that each local authority or Trust do their best to align to it.</p> <p>To support this, representatives from the Voices of Children group and the Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA) met with Corporate Parenting Board members to explore what was important at a local offer in a Sandwell level.</p> <p>Sandwell's Access to Services: Local offer and what support care leavers need access to. Report and presentation provided.</p> <p>Current progress</p> <p>During the last two quarters, several proposals have been progressed including provision of laptops or tablets, funding to ensure priority access to mental health services, the House Project and increasing the leaving care grant to £3000.</p> <p>A full review of the local offer proposals that are still outstanding has been completed at Strategic Corporate Parenting Group. A number have large costs attached to them, it has been identified to see if there are amendments could be made to reduce the costs but still provide access to the requested support/service, for example reviewing lifelong links with Care Leaver ambassadors completing the training and delivering this inhouse.</p> <p>It is recognised Housing, Employment & Skills, Health are collaborating effectively with Trust and Council officers to enhance the local offer.</p> <p>The Metsec building, has now been developed and is a focal point of contact for young people. Staff and personal advisors who are on duty meet young people coming into the Metsec Building. There has been positive feedback and it has resulted in referrals to the welfare rights, employment and skills team.</p>

	<p>Sandwell Children’s Trust are aiming to achieve Foster Friendly Sandwell.</p> <p>There continues to be a shortage of council accommodation, Children’s Trust are working with private landlords, there are implications which need to be reviewed and costed to support this opportunity (guarantees, rental costs above housing benefit rates)</p> <p>Skills, Employability and Training team highlighted the work being completed with employers to improve opportunities for care leavers, often using the social value priority in procurement processes. An example is DSI (M@il it provider) who hosted an experience day for care leavers which 2 care leavers attended. During the day where care leavers were able to talk to Directors, 1 care leaver shared she had to get 3 buses to work and as a result DSI have offered to support the costs of driving lessons.</p> <p>It was highlighted that there is a need to extend these opportunities to more young people to enable them to take up similar offers. The board noted the work that Suzanne did was excellent in supporting the young person and we need to maximise on the opportunities for carers and young people.</p> <p>Care Leaver ambassadors have been introduced; they are meeting young people who have recently entered care. It has been highlighted that it is important that young people have opportunities to meet with care experienced young people where they can ask questions and access support. Individuals are invited to joint VOA and FIYA forums.</p> <p>Next steps: There are a number of areas identified as part of the regional blueprint that Sandwell young people consider to be priorities. These will be reviewed at Strategic Corporate Parenting Group.</p> <p>ACTION: The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group to map out how to increase engagement and create opportunities with companies. Research and report on the good practice of other authorities. e.g. Travel West Midlands to offer reduced or free travel.</p> <p>ACTION: Meeting to be held to review Foster Friendly Sandwell and life skills sessions.</p> <p>ACTION: Strategic Corporate Parenting Group to review Access to Services: Local Offer and how the recommendations can be funded</p> <p>ACTION: Local offer information to be shared with foster carers and to review for inclusion in foster carers training.</p>
6.	NEET Strategy Action Plan

	<p>Oversight to the current progress of the NEET action plan was shared.</p> <p>In January 2024, Skills, Employment and Training will present a NEET deep dive to the board focussing on identifying the work taking place on key areas such as social value, apprenticeships to understand other elements of work the taking place.</p> <p>The NEET Strategy Action Plan has been reviewed by the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group.</p>
7.	<p>Update from Corporate Parenting Project Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of Reference The terms of reference where been approved by full council in May. • Corporate Parenting Week Councillor Hackett thanked everyone for Corporate Parenting Week. • Annual Report - Feedback As part of Corporate Parenting week, the annual report was approved by key partners and presented to Full Council on the 13 June 2023. The report was presented by Care Leavers, leasha Khan and Lukas, who shared their experiences and highlights of the report. There was positive feedback from members and the Chief Executive. Cllr Hackett thanked Lukas and Rosie for their contribution • Corporate Parenting Week 12-16 June Throughout the month of April and May, a task and finish group was formed to co-ordinate Corporate Parenting Week:12-16 June 2023. SMBC and SCT Comms were a part of this partnership. Both partners ensured that colleagues received news leading up to the week's events. Michael Jarrett reported that the LGA want to use the evaluation that he provided to use nationally as good practice. Worked with partners/young people. • Update from Corporate Parenting Project Officer SCSP - Sally Giles Key feedback was from the LGA was to focus on our strategy. Rosa da Silva and Claire Tate are looking at the pledges ad promises in the action plan. An initial draft is to be produced from the current elements of work completed in partnership, working groups and external working groups. This is to be completed by December.

	<p>Draft for Corporate Parenting New Strategy to be produced by December in readiness to launch in January. Strategy to run 2024-2027</p> <p>The challenge for the next few months to achieve Foster Friendly Sandwell.</p>
8.	<p>Data Dashboard and Update from Strategic Corporate Parenting Group - Sally Giles</p> <p>Data Headlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are currently 814 Children in Care, a slight increase of 2 this quarter. • 504 young people are placed out of borough (61.9%) with 89 (10.9%) of those are placed further than 20 miles from their home address. • Young people with 3+ placement moves in the last 12 months has remained the same at 64 young people. (8%) • 589 young people have an updated care plan in the last 6 months (88%). An increase on the previous month. • 86.9% of young people aged 5+ have had review health assessment in the last 12 months. • 62.5% of young people have had a dental check completed by the end of March 2023, this figure does need to be reviewed and updated • 87.1% of Care Leavers are in suitable accommodation (there is a need to account for any young people in custody as this is reported as not suitable) • 79.4% of 18-24-year-old Care Leavers have an updated pathway plan in the last 6 months. It is recognised that there has been a change of template for plans and procedure which has had an impact, but numbers are increasing. <p>ACTION: Sandwell Children’s Trust to present a post 16 Pathway plan assurance report to the board in November.</p> <p>ACTION: Sandwell Children’s Trust to provide up to date on children and young people out of borough 20 miles or more. Can this be embedded into a heat map to show a visual format?</p> <p>There is a need to understand, how do we know that children outside borough have and are accessing the services where they are living? Are those living in Sandwell accessing support and services, are we making carers aware, and how do we do this?</p> <p>Foster carer representative questioned what can be done to ensure foster carers know how to help young people to access services?</p> <p>ACTION: Fostering Team to review how information can be</p>

	<p>incorporated into the fostering training.</p> <p>Co-Chair highlighted the need to access free medical prescriptions for young people is a good start, but there is a need for care leavers to access free optician check-ups and costs to support new glasses.</p> <p>ACTION: Health Leads to complete a request to ICB - Can the board received an update during November's meeting.</p>
9.	<p>Feedback from Scrutiny Board</p> <p>A request is put forward for an agenda item for the Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair at each CPB meeting.</p> <p>Cllr Hackett commented the Scrutiny Board will help us with some of the actions of the group.</p> <p>As the Scrutiny Chair sent apologies but shared comments which were provided by Rosa da Silva</p> <p>Cllr Hackett commented it would be good if Scrutiny could engage directly with young people as well as via the SHAPE forum</p> <p>Action: Scrutiny Board want to review the Corporate Parenting strategy 2024 – 2027 before they engage with young people in February 2024.</p>
10.	<p>AOB</p> <p>1. Tom Davies commented he is saddened by the loss of Dave Salt who was a former foster carer. His contribution to MOTIVA8 programme which provided specific opportunities to care leavers. The Youth Team provided a eulogy at the funeral.</p> <p>2. A request will be sent to partners in October to support care leavers with a Christmas present. It will be raised at Full Council before Christmas, with Councillors encouraged to bring a gift for a care leaver.</p> <p>3. Date of the next CPB meeting is Thursday 16th November 2023 at 5-7pm in Sandwell Children's Trust</p> <p>4. A Scrutiny report on NEET will be presented in November, which will affect the timing of the of the NEET deep dive. It was suggested therefore that we could look at the Scoping exercise before the deep dive.</p> <p>Tom Davies: We are looking at our foster care offer, a new brand, new website.</p> <p>ACTION: Corporate Parenting Project Officer to ensure FIYA and VOS forums to be on the agenda and provide feedback from young</p>

	people – this must be a set agenda item.
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Meeting ended 19:00

Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday 16 November 2023
Sandwell Council House
5pm – 7pm

Present:

Councillor Hackett (Co Chair), Councillor J Giles, Councillor R Piper, Councillor Rahman, Councillor Hinchliff, Councillor Singh-Gill, Councillor Daya-Singh

Young People:

Lukas Butler (Co Chair), Madison Bishop, Ellie Hatton

Officers Present:

Emma Taylor (Chief Executive – SCT)
Sally Giles Assistant Director (Children’s Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement – SMBC)
Teodora Bot (Director of Practice Quality and Partnerships – SCT)
Mandip Chahal (Senior Joint Commissioning Manager – SMBC)
Claire Tate (Senior Lead for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health – SMBC)
Nigel Collumbell Asst Director Housing SMBC
Rosa DaSilva Corporate Parenting Project Officer SMBC
Tom Davis Partnership and Engagement Manager SCT
Dr Indu Mahabeer (Doctor for Children in Care, Medical Advisor – NHS/ICB)
Jane O’Riley (Designated nurse for Children in care – NHS/ICB)
Claire Hickman (Designated Children in Care Nurse – NHS/ICB)
Pete Dankert (Connected Carer – SCT)
Tanya Evans (Foster Carer – SCT)
Gerry Lyng (Advisor – DWP)
Natalie Barnes (Team Manager Mainstream Fostering, Recruitment and Assessment – SCT)
Amanda Carby (Minute taker – SMBC)

1	<p>Introduction and Apologies <i>Apologies from:</i> <i>Michael Jarrett</i> <i>Jacqui Smith</i> <i>Councillor Fisher</i> <i>Councillor William Gill</i> <i>Kelly Harris</i> <i>Suzanne Allen</i></p>	
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	<i>Abdul Kahar</i> <i>Balwant Bains</i>	
2	To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 7.9.23 Minutes agreed.	
3	<p>Action Log 7.9.23</p> <p>Rosa Da Silva shared each action for an update and comments:</p> <p>ACTION: Sandwell Children’s Trust to present placement data to the board in November.</p> <p>The data will cover the following areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many children are in foster care? • How many are out of borough? • How many have remained in borough placements? <p>Provide up to date data on children and young people out of borough 20 miles or more. Can this be embedded into a heat map to show a visual format?</p> <p>This action will be shared at January’s CPB meeting by Kate Mullinder/Data team with a heat map to show where young people are placed.</p> <p>ACTION: Sandwell Children Trust to undertake a deep dive on placements and provide an update on developments to reduced out of borough placements. Sandwell Children’s Trust are to report back to the board in six months.</p> <p>This is being done with Wendy Williams and EMT with the new step aside project.</p> <p>Our short term approach - A new project is being set up to review all residential and high cost placements, so there is a joint review, with consideration being given to move children into fostering households or return to family - where it is appropriate to do so.</p> <p>Longer term – SCT is currently refreshing their sufficiency strategy to set the strategic vision for the next three years. This will include a deep dive into out of borough placements, as well as placement instability and managing the market to meet Sandwell’s needs. There is a need for all our children to be placed locally within loving homes.</p> <p>In relation to the requests, Emma Taylor highlighted these are very broad questions and SCT leads need to meet to discuss specific queries and questions that the Board want to be</p>	

actioned.

ACTION: Housing Services to provide an update on how they can provide access to larger housing options for foster families to accommodate more children.

This work has begun. A panel has been set up to review foster families who need bigger properties. Housing Services are to identify the staff who will sit in a very short task and finish group to agree on Terms of Reference and process of the panel.

Nigel Collumbell will complete a follow up of current casework through the panel. He reported there is activity being completed to address these issues. Care leavers are already receiving Band 1 priority, provided with training flats. There is involvement with the House Project and support to ensure care leavers access the St Basil's Live and Work Scheme.

ACTION: The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group are to review ways to increase and promote being a foster carer, and to have an understanding from Sandwell residents what the barriers are to becoming a foster carer.

Sandwell Children Trust Fostering team have begun this work. A meeting was held with Kate Mullinder who will be Head of service for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Fostering.

Teo will provide an update to the Board with regard to Sandwell becoming a Fostering Friendly Borough in the New Year.

ACTION: The new Director of housing is to be invited to the meeting.

Nigel shared that there is a current restructure at Sandwell Council and a decision will be made about the Housing representative attendance at this Board. Until this has been confirmed Nigel will be in attendance.

ACTION: Sandwell Children's Trust to begin implementing "Foster Friendly Sandwell" and use examples of good practice such as Stoke as the benchmark. A meeting is to be held to review Foster Friendly Sandwell and life skills sessions.

Cllr Hackett is to meet with Sandwell Children's Trust partners to explore the importance of Foster Friendly Sandwell.

ACTION: The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group to map out how to increase engagement and create opportunities

with companies. Research and report on the good practice of other authorities. e.g. Travel West Midlands to offer reduced or free travel.

Tom attends the regional meetings and this area of work is part of the Regional Blue Print local offer work, to ensure that there is a consistent approach to accessing large organisations to support care leavers across the Midlands.

ACTION: Strategic Corporate Parenting Group review Access to Services: Local Offer and produce clear recommendations for the young people's Local Offer request of £154,670.

Since the last board meeting, key partners have met to review and develop the local offer recommendations. This is item 7 on the agenda.

ACTION: Local offer information to be shared with foster carers and to review for inclusion in foster carers training.

This work is to be led by Sandwell Children's Trust and work is being reviewed for sign off.

ACTION: Sandwell Children's Trust to present a post 16 pathway plan assurance report to the board in November.
This is item 5 on the agenda.

ACTION: Fostering Team to review how Local Offer and information of services can be shared with foster carers and be incorporated into foster care training.

Changes have been made to the foster care training, to ensure that carers are not overwhelmed with the abundance of information available. Changes have also been implemented to support our groups, with the newly approved carers group starting in December. This is in hopes of easing carers into the fostering role.

Tanya highlighted that there is a need to understand how carers can support care leavers and they want to know what resources and services are available so this can be shared with the young people. Information, including the Staying Put and Forever Care offers, was provided as examples that carers should be aware of in advance of a child preparing for adulthood. This enables early discussions to take place and sets expectations for carers.

Foster Carers attend support groups and the Virtual Head is in attendance. It would be beneficial for other services/resources

	<p>to be shared at these support groups.</p> <p>Tom Davies to action a strategic approach to communication with foster carers and further support to enhance foster carer training including a 3-day training offer, website information, the Local Offer.</p> <p>ACTION: Health Leads to provide the Board with an update on care leavers free optical and dental prescriptions.</p> <p>This work has begun however, health partners are experiencing some barriers. Health Partners are to provide a verbal update in the January CPB.</p> <p>Claire Hickman shared that health leads are working with colleagues to enable young people to access free eye tests from Specsavers, which is part of the NHS staff offer. A request has been made to review and identify if there could be the same arrangement for our care leavers. Dental prescriptions are to be looked at further. Health colleagues are to update at the next CPB Board meeting in January.</p> <p>ACTION: Scrutiny Board want to review the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 before they engage with young people in February 2024.</p> <p>The first draft of the Strategy 2024 -2027 is now in development and in schedule for January 2024. This is item 8 on the agenda.</p> <p>ACTION: Corporate Parenting Project Officer to ensure FIYA and VOS forums to be on the agenda and provide feedback from young people – this must be a set agenda item.</p> <p>This is item 4 on the agenda and will be a standing agenda item.</p> <p>ACTION: Strategic Corporate Parenting Group to produce an independent living booklet for care leavers.</p> <p>This work will be led Sandwell Children Trust and updates will be provided to SCPG.</p>	
4	<p>The Childs Voice Update from VOS & FIYA</p> <p>Lukas, Ellie and Maddie updated the Board about what has happened over the last few months.</p>	

VOS and FIYA shared:

What has gone well?

The HAF activities and food programme, parent forum consultation, a foster carer thankyou and the election of new Chair Maddie and a consultation.

What are we worried about?

Will there be continued HAF funding? We need more members for our FIYA group, and we want to help all carers to be better carers.

What need to be done next?

Following up on the HAF programme – further funding. To be involved in parent forums, have opportunities to thank foster carers and arrange the end of year celebration and Christmas Party.

We have been involved in:

Drop in Sessions, AGM, NHS Redesign, House Project, FIYA Awards, Care Leavers Week.

FIYA will advertise drop-in sessions to all personal advisors to encourage young people to attend Metsec session. FIYA will be present at the AGM in 2024 and would hope to be part of the co-production of the AGM. They would hope to receive an update on recruitment on the NHS redesign and for the new nurse to attend FIYA.

Further work is being completed for Elections and consultations, and planning is being completed for the Christmas Party.

FIYA will work with the House Project to ensure that impact is being made with the support of the participation team. The FIYA awards will continue for 2024, and Care Leavers Week will have a diverse programme focusing on transition and independence.

Emma raised the topic of the care leavers event and asked why people thought that care leavers don't attend. It was highlighted that some young people don't feel able to come along due to a lack of confidence. There is a need to work with young people and PAs to try to encourage attendance at the event.

Lukas confirmed that all young people who win get their award – they are always recognised, sometimes in different ways, as due to circumstances they can't always attend - personal advisers can help with this.

	<p>Sally Giles shared that HAF funding is available for one more year, 2024/25, and the government will make a decision if there is further funding allocated.</p> <p>NHS Recruitment – Claire Hickman shared that the NHS is working on a joined-up service specification for all of our young people in the Black Country to ensure that all young people will receive the same health care. She confirmed that the development of a Leaving Care Nurse is at the early stages of development.</p> <p>The NHS is trying to achieve a gold standard service, it is currently at the scoping level, and Claire has asked if this can be presented to FIYA.</p> <p>House Project – FIYA has been involved with this programme at all stages.</p> <p>ACTION: Sandwell children Trust to work with Personal Advisers to encourage and support young people to attend care leaver events and awards ceremony.</p> <p>ACTION: Sandwell Children Trust to explore the possibility of allowing care leavers to nominate a trusted person to collect their award. Explore whether a significant adult/carer can be invited to the awards with them.</p> <p>ACTION: Sandwell Children Trust to provide enough pre-notice to the young people enable arrangements to attend the care leavers awards.</p> <p>ACTION: Tom Davies is to invite other council directorates to the Parent Forum.</p> <p>ACTION: The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group and Sandwell Children’s Trust to co-produce and organise more ‘Thank You’ events with children, young people and partners.</p> <p>ACTION: Emma Taylor/Teo Bot to inform the Trust Board chair of the need for AGM for the Trust – more co-production with our young people.</p> <p>ACTION: Care Leavers Week – Strategic Group will pick up these actions.</p>	
5	Assurance Report for Post 16 Pathway Plans	

Sarah Grant Presentation and Report was shared. This covered:

- Background/service delivery - we have 362 care experienced young people within the age of 18-25
- We have 165, 16 and 17 years olds, 92 of our young people have a co-allocated PA - we are looking to allocate a PA earlier for our young people at 15 years 9 months, a review of this is underway
- Finalising Pathway Plans – smoother transition to adulthood
- NEET/EET
- Working with Foster Carers
- Voice of Young People
- Working with Foster Carers and Providers
- Referring young people to Adult Social Care
- CiC and care leaving services review for 21 – 25-year old's
- House Project
- Emotional Wellbeing Hub
- Areas for development - Co production of Plans, Review of roles of PAs, System Updates, Quality Assurance – impact Enhancing, Independent Chairs (IROs), a Review of the Local Offer, Apprenticeships/Work Experience

ACTION: Cllr Hackett requested for Sandwell Children's Trust to provide NEET data, figures and information to the SCPG to review due to the continued high level of young people that are NEET.

Emma Taylor highlighted a need to focus on outcomes and impact measures of the pathways plans and what we want to achieve when following these Pathway Plans Updates.

ACTION – Sandwell Children's Trust to provide a brief update to board on the post 16 Pathway Plans (January 2024)

Cllr Giles asked if the local providers that the council works with offer apprenticeships to care leavers. He also requested that the CPB ask Councillors/Officers to encourage businesses that we have contracts with (as a Council) to take on a care leaver apprentice. It was identified that this initiative aligns with our social value work through the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group

CPB presentations are taking place within corporate business planning sessions which all Assistant Directors are attending.

	<p>Corporate Parenting has been identified as a priority and each service directorate will be asked to identify what and how they can support children in care and care leavers to access opportunities and employment in the family business.</p> <p>Gerry Lyng DWP shared that he is in contact with Kelly Harris in relation to NEET young people. Sandwell is on the national radar due to high numbers.</p> <p>Lukas shared opportunities that care leavers have accessed to find work, support with driving lessons, whilst others have had sessions at Malthouse as a pathway to employment via 'Think Sandwell'.</p> <p>Cllr Hackett shared that we aspire to be a 'borough with outstanding service' for our care leavers, particularly in relation to apprenticeships and employment.</p>	
6	<p>Progress Update on the Commission of the Emotional Wellbeing Service Pilot Scheme Until March 2025</p> <p>Claire Tate gave an update to the Board.</p> <p>There is a joint objective for both the Strategic Corporate Parenting Board and the Thrive Operational Group to have a 'getting help' service specifically for both children in the care system and care leavers.</p> <p>SMBC have made £400,000 available from covid funds, this funding is non-recurrent. The service is planned to run for approximately 15 months until March 2025. A multi-agency task and finish group proposed to test three pilots based on the greatest needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing assessment following children entering care • To support children, young people, and the wider network where two placement breakdowns have occurred, with the aim of avoiding a third placement breakdown • To have a getting help service for care leavers. <p>A pre-market review of services was completed. It has been identified that a provider with experience of similar programme delivery could provide consistency by delivering all 3 programmes. Work is being completed to review the proposed model of 4 co-located staff, admin support, locality manager and a formal evaluation.</p>	

	<p>Next steps moving forward</p> <p>The service specification has been reviewed and checked by procurement and it is awaiting final sign off from finance and legal for contract can be put in place. The earliest this could start is December, dependent on sign off and recruitment. Contract management meetings will be in place to offer the necessary support to ensure the success of the pilot. This will also aid for planning for next steps. Updates will be provided to the Strategic Corporate Parenting Group.</p> <p>Comments:</p> <p>Tanya shared that she worries about children who may fall through the gap. She sees great work from our Looked After Children Nurses – who sit with families and work with them. This way of working should be promoted more. This builds a relationship, works on accountability, and it links us all together.</p> <p>Emma Taylor asked that a discussion be held outside of this meeting with regard to preventing placement breakdowns, to look at the specifications of this pilot.</p> <p>This service will compliment what we already have in place. It will be bespoke and used as a ‘test and learn’ process. If this does not fit in with our young people, there is the ability to change as we want to step in early and provide support as soon as possible. The provider is aware of the need to be flexible across three different areas and is aware this is a pilot</p> <p>ACTION – Claire Tate is to present a mid-progress report to the board (June/July 2024) on the emotional wellbeing pilot.</p>	
7	<p>Progress Report on Access to Services - Local Offer Recommendations</p> <p>Local Offer for care leavers – we had 24 initiatives. 16 have been delivered on. We need to work on the final 8 initiatives for our Care Leavers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong Links/Significant Adults/Care Ambassadors • Apprenticeships – funding gap – trying to match salary to NLW • Increase University Bursary • Introduce ‘Plus One’ Leisure Pass • Free Eye Tests and glasses ICB colleagues speaking to Specsavers about Free Eye Tests as with NHS staff • Confirm Care Leaver Status as a Protected Characteristic • Birthday Present and Festival Allowance 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring Scheme <p>The Access to Services: Local offer need approximately £80k costs per year to provide care leavers with essential support.</p> <p>ACTION – Cllr Hackett and Michael Jarrett are to lead the work on a corporate sponsorship deal’s as part of our social value work with partners/companies in Sandwell. Cllr Hackett requested this is to be shared with the Leadership Team, Leaders and Cabinet – this is a co-production project for all directorates across the whole Council.</p>	
8	<p>Update from Corporate Parenting Project Officer</p> <p>Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027 draft outline for sign off</p> <p>Rosa shared a presentation which covered the Vision, Priorities, and Governance of a new Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027.</p> <p>Lukas shared the list of priority areas and promises that young people had previously shared and would like to be included. Rosa confirmed all of these were incorporated into the 6 main priorities.</p> <p>Emma Taylor asked if everyone could take this back, look at the vision, and a logo – this would need to include all partners.</p> <p>Cllr Hackett shared that Sandwell wants to be a ‘Beacon’ of outstanding service for our care leavers. This strategy needs to be co-produced</p> <p>ACTION – The Strategic Corporate Parenting group to review the new Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027 which is to be Co-produced with children and young people and multiagency partners. Further work is to be completed and to be presented to the board in January.</p> <p>Corporate Parenting Deep Dive Programme 2024-2025 draft for sign off</p> <p>These are the recommendations for CPB to endorse, look at, change, as appropriate – we will use this as a Planner for the year ahead – this was agreed.</p>	
9	<p>Data Dashboard and Update from Strategic Corporate Parenting Group - presented by Teo Bot.</p>	

	<p>Cllr Giles requested for the next board meeting to provide data on our SEND children.</p> <p>Verbal data was share and confirmation that 11% of our children in care have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).</p> <p>ACTION – SEND data figures are to be included to the data dashboard including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The numbers of children with an EHCP • What type of disabilities children have? • A breakdown of children in a care home/setting 	
10	<p>Feedback from Scrutiny Board</p> <p>Cllr Hinchliff gave an update and asked that we hold an engagement session with our young people and the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee. Scrutiny Members could go to Metsec to meet our young people. Connor Robinson is the contact at the Council.</p> <p>ACTION – Corporate Parenting Officer to communicate with Tom Davies/Abdul Kahar and Connor Robinson to hold an engagement session with our children and young people and the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee members.</p>	
11	<p>AOB</p> <p>Cllr Hackett asked if CPB could report into and give an update to every Full Council meeting.</p> <p>ACTION - Cllr Hackett will report back to full Council on CPB progress. Corporate Parenting officer to begin this process with Democratic Services (Trisha Newton).</p>	

Meeting ended: 6:55pm

Corporate Parenting Board

Thursday 25 January 2024

Sandwell Council House

Room First 3 and on teams

5pm – 7pm

Present:

Councillor Hackett (Chair)

Councillors R Piper, Hinchliff, Daya-Singh

Young People Present:

VOS: *Maddie*

FIYA: *Lukas (Co-Chair), Ellie Hatton and Amy Wright*

Officers Present:

Michael Jarrett (Director of Children and Education Services, SMBC)

Emma Taylor (Chief Executive, SCT)

Sally Giles (Assistant Director for Children’s Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement, SMBC)

Teo Bott (Director of Practice Quality and Partnerships, SCT)

Mandip Chahal (Senior Joint Commissioning Manager, SMBC)

Kate Mullinder (Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Fostering, SCT)

Claire Tate (Senior Lead for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health, SMBC)

Dr Mahabeer (Designated Doctor for children in care, ICB-NHS)

Nigel Collumbell (Assistant Director for Housing Service, SMBC)

Rosa DaSilva (Corporate Parenting Project Officer, SMBC)

Tom Davies (Partnership and Engagement Manager, SCT)

Abdul Kahar (Participation Manager, SCT)

Kelly Thomas (Employment & Skills Manager, SMBC)

Suzanne Allen (Employment and Skills Officer, SMBC)

Jayne O’Reilly (Designated Nurse for Children in Care, ICB NHS)

Claire Hickman (Designated Nurse for Children in Care ICB-NHS)

Balwant Bains (Executive Head of LACE and Virtual School, SMBC)

Amanda Carby (PA to Director of Children and Education Services, SMBC) (Minute taker)

Apologies:

Julie Andrews, Cllr Gill, Cllr John Giles, Cllr Kerrie Carmichael, Rashpal Bishop Natalie Barnes, Pete Dankert, Tanya Evans, Gerry Lyng (DWP)

1	Introduction and Apologies Introductions were completed Page 519	
2	Confirm minutes taken during board meeting held on Thursday	

	<p>16 November 2023 Minutes were agreed and signed off</p>	
<p>3</p>	<p>Action Log for Thursday 16 November 2023 by Corporate Parenting Project Officer:</p> <p>Action tracker updates and comments were shared with the board:</p> <p>Cllr Hackett will present the Corporate Parenting Board minutes at the Annual Council meeting in March. The process has started with Democratic Services officers, specifically Trisha Newton. ACTION: Cllr Hackett to present 12 months of CPB minutes at Annual Council March 2024.</p> <p>ACTION: Cllr Hackett to highlight CPB Annual Report 2023/2024 at Annual Council March 2024. The annual report will be presented to full Council in July 2024.</p> <p>Planning for the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee members and young people’s engagement session is in place. SCT Participation Team, Connor Robinson and Corporate Parenting Project Officer are liaising to prepare for the session.</p> <p>Update: A planning meeting is in place Friday 26 January in readiness for the engagement session on Wednesday 21 February 2024 - METSEC building.</p> <p>ACTION: SCT to include SEND data figures in the data dashboard including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Numbers of children with an EHCP - What disabilities children have? - A breakdown of children in a care accommodation/home/setting <p>Update: Action to be reviewed by the SCPG.</p> <p>SCPG to review the first draft of the new Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027. It is to be co-produced with children, young people and multi-agency partners and presented to the Board in January 2024.</p> <p>Update: SCPG to begin the co-production of the strategy between December 2023 – January 2024. Further update on the collective vision and partners pledges to the young people to be presented to the board in March 2024.</p> <p>Cllr Hackett and Michael Jarrett to lead on corporate sponsorship deals as part of our social value work with partners/companies in Sandwell. This is to be shared with the Leadership Team, Leaders and Cabinet – this is a co-production project for all directorates across the whole Council.</p> <p>Update: An update was presented to the SMBC Leadership Team on 23 January 2024. Michael Jarrett shared he had set meetings schedules with Infosys and DPD, working with social value</p>	

	<p>officers, using a whole council approach which will include corporate parenting.</p> <p>ACTION: Cllr Hackett will present the need for corporate sponsorship deals to support the local offer to Cabinet & Directors meetings to review and find a way to progress.</p> <p>A mid-progress report to be presented to the board in June or July 2024 on children in care and care leavers emotional wellbeing pilot programme.</p> <p>Update: A request for Barnardo's as the provider to attend and update the board.</p> <p>Other updates to be reviewed by SCPG: Housing First: Nigel Collumbell and Kate Mullinder will meet to discuss and follow up the need for access to larger housing for foster families.</p> <p>Foster Friendly Sandwell: All 4 Fostering actions to be amalgamated in to one action, to ensure it is joined and focused as a whole project, this will enable a full comprehensive feedback.</p>	
4	<p>The Childs Voice Update from VOS & FIYA – Presentation shared in CPB pack.</p> <p>Headlines: Positives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LACE & FIYA Awards • Local offer • Aspire 2 University Programme • NEETS Panel • Drop in Youth Club for NEETS at Metsec delivered by Think Sandwell • Support by Citizens Advice-Budgeting, Cooking, Life skills • Holiday Activities & Food Programme • Virtual School support, Residential, Tutoring, 120 Club, Careers support, SIPS Music <p>Issues/Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-esteem and social anxiety • Living outside of Sandwell • Mental Health, learning needs, disability • Abusive relationships, right to remain • Young parents, loving relationships, life-long links • Independent living, not happy where they live • Struggling financially, cost of living • Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) • <p>Next steps/Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprenticeship wage/adequate Maths & English grades 	

- Individualised/bespoke programme of support/1-2-1 support
- Work experience in the family business/ring fence job opportunities in the family business
- Graduate Scheme for care leavers
- Enhance University offer
- Mentors at work and in life/Lifelong links
- Emotional health & wellbeing support (dealing with trauma)
- Strengthen Local offer for care leavers

It was shared that children need more support around moving home and more support around mental health. There is a need for more help for children's and young people's emotional wellbeing to enhance and strengthen the current offer.

Board response to forum recommendations:

It was confirmed that work is taking place on several of the recommendations including the new emotional wellbeing hub set to be launched on 5 February to support for young people. SCT are working actively with our young people to address the recommendations and confirmed feedback needs to be shared with young people.

It was highlighted that obstacles encountered for children regarding school and school moves needs to be raised wider amongst education networks. The board emphasised that recommendation made at the CPB meeting should not be confined to just to CPB. There is a need to share these with various other meetings, including the Headteacher Partnership, JEG, and both Primary and Secondary Partnership meetings.

ACTION: SCPG Lead Officers to attend education networks to raise concerns to ensure concerns are shared.

It was highlighted the Skills, Employment and Training Team do provide the following support:

- Offer work experience
- Ring fenced apprenticeships
- Speak to local companies for opportunities
- Carry out bespoke 1-1s for young people who are engaged
- Speak to young people to ensure support is bespoke to the individual.

Emotional wellbeing is identified as a barrier when accessing education, training or employment and young people need extra support throughout their journey as it can stop them moving on to positive destinations.

Bespoke Maths and English courses are available to ensure young people have the right qualifications when seeking employment as this can be a barrier into employment. There are a small number of young people who have received this support; the NEET panel is working to implement early support by identifying young people who may want to

access it.

The importance of the NEET action plan and strategy now having concrete solutions and progressing this work was highlighted. This could include barriers to moving forward, accessing support and entering employment based on our young people's past experiences.

The requested £80k to fund the outstanding items as part of the local offer would really be beneficial to support the needs the young people have identified.

There is a need to review the accommodation moves. This should be planned where possible to ensure young people are supported throughout the process.

ACTION: SCT to review how children are supported when they must move home by ensuring this is done in a timely manner by being prepared and ensuring the right support is in place.

It was requested for information on what support is available for children living out of borough and what barriers young people may face by not having access their social worker (SW) and personal advisor (PA) be shared with the board. It was confirmed that Local Authorities are responsible for young people, irrespective of their location. If young people wish to remain in area in which they are currently living, their SW and PA will assist where possible. However, there are varying agreements among Local Authorities which can pose challenges. SWs and PAs work with other Local Authorities to explore housing options and it was noted that there is a need for further improvements in these areas.

It was requested that information is shared on the support Sandwell provide for children from other Local Authorities who are living in Sandwell.

Care leavers from other Local Authorities residing in Sandwell can receive support from their home LA and allocated personal advisors. They are also informed about Sandwell's procedures and housing options. It is recognised that it would be helpful for reciprocal arrangements to be agreed at a regional level which would support all young people and their support network.

The team attend a WM Regional Group where discussions have been held relating to the local offer. Housing was identified as a big issue for reciprocal arrangements, due to the differences in the offer for example our Council Tax exemption not all LAs provide this up to 25 years old. There is a need to raise awareness around the needs of housing, mental health support, employment and education opportunities both internally and externally in Sandwell.

The participation team are working on the House Project which is for young people aged 16+. The team visit children and support independence work. Young people asked if a young person does not

	<p>want access to the Home Programme, could they have continued support at 16 through alternative ways to develop their independent living skills if they require it.</p> <p>It was highlighted that we should prepare our young people for adult life earlier with the aim to ensure this is done when children come into care, not waiting until later teenage years.</p> <p>ACTION: Abdul Kahar to share more information about the work underway with the WM Regional Group with SCPG.</p> <p>The WM Strategic Housing Group has been discussing housing banding. The group is interested in exploring potential reciprocal agreements for out-of-borough (OOB) children from other Local Authorities (LAs). Whilst priority is currently given to Sandwell's children in care, the group is open to extending this as a reciprocal arrangement, although received a muted response from the group.</p> <p>SMBC Council is developing a Corporate Parenting Mandatory E-learning training on corporate parenting for both staff and Councillors, which will be available early 2024.</p> <p>ACTION: SCPG to complete a final review of the Corporate Parenting Mandatory training ahead of its publication.</p> <p>ACTION: Housing to share updates with Cllr Hackett on regional house banding and reciprocal agreements for out-of-borough (OOB) children from other Local Authorities (LAs).</p>	
5	<p>Deep Dive into Education Skills Employment and Training Education: Sandwell Virtual School for Children in Care (Report 1)</p> <p>The Virtual school appointed a new allocated worker to oversee 16+ to identify how to bridge the gap and support the reduction of NEETs long term.</p> <p>A pilot programme for approximately 6 Year 13 students will run around Easter, it will be offering one day per week of work experience for six weeks with Lovell. If this is successful there will be wider roll out to other Year 13 students.</p> <p>Action: Virtual School is to provide the Board with an update and outcomes of the pilot programme for 6 year 13 students in July 2024.</p> <p>In order to support the Virtual School, it was requested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can we do better? • What are the challenges? • Where do we want to be? <p>The Virtual School is focused on the following areas:</p> <p>Page 324 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To plan young people's education better: Refine the process, </p>	

- the child's voice becomes the centre of this process
- Emotional support
 - Educational support
 - Three targets for young people
 - Post 16 work, 18+
 - NEET strategy – moving forward
 - Working with UASC children – numbers increasing, working with Sandwell Valley schools for ESOL courses.

The board acknowledges the strength of Sandwell Virtual School and LACES. It was questioned how could we benchmark against other Local Authorities as we aim to be an outstanding authority and CPB?

Action: Virtual school to review and complete a benchmark against Outstanding LAs to identify where and what can we do to improve the current strong offer that exists.

SCT Chief Executive highlighted concerns and requested that the detail is provided on:

- Young people at risk of NEET at age 14 this may be too late
- 6% of PEPS are inadequate
- Exclusions
- Reduced timetables for our children
- Keeping attendance up (no child will move school without approval from Directors at the Trust)
- EY Foundation Stage – SCPG to review this area

Action: Virtual and SCT are to work in partnership to ensure no child moves schools during term time without approval from SCT Directors.

Skills Employability & Training Service (Report 2):

The presentation focused on 19–21-year old's and reasons why young people disengage, impact of NEET Strategy and provided feedback and barriers to accessing skills training and barriers training services face:

It is identified that the lack of pathways of those furthest away from the labour market require intensive support and emotional health and well-being support. There is a need to address the engagement of young people who have multiple missed appointments, or they are turning down opportunities.

To understand the NEET data, sharing detailed breakdown of data and SEND data would enable a more comprehensive oversight of the support offered.

Apprenticeship finance can provide difficult, this includes the apprenticeship bursary and the need to support with a living wage.

Whilst there is the £3000 apprenticeship bursary, the way young people receive this can cause lots of issues including, timescales, young person to receive this from the provider. Apprenticeship

	<p>monthly wages are still £500+ below the living wage.</p> <p>Skills, Employment and Training will be holding an Apprentice Celebration Event at Coneygre Art Centre on 7 March 2024. Corporate parents are welcome to attend.</p> <p>It was confirmed further work is underway with PAs to identify better ways to support young people and reduce the number of missed visits.</p> <p>There was a request for Skills, Employment and Training Team to do home visits to engage young people, build relationships so they feel comfortable and reduce their anxiety? The Team will be able to facilitate this and advised that the Metsec building is also used due to it being young person friendly.</p> <p>Action: SCPG to review the effectiveness of the NEET Group and strategy. Further review of outstanding Local Authorities with low NEET figures and how are they working to improve NEET figures and youth unemployment.</p> <p>Chair advised that there are preparations to hold a Youth Summit with a focus on Youth Unemployment. There will be a new Youth Unemployment Board to look at all issues for all Young People and Care Leavers in Sandwell.</p>	
6	<p>Data Dashboard and Update from Strategic Corporate Parenting Group (Data Dashboard for consideration)</p> <p>Data dashboard was shared with the Board prior to the meeting. Board member to share any comments or question to Corporate Parent Project Officer.</p>	
7	<p>Feedback from Scrutiny Board:</p> <p>It was highlighted that an engagement session between the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board is set to take place Wednesday 21st February. The Scrutiny Board hope to meet our young people to have conversation on whatever topic they want. The session will be led by the young people, there is no agenda, and the Board hopes to hear the young people voices and their experiences.</p>	
8	<p>a. Update from Corporate Parenting Project Officer</p> <p>Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027: Updated Timeline was shared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Feb 2024 – SCPG to meet to produce ‘you said, we heard, we did’, Collective vision and partners pledges • 14 Feb 2024 – VOS and FIYA to review the final version of their feedback • 28 March 2024 – sign off Strategy at CPB <p>Page 526 Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027 - Developing the joint vision for children in care and care leavers.</p>	

	<p>All Board member were asked to provide feedback on Corporate Parenting Vision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should Corporate Parenting look like? • What do we want this to include? <p>Vision comments:</p> <p>The Chair shared that the Strategy should cover the period 2024-2027 and that he hoped Sandwell would be an 'outstanding authority' in terms of Corporate Parenting. We have an outstanding Virtual School; we want NEET figures to be reduced</p> <p>Virtual School and LACE wants to make decisions for our young people in care as we would for our own children.</p> <p>Scrutiny Board shared that our vision should always be less 'corporate' and more 'parenting'.</p> <p>Chair hopes all staff understand what it means to be a 'corporate parent' this will be the theme for Corporate Parenting week, 10th- 14th June 2024.</p> <p>ACTION: SCPG to ensure the vision is co-produced by Board members, children and young people. All CPB members to share their Corporate Parenting vision statement for the CPB strategy to the Corporate Parenting Officer by 31st January.</p> <p>ACTION: SCPG to arrange a link meeting between Wiltshire (as a Outstanding Corporate Parenting Authority) cabinet member and Cllr Hackett before the next Board meeting.</p>	
9	<p>AOB</p> <p>Michael Jarrett's last CPB – Cllr Hackett and the Board thanked Michael for all of his work.</p>	

Meeting ended at: 6:50pm

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Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Sandwell Council submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) – proposed council size
Director:	Mike Jones – Monitoring Officer, Assistant Director Legal & Assurance
Contact Officer:	Mike Jones – Monitoring Officer, Assistant Director Legal and Assurance Mike_Jones1@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that Full Council –



- 1.1 agree a council size of 72 Councillors be recommended to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE); and
- 1.2 approve the submission and accompanying documentation as set out at Appendices 1 to 4 of the report to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), fulfilling stage one of the LGBCE electoral review process.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report seeks Full Council endorsement of a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on a proposed council size for Sandwell MBC.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>The Council plays a major part in promoting local democracy, encouraging people to register as electors, providing information about local issues and providing pathways by which people can influence decision-making.</p> <p>Electoral reviews seek to establish and maintain the conditions for a fair and representative democracy at local level. In addition, the review will ensure that the council size is appropriate for ensuring that the Council is able to deliver on its corporate priorities and in a manner consistent with the Council’s desire to be open and accountable to its residents.</p>
	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell</p> <p>The geographic configuration of wards through the review will be undertaken in accordance with LGBCE requirements. These include recognition of the need to ensure community identity and accessibility within wards, often associated with key community facilities, infrastructure, and transport hubs.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Sandwell’s council size submission provides the LGBCE with the Council’s view on the appropriate council size for having considered the current and future direction of the Council in the following areas which are a requirement of the LGBCE:

4.1.1. **Strategic Leadership** – providing evidence about the current Council decision-making structure, involvement and workload of those Councillors involved as well as on the Scheme of



Delegation and other bodies, and emergent future trends for governance.

4.1.2. **Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory Functions & Partnerships)** – providing evidence about how Councillors hold decision-makers to account and ensure that the Council can discharge its responsibilities to other organisations and how these responsibilities will evolve in the coming years; and

4.1.3. **Community Leadership** - providing evidence about how Councillors interact and engage with their communities, their caseloads and the support required to represent local residents and groups effectively and on emergent trends for the future, including how the relationship between Council, Councillors and communities will continue to develop.

4.2 This submission forms part of the first stage of the LGBCE process – information on the position of the council, population, and electorate forecasts. Following review, the LGBCE will draw conclusions on the most appropriate council size. It is important to note that opportunity for public representations on council size will be available, with any submissions from public, stakeholders or representative groups being considered by the LGBCE alongside the Council’s submission.

4.3 After consideration of all submissions and supporting evidence, the LGBCE will write to the Chief Executive with details and timing of the next phase of the process which will be to determine the warding pattern for the Council. This will include a further consultation phase where all interested parties will be invited to make representations.

4.4 A further submission will be required at stage two of the process setting out the Council’s view on the most appropriate pattern of wards. The Council has not yet reached any conclusions on this matter. The LGBCE will then hold a second round of consultation on the draft recommendations which the Council will again be able to comment on and propose alternatives.

4.5 The LGBCE will then draw up the new electorate arrangements that provide the best balance of the statutory criteria within which they must make their decisions. The criteria comprises three elements –



4.5.1 **Delivering electoral equality for local voters**

This means ensuring that each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters so that the value of an elector's vote is the same regardless of where they live in the local authority area.

4.5.2 **Interests and identities of local communities**

This means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, avoid splitting local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.

4.5.3 **Effective and convenient local government**

This means ensuring that the wards can be represented effectively by their elected representative(s) and that the new electoral arrangements, including both the council size decision and warding arrangements, allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively.

Conclusions

- 4.6 The Council has a strong and positive view of the future relationship between the Council and its electorate, which is an essential part of the delivery of the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030, enabling and empowering local communities. The emergent neighbourhood arrangements underpin these objectives.
- 4.7 A council size of 72 Councillors is optimum for that relationship to develop and embed over the long term and will contribute to the positive improvement in outcomes that the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030 envisage.
- 4.8 It is also considered that a council size of 72 is an appropriate number to discharge statutory and regulatory functions satisfactorily and efficiently, to fulfil council duties as a strategic place maker, deliver high quality and efficient services, allow for adequate citizen representation, and deliver robust governance. These considerations recognise continuous improvements and transformation in service delivery models and governance that the Council continues to implement.



4.9 Council Officers will continue to work with Councillors and representatives of the LGBCE during the next stage of the review process. This timeframe for this will be determined by the LGBCE and will be communicated to all members in due course.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 Alternative options are considered and set out at section 7 of the Council’s submission document.

6 Implications

Resources:	As the electoral review process progresses and the warding pattern for the Council is agreed, any additional financial implications arising from that will be set out in the proposals and reports to Full Council.
Legal and Governance:	<p>The LGBCE operates under the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). This established the LGBCE in place of the former Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission.</p> <p>Under s.56(1) of the 2009 Act, the LGBCE must, from time to time, conduct a review of the area of each principal council, and recommend whether a change should be made to the electoral arrangements. In this regard, “electoral arrangements” means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of councillors • The number and boundaries of electoral areas for the election of councillors • The number of councillors to be returned by any electoral area • The name of the electoral area <p>The legislation does not set out how many councillors each authority (or type of authority) will have. It is the LGBCE’s responsibility to</p>



determine the appropriate number of councillors for each authority.

In making its recommendations, Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act requires the LGBCE to have regard to:

- (a) The need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area – over the five-year period following the implementation of recommendations
- (b) The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and, the desirability of fixing boundaries:
 - which are and will remain easily identifiable
 - so as not to break any local ties
- (c) The need to secure effective and convenient local government

Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act also states that the LGBCE should consider any change to the number and distribution of electors that is likely to take place within the five years following the end of a review.

This requirement means that, at the start of the review the LGBCE asks us to provide them with six-year forecasts of electorate changes in all polling districts, i.e., up to 2030.

The LGBCE's decision on council size will mark the formal start to the review process. However, this decision will not be formalised until their Final Recommendations are agreed and published at the end of the process.



	<p>This is because the number of councillors may change marginally (generally ± 1) from the initial decision if it is felt that modifying the number of councillors may provide for a pattern of wards that better reflects the three statutory criteria referred to in paragraph 4.31.</p> <p>The Final Recommendations describe the complete set of electoral arrangements, including ward names and locations, as well as the number of elected members.</p> <p>These recommendations will be implemented at the next scheduled borough council elections in May 2026 by means of an Order laid before Parliament.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>Sandwell Council has a duty to comply with the requirements of LGBCE during an electoral review.</p> <p>The main risk is that if a proper and robust review is not conducted, there may be an unfair and disproportionate number of members to electors throughout the borough.</p> <p>If the Council does not produce a detailed, evidenced-based submission on its council size, the LGBCE will impose its own recommendations for the future electoral arrangements for Sandwell. The Council's submission must be clear and evidence the Council's requirements.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>S.149 of the Equality Act 2010 states a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act. • advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected



	<p>characteristic and persons who do not share it; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. <p>These requirements are known as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). In complying with this duty, the Council must consider whether the decision will or could have a differential impact on ethnic minorities; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their gender; people due to their religious belief; or people who are pregnant</p> <p>The Council must ensure that all communications are as inclusive and accessible as possible throughout the review. An equality impact assessment is not necessary for the purpose of responding to the LGBCE on the number of councillors or patterns of ward boundaries.</p> <p>Future stages in the LGBCE process require the submission of a proposal from the Council on a proposed warding pattern. At this point a detailed equality analysis will be provided to support the development of the Council's submission.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities arising from this report.
Social Value	There are no implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g., employment of local traders, young people) arising from this report.
Climate Change	There are no relevant climate change implications arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting	The are no corporate parenting implications arising from this report.



7 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Council Size Submission

Appendix 2 – Councillor Survey 2024

Appendix 3 – Technical Report & Methodology

Appendix 4 – Electorate & Population Data Projections 2023-2030

8 Background Papers

None.



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Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Council Size Submission

March 2024

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Appendix 2 – Technical Report & Methodology

Appendix 3 – Electorate & Population Data Projections 2023-2030

1. Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) review of Sandwell's council size started in August 2023 with a preliminary meeting, at which an indicative timetable for review was outlined.
- 1.1.2 The review was initiated due to the passage of time, the last review having been undertaken over 20 years ago and implemented in 2003. In addition, 2 of the wards now have a variance greater than +/- 10% compared to the average within the borough. The LGBCE undertakes reviews of local authorities that have a variance greater than +/- 10% in 30% of wards or where one ward has a variance +/- 30% so this criterion was not engaged.
- 1.1.3 This submission presents Sandwell's 'Council Size Submission'. This provides the LGBCE with the Council's view on the optimal council size, accompanied by supporting evidence across three broad areas based on LGBCE review criteria. These areas are:
- a) Strategic Leadership – the role of councillors in decision making and council business demonstrating how responsibilities are distributed across the council.
 - b) Accountability – the role of councillors in holding decision makers to account and to ensure that the council can discharge its responsibilities to outside bodies.
 - c) Community leadership – how councillors represent and provide leadership in their communities and how this affects workload responsibilities.

Summary

- 1.2.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the Council's recommendation to the LGBCE in terms of proposed council size. This represents the preliminary stage in the Council's Electoral Boundary Review process.
- 1.2.2 The recommendation proposed by the Council is based on -
- a) the future strategic vision for Sandwell and changes in the nature of the relationship between residents and the Council which seek to achieve greater empowerment of local communities in designing solutions to the challenges that they face;
 - b) ensuring levels of elected representation are commensurate with the challenges and opportunities facing the borough;
 - c) the intention to improve effectiveness and transparency of governance and decision-making arrangements in the short and medium term which will lead to opportunities for greater efficiencies;

- d) the intention to consider the required number of Councillors actively involved and serving on bodies with a role in the Council's formal decision-making structure; and
- e) changes in the way that residents are interacting with the Council and are able to communicate with Councillors developing and implementing modern practices reflecting the aspirations of the Council moving towards a digital first organisation using technology to increase engagement in and participation with the Council.

Recommendation – Council Size

A council size of 72 is recommended to ensure an efficient structure whilst meeting key representational requirements relating to strategic leadership, accountability, and community leadership.

2. Borough Profile – the six towns of Sandwell

Sandwell is the twenty-seventh largest English district by population and is located within the Black Country and West Midlands at the heart of England.

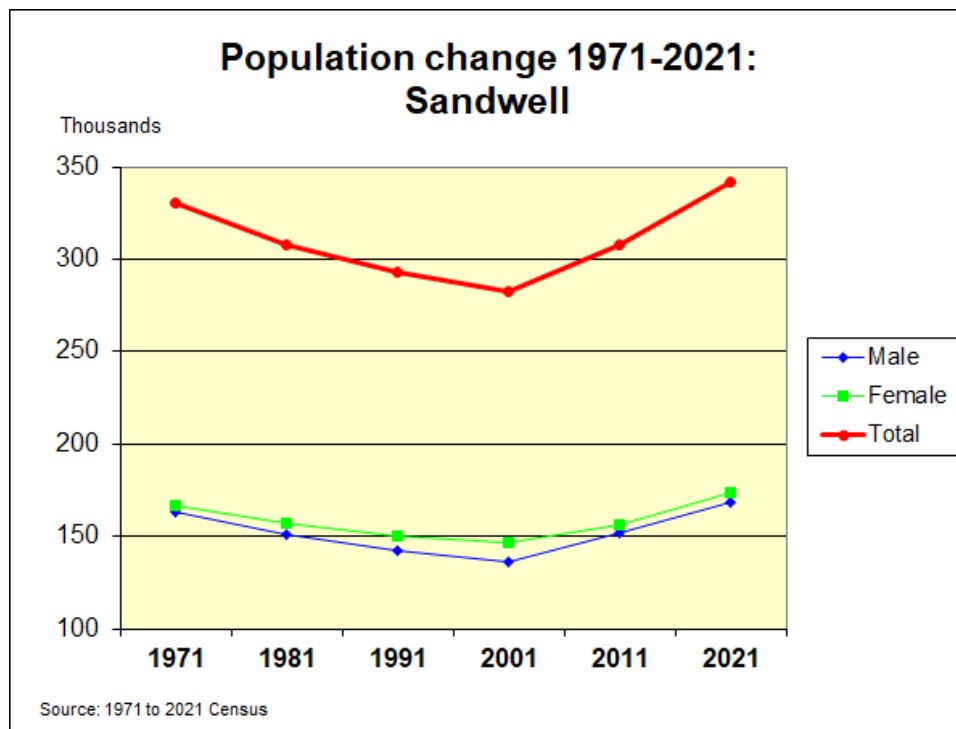
The borough comprises six distinct towns – Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich – each with their own unique characteristics, cultures and identity but sharing many unifying features. The borough is predominantly urban in nature and borders Birmingham, Dudley, Walsall, and Wolverhampton. Spanning the borough are the parliamentary constituencies of West Bromwich West, West Bromwich East, Warley, part of Halesowen and Rowley Regis, which crosses into Dudley borough.

A boundary review for Sandwell was last undertaken in 2004 when the population was 288,849 with an electorate of 206,728. As of the most recent ONS mid-year estimate in 2022, its population was 344,210 with an electorate of 235,216.

a) Profile

2.1.1 Sandwell's population has remained stable over the past two decades with an increased rate of growth since 2001 and this trend is forecast to present over the coming years, reflecting the borough's role as a major economic driver within the wider West Midlands region and the UK economy overall (Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 – Population change in Sandwell



- 2.1.2 Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Sandwell increased by 11.0%, from around 308,100 in 2011 to around 341,800 in 2021.
- 2.1.3 The population here increased by a greater percentage than the overall population of the West Midlands (6.2%), and by a greater percentage than the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census).
- 2.1.4 In 2021, Sandwell was home to around 28.5 people per football pitch-sized piece of land, compared with 25.7 in 2011. The area was the second-most densely populated local authority area across the West Midlands (after Birmingham).

b) Population, People & Diversity

- 2.2.1 The last Boundary Review for Sandwell was undertaken in 2004, when the population was 288,849 with an electorate of 206,728. Since 2004 substantial regeneration has continued which, combined with natural migration has seen the population grow to 344,210 in 2022, which is a 19.2% increase.
- 2.2.2 Sandwell Forecast Model (SFM) projections show that the borough’s population is set to reach 361,389 by 2030, with those age 18+ from which the electorate is drawn reaching up to a potential 271,676 and a projected electorate of 247,060 (see **Appendices 2 and 3** for detail).
- 2.2.3 For electorate forecasting purposes, 2023 electorate data is used as a base line as this was the mid-point in the electoral cycle and is not artificially impacted by General Elections, Referenda, or absence of local elections.
- 2.2.4 The following table (Figure 2) illustrates population and electorate change from 2004 to 2022/3, and projections to 2030 –

Figure 2 – Population change in Sandwell

Population Change		Electorate Change	
ONS Mid-Year Estimates to 2022/23		ONS to 2023	
Total Population		Total Electorate	
2004	288,849	June 2004	206,728
2019	340,198	June 2019	227,342
2022	344,210	June 2022	235,216
		June 2023	233,725
Additional Population	55,361	Electorate Change (from 2004)	26,997
% Change	19.2%	% Change (from 2004)	13.1%

SFM Forecast 18+ Population		SFM Forecast Electorate 2030	
2030	271,676	2030	247,060
Population Change (from 2023)	11,943	Electorate Change (from 2023)	16,652
% Change (from 2030)	4.6%	% Change (from 2023)	7.2%

2.2.5 Within the population of adults aged 18+, not all adults will be registered to vote. This is important because the LGBCE uses the number of electors per ward (people registered to vote) to determine “electoral fairness”. The LGBCE uses the concept of variance from the Sandwell average per ward and will intervene if over 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/- 10% from the average electorate for the authority. Figure 1 outlines the most recent data sourced from the LGBCE; Wolverhampton had six wards (30%) with a +/-10% variance, which was on the cusp of mandatory intervention. Figure 3 outlines the most recent position pre-review.

Figure 3 – Voter ratios in Sandwell for 2023 (LGBCE/SMBC-sourced data)

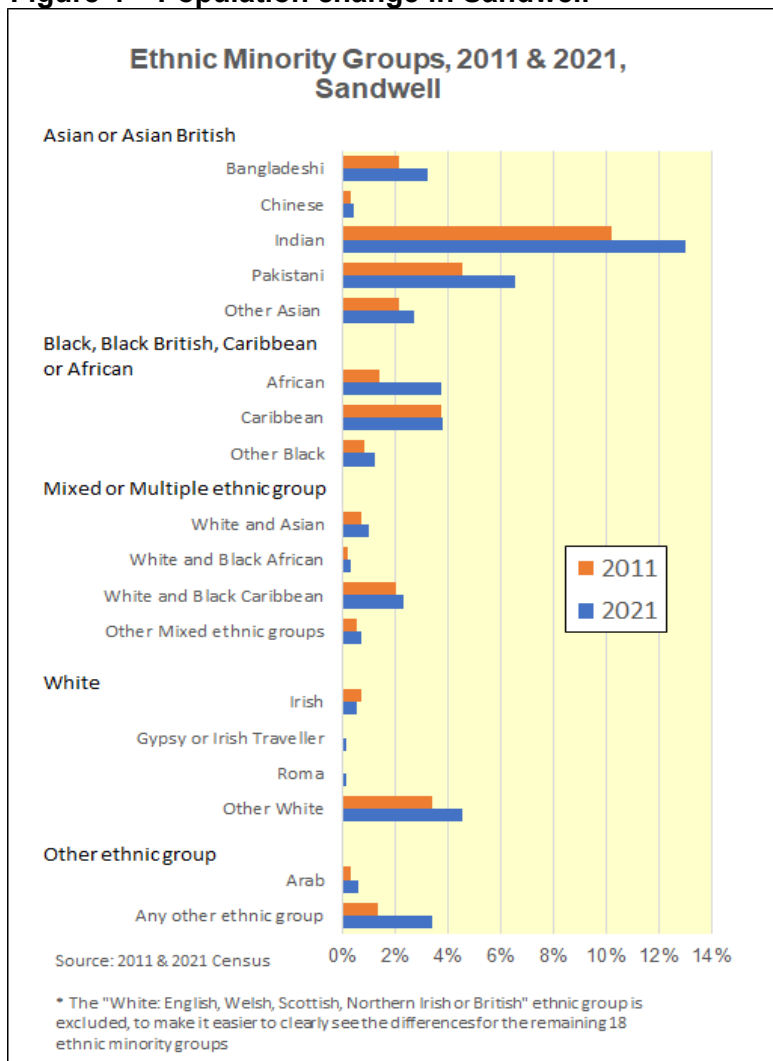
Ward	Electorate	Average	Difference
Abbey	8,491	9722	-12.7%
Blackheath	9,228	9722	-5.1%
Bristnall	9,009	9722	-7.3%
Charlemont with Grove Vale	9,343	9722	-3.9%
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	10,518	9722	8.2%
Friar Park	8,840	9722	-9.1%
Great Barr with Yew Tree	9,818	9722	1.0%
Great Bridge	9,862	9722	1.4%
Greets Green and Lyng	9,530	9722	-2.0%
Hateley Heath	10,295	9722	5.9%
Langley	9,584	9722	-1.4%
Newton	8,683	9722	-10.7%
Old Warley	9,236	9722	-5.0%
Oldbury	10,242	9722	5.3%
Princes End	9,455	9722	-2.7%
Rowley	9,853	9722	1.3%
Smethwick	9,948	9722	2.3%
Soho and Victoria	11,023	9722	13.4%
St. Paul's	10,667	9722	9.7%
Tipton Green	10,707	9722	10.1%
Tividale	9,198	9722	-5.4%
Wednesbury North	9,260	9722	-4.8%
Wednesbury South	10,217	9722	5.1%
West Bromwich Central	10,328	9722	6.2%
Total	233,335		
Average per ward	9,722		

2.2.6 Sandwell's population is younger than England's average, with 27.4% of the population below the age of 20, compared to 23.1% for England as a whole. 49.4% of the population is male and 50.6% female (2022 data). 2.3% of Sandwell's population (aged 16 & over) identifies as having an LGB+ orientation (2021 Census). Sandwell's demographic profile reflects its rich heritage as a manufacturing and industrial hub which emerged during the industrial revolution. Sandwell has historically attracted a diverse population

from a wide range of cultures and the borough is home to 163,900 from non-White British groups (47.9%)

2.2.7 The following chart shows the borough’s population breakdown at the time of the 2011 & 2021 Census. The ethnic makeup of Sandwell has seen extensive changes since 2001. Just over half of Sandwell residents now class themselves as being of White British origin and a further 5.2% are of Other White origin (which includes Irish and Gypsy Travellers). 42.8% of Sandwell’s population are from other ethnic backgrounds. These Sandwell figures compare with England & Wales averages of 74.4%, 7.3% and 18.3% respectively. The largest minority ethnic groups in Sandwell in 2021 are Indian (13.0%) and Pakistani (6.5%), as illustrated below (Figure 4)

Figure 4 – Population change in Sandwell



2.2.8 The distribution of people from BAME communities is not uniform across the borough, with higher proportions seen across the traditional inner core areas of the borough. Smethwick town has the highest ranked proportion of residents from Minority Ethnic groups in Sandwell (that is, all ethnic groups other than White British). These groups make up 75.6% of the town’s population, which is considerably higher than West Bromwich town which ranks second with 55.8% of its population from Minority Ethnic groups.

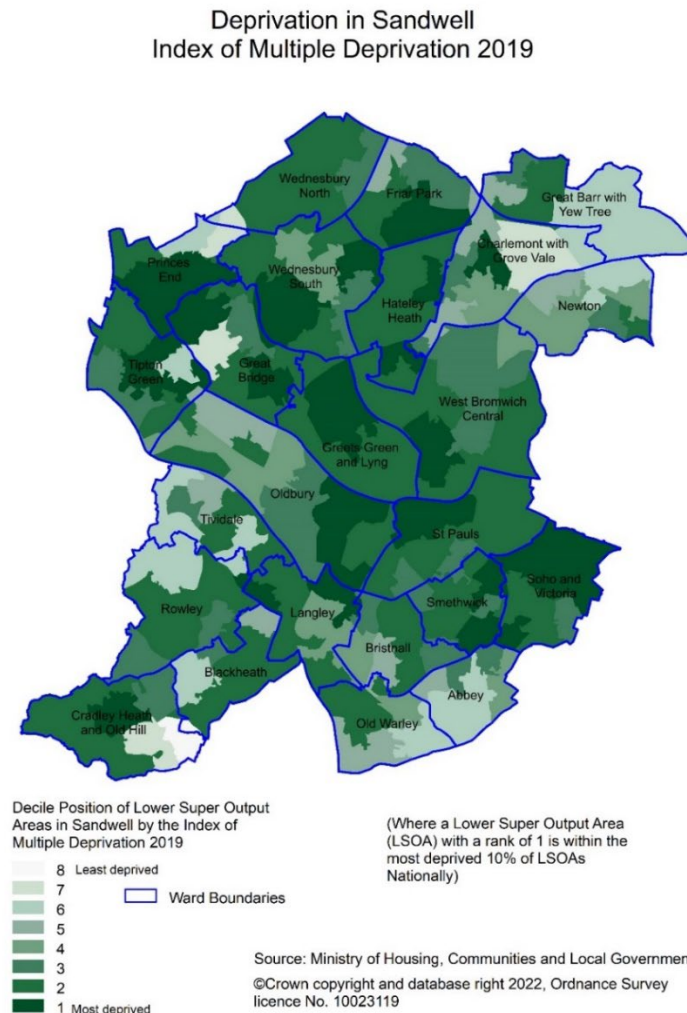
- 2.2.9 BAME communities tend to live in larger households than White groups, with the 2021 Census showing that 34.7% of White residents live in households of 4 or more compared to 72.9% of Asian residents. In contrast, 14.9% of White residents live in single person households compared to 3.9% of Asian residents. This suggests that those towns with a larger BAME population may be disproportionately affected by future growth in electorate size.
- 2.2.10 According to the 2021 Census, in Sandwell, 20% of residents were disabled under the Equality Act, compared with 17.8% in England & Wales. 9.9% of Sandwell residents were disabled and said their disability limits their day-to-day activities a lot. 27.4% of Sandwell households included 1 disabled person (25.6% in England & Wales), whilst 8.3% of households contained 2 or more disabled people (6.7% in England & Wales).
- 2.2.11 This corresponds with higher demand on social care support services as well as accessible housing, the design and structure of the physical and built environment (including highways, pavements, public transport, and retail). This is reflected in casework undertaken by Councillors and the challenges experienced by several Councillors who themselves are disabled.

c) Deprivation & Inequality

- 2.3.1 The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) shows Sandwell as having 19.9% of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the most deprived 10% nationally. According to the average deprivation score, it is the 12th most deprived local authority in the country (out of 317). In Wednesbury Town and Tipton Town 75% and 71% respectively of LSOAs fall within the 20% most deprived in England.
- 2.3.2 Each local authority has been assigned a score based on deprivation levels, and also a rank based on each of the scores. Scores and ranks are provided for the following: average score, average rank, extent, local concentration, proportion of LSOAs in most deprived 10% nationally, income scale and employment scale. Sandwell's ranks are as follows (where 1 is most deprived):
- Average Score – 12
 - Average Rank - 8
 - Extent - 10
 - Local Concentration - 53
 - Proportion of LSOAs in most deprived 10% nationally - 44
 - Income Scale - 9
 - Employment Scale - 12
- 2.3.3 Sandwell's rank of local concentration is lower than the other deprivation measures – this shows that deprivation in Sandwell is not concentrated in pockets, but more widespread across the borough than in other areas.

2.3.4 Of the two supplementary indices that have been produced, Sandwell is ranked 31st most deprived for Income Deprivation Affecting Children, and 27th most deprived for Income Deprivation Affecting Older People nationally. 60.3% of Sandwell residents and 63.6% of children live in the 20% most deprived areas in the country (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Index of Multiple Deprivation – Sandwell (2019)



2.3.5 This data underpins the high and complex caseload experienced by Councillors in the borough (as shown in Appendix 1 - Councillors' Survey) and challenges in representing a diverse and modern borough population.

Conclusion

Sandwell is a diverse borough comprising many communities and faiths. The borough is one of the most socially deprived in the UK with its residents and communities presenting complex and challenging casework and service needs to their local Councillors. It is essential that there are sufficient Councillors to meet local need balanced with wider representational requirements.

3. Policy Context, Challenges & Priorities

- 3.1.1 Sandwell's Vision 2030 is shared by all partners in the borough and contains 10 ambitions for Sandwell. The Council and its partners are in the process of refreshing the approach to Vision 2030 with a view to launching in Summer 2024.
- 3.1.2 The Council's commitment to delivering Vision 2030 is set out in its Corporate Plan. The plan was refreshed and updated in June 2023.
- 3.1.3 The Corporate Plan sets out the six strategic outcomes for the Council:
- 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 Connected and Accessible Sandwell; and
 - A Strong and Inclusive Economy.
- 3.1.4 The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's role as a partner, enabler and leader and the importance of partnership working to the delivery of the Plan. It incorporates elements such as:
- Responding to national and regional policy for local government.
 - Leading on innovative approaches to working differently.
 - Acting as a civic leader, in collaboration with residents, communities and partners (public, private and voluntary and community sectors).
 - Working with residents and communities to find solutions to challenges faced in local neighbourhoods.
 - Being an effective partner in the West Midlands Combined Authority.
 - Being at the forefront of working with Government through the Levelling Up Partnership and leading local anchor networks.
- 3.1.5 Delivery of the Corporate Plan is monitored regularly through the Council's Performance Management Framework. The Council has adopted a Golden Thread approach to business planning and performance management, to ensure everyone understands how they fit in and support delivery of the strategic outcomes in the Corporate Plan.
- 3.1.6 Business Plans are in place at Assistant Director Level across the Council, to ensure alignment with both the Corporate Plan and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. A wide evidence base is used as the foundation for the business planning process, this ensures that the views of residents and other key stakeholders, as well as performance data, are considered when planning and developing service provision.
- 3.1.7 Key elements of the evidence base are: -
- Annual Resident Wellbeing and Perception Survey;

- Annual Budget Consultation;
- Annual Tenant Survey;
- Local Government Association (LGA) Equality Framework Audit; and
- Employee Engagement Survey.

3.1.8 In March 2022, a process of statutory intervention was initiated by the Secretary of State in response to an External Auditor Value for Money (VfM) Governance Review. In seeking to address the recommendations of several key statutory reviews, the Council, overseen by Commissioners, responded by adopting an Improvement Plan, the delivery of which has been closely monitored by the Council's Leadership Team, Cabinet, Scrutiny function and Full Council.

3.1.9 The Council has made great strides in securing improvement across the organisation, addressing the recommendations set out in the reviews. As part of the Council's ongoing improvement journey, there is a continuing focus on embedding these improvements and securing lasting changes to organisational values and behaviours.

3.1.10 Crucially, in seeking to move beyond statutory intervention the Council adopts a mature and realistic assessment of its current position and has a clear understanding of future requirements to sustain transformative improvement and service delivery and maintaining effective governance frameworks which provide appropriate assurance balanced with agility of decision-making.

3.1.11 In addition, there are two statutory plans that support the economic growth of the borough. These are -

- The Local Development Plan (or Local Plan) – this is the statutory land use planning document which identifies where new employment and housing development will be located and where investment for new infrastructure, such as transport, schools and green space will be made. It consists of;
 - ✓ Black Country Core Strategy (2011) - the overarching strategy framework for the four Black Country LAs.
 - ✓ Sandwell Site allocations & Delivery Plan (2012)
 - ✓ Area Action Plans for Tipton (2008), Smethwick (2008) and West Bromwich (2012).
- The West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) (Movement for Growth, 2016) which is prepared by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and sets out the transport policies and a programme of interventions which include supporting economic growth as a primary objective.

3.1.12 Legislation requires that both plans are periodically reviewed. Joint working at a Black Country level on strategic planning matters ceased in 2022. Sandwell's new Local Plan will cover the period to 2041 and will replace all the documents that currently form the Local Development Plan. The Draft

Local Plan was consulted on at the end of 2023. The new Local Plan is expected to be adopted in late 2025 following an examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

- 3.1.13 The Draft Local Plan is a document that plans the future development of the borough. It sets out how and where we expect to build the new homes we need up to 2041, and what land is required to accommodate new jobs. It also sets out how we will address challenges like dealing with climate change, protecting our natural environment, supporting our high streets, and encouraging sustainable travel.
- 3.1.14 The Draft Local Plan identified that there is a need for 29,773 homes (2022-2041). However, the Draft Local Plan acknowledged that there is only sufficient land suitable and available for housing to deliver 11,167 homes, of which 5,063 are estimated to be built by 2029. With regards to employment land, the plan established a need for 185 hectares (ha) of vacant land and proposed to allocate 1,206ha of employment land (of which 29ha is currently vacant).
- 3.1.15 The WMCA is currently preparing a replacement for the 2016 LTP. This is likely to be completed in 2025 and will be endorsed by all the WMCA's constituent authorities.

Conclusion

The significance of the policy and strategic landscape for Sandwell does not support a reduction in the number of Councillors. Strong and robust partnerships, commitments to system change with local partners and moves toward empowering individuals and communities through the development of a new model for neighbourhood service structure and delivery will current levels of representation to be maintained to ensure communities needs are fully represented.

4 Strategic Leadership, Governance & Decision-Making

Councillors are the heart of local government, providing political and local community leadership as well as helping shape the development of services and ensuring investment and regeneration takes place for the benefit of residents and communities. Details of the key roles played by Councillors in Sandwell are explored below.

a) Context & Overview of Governance

- 4.1.1 Sandwell Council has 72 Councillors who in turn represent 24 wards, each of which has 3 Councillors. Councillors are currently elected by thirds each year, with a fallow year every four years when no local elections are held.
- 4.1.2 The political composition of the Council as of 1 March 2024 comprises 61 Labour, 8 Conservative, 3 Independent.
- 4.1.3 A range of opportunities were provided for members of the public to address meetings virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council's democracy and decision-making systems were made accessible in a way not previously thought possible in such an accelerated timeline and this approach continues through the ongoing use of webcasting – broadening access to local democracy. It is hoped that consideration of virtual meetings will be reintroduced by Government following their successful introduction during the Covid-19 pandemic.

b) Full Council

- 4.2.1 Full Council typically meets up to 8 times a year, with between 6-8 weeks between each meeting There are 4 types of Full Council meeting, including –
- **Annual Meetings** – typically held on the third Tuesday of May following local elections and which sets the Constitutional frameworks, delegations, committee structures and Councillor responsibilities for the forthcoming year;
 - **Budget Meeting** – this meeting is typically held no later than the first Tuesday in March and is the meeting at which the budget – and Council Tax – for the forthcoming financial year are set;
 - **Ordinary Meeting** – these meetings deal with a mixed range of business, including policies, plans and strategies together with motions which are typically on topical issues of local interest and concern; and
 - **Extraordinary Meetings** – these meetings are convened for Councillors to debate single issues of special significance for the borough. These may include recognising outstanding contributions of individuals or institutions active in the life of Sandwell.

- 4.2.2 Council meetings are usually well attended by Councillors with only minimal apologies. Public attendance varies depending on local topical issues and matters included on the published agenda for debate. Meetings are livestreamed to maximise public access to discussion.
- 4.2.3 There is therefore no indication that there will be a reduction in the number of Full Council meetings.

c) Political Leadership

- 4.3.1 The Leader and Cabinet provide political leadership for the Council, balanced with the Opposition Leader and Opposition Group(s) who hold the Leader and Cabinet to account as well as setting forward their alternative ideas for the borough. Details on the various roles and responsibilities are set out below.

Council Leader

- 4.3.2 The Leader has a duty to set out plans and policies that drive forward economic growth in the borough. Such activity includes transport, planning and development, housing, economic development and regeneration in addition to skills (including education and schools) and employment, culture, health and a range of environmental issues including low carbon and green technology.
- 4.3.3 The Leader also plays a significant role in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and associated Committees and is portfolio holder for Employment & Skills, alongside sitting on the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and a mix of regional and national bodies.

Cabinet, Cabinet Member & Portfolio Responsibilities

- 4.3.4 The Leader has appointed 2 Deputy Leaders (who also have their own individual portfolio of responsibility) alongside 7 other Cabinet Members who each have an individual portfolio of responsibility. The Leader, Deputy Leaders and Cabinet Members work closely together on establishing and driving a range of political and strategic economic priorities, which, once adopted, then becomes the policy frameworks within which services are delivered across the borough.
- 4.3.5 Cabinet meets on a monthly cycle and considers a range of complex and wide-ranging reports. Decisions are made in public on a collective basis and this model of collective decision-making by Cabinet provides clear lines of accountability. The Leader and Cabinet Members also seek to ensure that Councillors at all levels are engaged in the decision-making process, with those Councillors who are not Cabinet Members all being actively involved in the Council's scrutiny process and serving in other decision-making frameworks.

4.3.6 The Leader has assigned a designated portfolio of services to each Cabinet Member, as detailed below –

- Leader - Inclusive Communities;
- Finance and Resources;
- Health and Adult Social Care;
- Children, Young People and Education;
- Public Health and Communities;
- Environment and Highways;
- Housing and Built Environment;
- Leisure and Tourism; and
- Regeneration and WMCA.

4.3.7 Cabinet Members are outward facing too and, as well as the behind the scenes working in helping keep the Council running, will regularly attend a range of ad-hoc meetings with Officers, community organisations and businesses and partners across the public, private and voluntary sector.

4.3.8 Most Cabinet Members carry out their responsibilities whilst also holding full-time employment - the demands and expectations of hours worked by individual Cabinet Members is high and is on top of their roles as ward Councillors. Cabinet Members also make decisions individually as required and details of this work are fully published on the Council's website.

Opposition Group Leader

4.3.9 The role of Opposition Group Leader in local government is recognised as complex and demanding and extends beyond the internal processes of the Council. The Opposition Leader is a key community representative in their own right and are prominent in the political life of the borough and also represent a powerful voice beyond Sandwell on many occasions transcending the traditional divisions of party politics alongside the Leader and other regional Leaders to emphasize the importance of Sandwell's issues being heard, understood and responded to.

Conclusion

It is clear from the analysis above that the Council has a significant number of strategic plans either in place or in development, set against an ambitious transformation and improvement programme. This requires strong, efficient, strategic leadership for the borough and the Council.

Delivery of these plans in an inclusive and empowering way, requires active and responsive local Councillors ensuring the voices of all communities are heard.

5 Accountability, Regulatory & Scrutiny Functions, Partnerships

Whilst the Leader and Cabinet have responsibility for the executive functions of the Council, all remaining Councillors are active participants in discharging Council, regulatory and scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council. Details of the key roles played by Councillors in these aspects of the Council's governance, decision-making and accountability structures are explored in this section of the report.

a) Council, Regulatory & Statutory Functions

- 5.1.1 In common with all authorities across England and Wales and in accordance with the requirements of local government legislation, the responsibility for functions is split into those reserved to the Executive (in the case of Sandwell the Leader who may delegate and assign as considered necessary), to Full Council or at local discretion.
- 5.1.2 Several Council functions and responsibilities relate to the discharge of regulatory functions, such as those relating to determining planning, licensing, and street trading applications.
- 5.1.3 The Council's Constitution sets out arrangements as to how these decisions are made, through a combination of delegations to key Officers and Service Areas as well as the establishment of dedicated Regulatory Committees to discharge non-executive functions. For Sandwell, these include –
- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee;
 - Chief Officers Appointments Sub-Committee;
 - Chief Officers Terms and Conditions Committee;
 - Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee;
 - Ethical Standards Sub Committee;
 - General Purposes and Arbitration Committee;
 - Governance and Constitution Review Committee;
 - Land and Asset Management Committee;
 - Licensing Committee and Sub Committees; and
 - Planning Committee.
- 5.1.4 The Constitution sets out the regulatory decisions that are delegated to officers. In practice, this is most planning and licensing applications. In the case of planning decisions, the Committee will only consider applications that are of considerable public interest, large in scale or where objections have been received.
- 5.1.5 The Council's Regulatory Committees meet regularly, reflecting the volume of complex and sensitive applications for development or licensing of premises. Even with most regulatory functions being delegated to Officers, there remains a substantial role for Councillors in determining these matters and discharging regulatory functions.

b) Delegation to Officers

- 5.2.1 Whilst there is an extensive range of functions and responsibilities discharged collectively by the Leader and Cabinet as well as other member decision-making bodies, a detailed Scheme of Delegation also exists. The Scheme of Delegation provides for a range of Executive Functions otherwise reserved to the Leader and Cabinet to be discharged either through Sub-Committees of Cabinet or by Officers under specific delegations as set out within the Council's Constitution.
- 5.2.2 In addition to the delegation of Executive Functions, a range of other functions also exist which either cannot be exercised by the Leader and Cabinet, are reserved to Full Council or are matters where the Council has a choice over how they are delegated. These are addressed within Part 3 of the Council's Constitution and include those which -
- a) cannot be the responsibility of the Leader and Cabinet and specifies which part of the Authority will be responsible for them. It also specifies to whom, if anyone, those functions have been delegated. For instance, in the case of planning and development control, all functions are delegated to the Head of Planning and relevant professional planning officers for discharge except those which are specified as being the responsibility of the Planning Committee;
 - b) are classified as local choice functions which may or may not be Leader and Cabinet responsibilities and specifies which part of the Council will be responsible for discharging them. It also specifies to whom, if anyone, those functions have been delegated by the Council in the case of Council functions, or the Leader in the case of Executive Functions; and
 - c) are not solely executive responsibilities, including plans and policies reserved for determination by Full Council and which form the Council's Policy Framework are also detailed along with what role the Cabinet will play in relation to those plans, policies, and strategies. Essentially, the Cabinet will develop and consult on the plans, policies and strategies listed and will then refer them to Full Council for consideration and approval. If approved, the Leader and Cabinet will then be responsible for ensuring they are implemented.
- 5.2.3 There are some decisions reserved to Full Council that cannot be delegated, except to the Chief Executive in circumstances of emergency when decisions otherwise reserved to a member body cannot be discharged, as utilised during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council must be able to have a process for urgent decisions within the legal framework and this has been stress-tested by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regulatory processes

Planning functions

- 5.2.4 The Council discharges a range of statutory decision-making obligations for regulatory processes relating to planning and licensing matters amongst others.
- 5.2.5 The Council has a distinct role as Local Planning Authority with responsibility for the assessment and determination of a wide range of planning matters, from small scale household application to large scale strategic regeneration applications. Responsibility for decision-making is discharged through Councillors as members of the Planning Committee and by officers through delegation made to the Head of Planning & Building Control.
- 5.2.6 An analysis of data for the four years 2020 to 2023 consistently shows 4-5% of applications are determined by a member body. These are typically complex and major applications which require significant preparation and commitment to attend meetings, hear representations and reach decision. The volume of applications is illustrated in the table below -

Applicable dates (1 January – 31 December)	No of planning applications received	No of planning applications determined	% of applications determined by Officers	% of applications determined at planning committee
2020	1,067	954	907 (95%)	47 (5%)
2021	1,201	1,224	1164 (95%)	60 (5%)
2022	1,223	1,179	1,128 (96%)	51 (4%)
2023	1,000	966	923 (96%)	43 (4%)

- 5.2.7 It is also of note that the Planning Committee may defer consideration of a applications for either additional information or site visit, resulting in applications received in one year being determined in the following year and requiring additional time commitments from Members.

Licensing functions

- 5.2.8 The Council acts as Licensing Authority with responsibility for the assessment and determination of a wide range of licensing matters including taxis and premises licences. Responsibility for decision-making is discharged through Councillors as members of the Licensing Committee and Sub-Committee and by officers through delegation made to the Head of Licensing.
- 5.2.9 Meetings of the Licensing Committee and Sub-Committees take place on a regular basis and are often reactive in response to emergent matters of operational or licensing compliance concern. Each meeting requires significant preparation and time commitment to attend meetings, hear representations and reach decision.

5.2.10 The volume of applications and proportions determined by Members or Officers through delegation are illustrated in the table below –

Municipal Year	No. of Decisions	Member Review Hearing Decision (%)	Matters determined by Officers (Delegation) (%)
Taxis			
2021-22	184	19 (10%)	165 (90%)
2022-23	88	41 (47%)	47 (53%)
Premises			
2021-22	826	13 (2%)	813 (98%)
2022-23	629	22 (3%)	607 (97%)

c) Scrutiny Structures & Councillor roles

5.3.1 Sandwell currently has several Scrutiny Boards, which meet regularly. Sandwell's Scrutiny Boards for 2023/24 are –

- Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board;
- Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board;
- Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board;
- Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board; and
- Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.

5.3.2 The volume of meetings and matters considered by Scrutiny Boards over the last 3 years, is summarised below -

2021/22

- 33 meetings of Scrutiny Boards;
- 76 items of business dealt with; and
- 9 meetings of Scrutiny Working Groups.

2022/23

- 38 meetings of Scrutiny Boards;
- 95 items of business dealt with; and
- 6 meetings of Scrutiny Working Groups.

2023/24 (as of January 2024)

- 22 meetings of Scrutiny Boards;
- 51 items of business dealt with; and
- 5 meetings of Scrutiny Working Groups.

5.3.3 The role and responsibilities of each Scrutiny Board are subject to a process of continuous review and confirmation at the Annual Meeting of Full Council or Ordinary Meetings of Full Council as otherwise may be required.

- 5.3.4 The scrutiny process is embedded within the culture of governance and accountability operated by the Council, with each Scrutiny Board seeing attendance from the Leader and Cabinet Members with relevant portfolio responsibilities, together with Directors, Assistant Directors and key Statutory Officers as required depending on the nature of business scheduled for discussion.
- 5.3.5 Each of the Council's Scrutiny Boards may establish a Scrutiny Working Group when a particular subject or service requires more in-depth analysis and study. Scrutiny Boards comprise a smaller number of Councillors, typically 3-4 most often drawn from the membership of the appointing Scrutiny Board and as far as possible, including representatives from at least 2 political groups (or more depending on the political composition of the Council).
- 5.3.6 The annual scrutiny report indicates the effects and role of scrutiny on the Council, what policy and practice changes have been made and its effectiveness, such as fractional investment and the work with our partners on health and social care integration. All non-executive Councillors serve on at least one Scrutiny Board.

d) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

- 5.4.1 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) comprises 18 local authorities, including Sandwell Council and four Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) including Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP, working together to move powers from Whitehall to the West Midlands.
- 5.4.2 The primary role of the WMCA is to drive and deliver economic growth through co-operation across the constituent authorities and partners and, in turn, promote healthy, happy, and well-connected communities. This has seen the WMCA focus on a series of core objectives relating to economic growth, employment, environment, health and wellbeing, housing, productivity and skills, public service reform and transport.
- 5.4.3 The Combined Authority Mayor acts as the Chair of the WMCA, with Council Leaders from each of the constituent authorities including Sandwell collectively forming a strategic WMCA Board.
- 5.4.4 The WMCA has in turn established several Committees to assist with the discharge of its responsibilities and hold the Combined Authority Mayor to account, including –
- Economic Growth Board;
 - Employment Committee;
 - Environment & Energy Board;
 - Housing & Land Delivery Board;
 - Investment Board;
 - Wellbeing Board;
 - Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee;

- Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee; and
- Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

5.4.5 The Council nominates Councillors as members of each of the Committees listed above. Those Councillors nominated to the Committees undertaken additional responsibilities aside of their core representational and decision-making roles for Sandwell MBC. These additional responsibilities extend to include attendance and participation at regularly scheduled meetings of each Committee, as well as the associated pre- and post- meeting preparations and actions. As these meetings typically are hosted outside of borough but within the wider region, additional time is also required for travel.

5.4.6 Feedback through the Members Survey 2024 shows members appointed to these roles are spending an increased amount of time meeting these responsibilities, typically up to 5 hours per month. This requires their fellow ward councillors to provide additional support and cover. With the likelihood of further delegation of powers and funding from central Government to regional bodies such as the WMCA, it is reasonable to anticipate further increases in demands for representation, attendance, and engagement from members across each of the constituent authorities. This reinforces the need to ensure an appropriate level of representation exists to meet these competing demands for time.

Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA)

5.4.7 Sandwell is located within the West Midlands and lies at the heart of an area known as the Black Country – made up of the four local authorities of Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton which together are home to over one million people, the location for 430,000 jobs and a net economic contributor of £17.2 billion gross value added (GVA) per annum.

5.4.8 The authorities work together closely and co-operate through the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) which acts as a shared forum to co-ordinate work to drive economic growth and establish a shared vision for the future, working in partnership with business and the wider community.

5.4.9 In 2013, ABCA agreed that a Black Country Executive Joint Committee would be set up to lead the decision-making forum for the Black Country Growth Deal. Central government has devolved certain powers as part of these deals in 2014 to increase economic growth. The Leader of the Council and two further Cabinet Members are involved in the four bodies that have developed from this further example of devolution.

Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP)

5.4.10 The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP) was established with a remit to bring greater prosperity to the Black Country area. This objective is to be achieved through facilitating co-operation and co-ordination between public, private, and voluntary sector across a range of key strategic

areas including education, infrastructure, environment, and economic development.

- 5.4.11 The BCLEP has a separate governance structure which includes a Board and several thematic sub-groups. The Council Leader is a member of the BCLEP Board alongside Council Leaders from the other four constituent authorities and several other Councillors hold roles on the thematic sub-groups.

Impacts of regional frameworks on Councillor capacity and caseload

- 5.4.12 The establishment of the Combined Authority and the associated devolution agreement saw the transfer of a range of functions and responsibilities to this new body from Government, however, this did not see functions transferred from the local authorities of the Region which form its constituent parts.
- 5.4.13 The effect of this means that the WMCA - and its various Committees - place additional demands on the time, capacity, and resource of those Councillors appointed to those bodies. The Leader serves on the WMCA Board and several Sandwell's Councillors serve across the WMCA on joint boards. Allowances, where they exist, are published.
- 5.4.14 The areas of responsibility covered by the WMCA and the Combined Authority Mayor do not substantially impact on Councillors capacity in Sandwell. For example, matters relating to bus and train travel may be anticipated to more often be referred to the WMCA as opposed to local Councillors.
- 5.4.15 Whilst the WMCA and its various committees play a pivotal role in the Region, its functions and responsibilities are distinct from those of the Council. This has resulted in some diversion of casework issues to WMCA structures, but this effect has largely been limited. It is not considered that the WMCA roles are a factor to significantly reduce the number of Councillors in Sandwell.

e) External Partnerships

- 5.5.1 Sandwell as a borough and as a Council does not exist or operate in isolation. Alongside the WMCA regional governance arrangements summarised earlier in this report, a range of structures and frameworks exist or are emergent in the health, social care and public health sectors of local government.

f) Local Authority Companies

- 5.6.1 Sandwell Council has several wholly owned companies/subsidiary bodies and several associate companies. These include Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) which delivers statutory children's social care functions on behalf of the Council and Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) which funds several leisure centres across the borough on behalf of the Council. The Council continues

to review the governance and future direction of these companies in accordance with best practice.

g) Strategic Direction

- 5.7.1 The overarching principle articulated in the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030 is about empowering people to take control of their lives and building resilience at a family and community level to improve outcomes leading to reduction in demand for hard pressed public services.
- 5.7.2 A key element of the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030 is the alignment of Council resources with partners to create a shared focus on outcomes at both a borough scale and neighbourhood level with a prevention and early help model at its core.
- 5.7.3 Moving forward the Council will continue to review the effectiveness of its scrutiny function to ensure emergent best practice is enacted. Whilst the number of committees of all types may change, the Council is planning on establishing a neighbourhood model of delivery as part of the Sandwell Plan objectives and changing the relationship between the Council and residents which will involve all Councillors.
- 5.7.4 The development of a new neighbourhood delivery model forms a key component of the Council's continued transformation and improvement. Increased emphasis will be placed on locality and community, enabling a better understanding of local priorities and focus on the delivery of vital Council services, as well as informing and influencing emerging strategies – ensuring the needs of each neighbourhood are understood and considered.
- 5.7.5 The Council is focussed on -
- more effective joint working across the Council focussed on the needs of residents and localities;
 - more use of data, insight and evidence at a neighbourhood level to build a better understanding of needs and opportunities, inform strategy development, local investment and service design and partner interventions where appropriate;
 - an inclusive approach to empower and engage residents and build community capacity for decision making and issues affecting their neighbourhoods; and
 - a more efficient and more responsive but less dependent and less complex customer journey that can resolve local issues.
- 5.7.6 The Council will seek to adopt a collaborative community-focused approach working with elected members, residents, and communities as well as key partners, ensuring core services are delivered using data and insight to enable a differentiated approach.
- 5.7.7 A new Neighbourhoods Strategy will be developed in parallel through consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders. The operation of

any new model will require fundamental changes to how the Council and Councillors operate across the six towns. These changes will take effect through new local forums and structures, all requiring additional time and engagement from Councillors both at initialization and to embed their role within local communities and with stakeholders.

- 5.7.8 By way of illustration, the expected new model will put Members at the heart of the way in which the Council operates at a neighbourhood level - driving the development of ward plans informed by data and local priorities and determining how local budgets will be spent to make improvements and meaningful changes to our communities. In this sense, the new model will support democratic renewal by increasing the levers available to Councillors to have genuine impact and get things done.
- 5.7.9 New structures established to support neighbourhood working will also be subject to oversight and review through existing member bodies including the scrutiny structure of the Council. It is essential that all of the governance and decision-making frameworks of the Council – at regional, corporate, and local community levels – are underpinned by an appropriate and efficient levels of Councillor representation to be both effective and to revitalize local democracy at grass roots community levels. The proposed council size of 72 achieves this objective.
- 5.7.10 The Council will continue to require clear, robust, transparent, and accountable political leadership. In turn, political leadership is not defined as being solely the role of a Council Leader or a Mayor. Political leadership is vested in and delivered by every Councillor as community leaders.
- 5.7.11 Any changes will be subject to detailed reports and debate at Full Council that, by definition, will need to be led and informed by enough Councillors to balance multiple and complex competing factors.

Conclusion

To discharge statutory and regulatory functions, it is essential that there are sufficient Councillors for this purpose. The involvement of Councillors in scrutiny is a critical element of effective and accountable governance in any executive decision-making model, whether at strategic or local level.

Taking account of the Council's ambitions summarised in this submission - balanced with the critical role Councillors will continue to play - 72 Councillors is considered a robust and sufficient number to enable efficient working, both in the context of the resources available and the Council's commitment to support active, engaged democracy.

6 Community Leadership & Representational Roles of Councillors

Councillors are community leaders and play an essential role for their communities. In Sandwell, this role is substantial. Not only is casework complex and substantial in number, Sandwell's communities are diverse.

Councillors themselves have identified this workload as substantial in the Councillor Survey (**Appendix 1**). Although technology assists in the quick resolution of casework, it also means that Councillors are much easier to access and can result in more rather than less workload.

a) Community Leadership, Representation & Engagement

- 6.1.1 The role and responsibilities of Councillors and particularly the relationship with the communities and individuals they serve, is changing. At the heart of the Sandwell Plan is a desire to promote empowerment of local communities and work with our partners on an asset-based model of delivery, where we build on the strengths of individuals and communities rather than say what is wrong and provide a menu of solutions.
- 6.1.2 The delivery of the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030 will change the nature of the relationship between Councillor and communities. This will see Councillors' role as enablers expanded further, to support greater empowerment for residents and communities.
- 6.1.3 The Sandwell Plan promotes a vision of integrated service delivery at a neighbourhood level with partners, supported by workforce development and empowerment of front-line staff. This model of service delivery means that while Councillors still have a vital and important role to play in their communities, the nature of caseload should be less as these structures and delivery models are implemented.
- 6.1.4 The development of neighbourhood structures will enhance the visibility and accountability of local Councillors who will be required to lead on the development of these neighbourhood structures moving forward.

b) Technology, Local Government Representation & Casework

- 6.2.1 The Council in preparing this report has sought to better understand the realities of Councillors roles and responsibilities. The Leader and Councillors were asked to complete a Survey in early 2024 (detailed results being set out at **Appendix 1** to this report).
- 6.2.2 The Councillor Survey demonstrates the scale of work undertaken by Councillors to engage with and work on behalf of their residents and communities. Crucially, the survey evidences continued demand for support from residents on a complex range of issues, reflecting the key role of Councillors as enablers, influencers, decision-makers, and advocates.

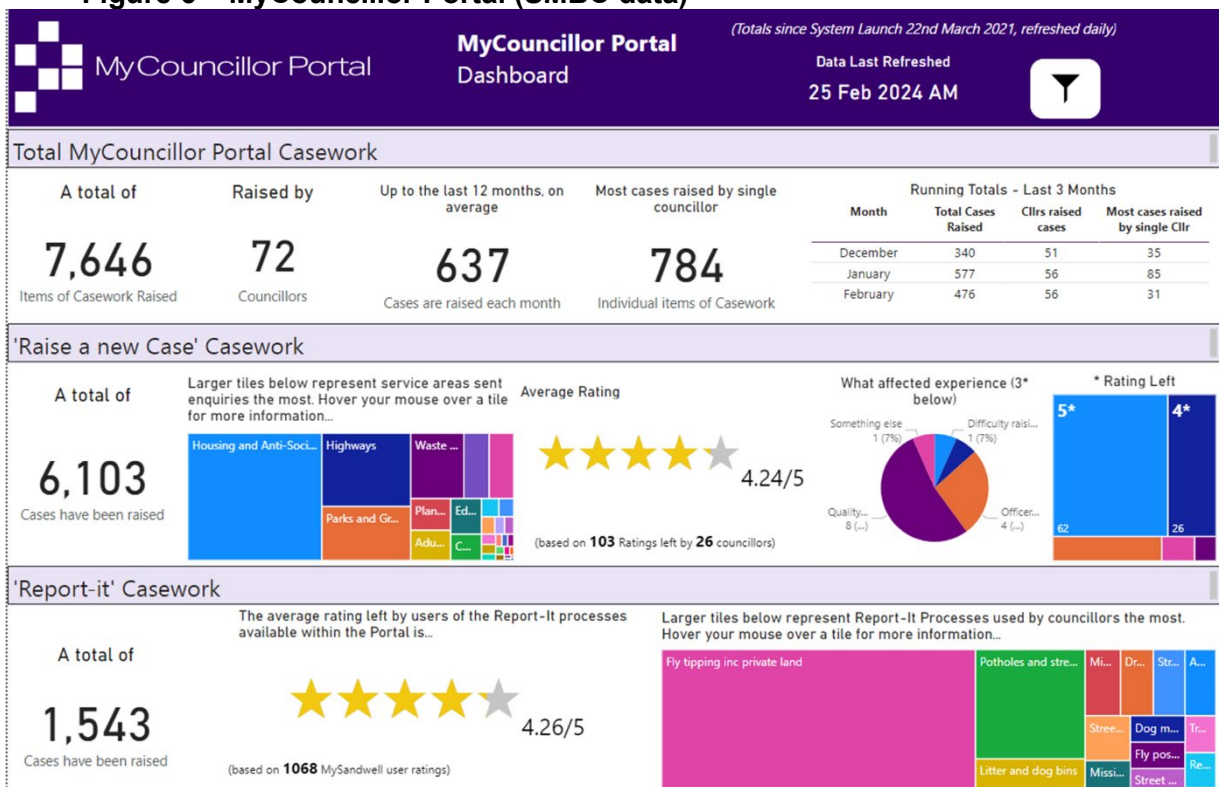
6.2.3 Key findings relating to communications and the use of technology include -

- Councillors still largely rely on traditional communication methods, typically face to face in person, telephone or email;
- most Councillors spend several hours each week publishing information on and responding to residents through social media;
- most Councillors use social media networks such as X (Twitter), Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram and Councillors across all political groups report increasing use of social media as part of their role; and
- the continued development of social media and technology has greatly benefitted Councillors and residents in providing an easy, readily available tool by which they can be available.

6.2.4 Key findings relating to the types of casework include –

- most Councillors casework is on behalf of the borough’s most vulnerable and deprived residents and communities; and
- Councillors deal with a high volume of casework issues each month. The dataset below represents casework in the last 12 months (data as at 25.02.2024) shows an average of 637 items of casework raised each month (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – MyCouncillor Portal (SMBC data)



6.2.5 Member Survey data demonstrates the breadth of casework undertaken by Councillors. Whilst a significant volume of casework is recorded in the MyCouncillor Portal, Councillors continue to deal with high volumes of work outside the Portal – it is important to recognise the true scale and volume of casework dealt with by Councillors and to not under-estimate by relying solely on Portal data.

Attracting and retaining Councillors

6.2.6 Sandwell continues to attract many candidates seeking to stand in the borough's local elections. The number of candidates who stood for local elections during recent years were –

- 76 in 2018
- 88 in 2019
- 93 in 2021
- 66 in 2022
- 94 in 2023

6.2.7 The average length of service of the Councillors of the present Council is just over 6 years; the longest serving Councillor on the Council currently has 24 years of service.

c) Training for Councillors

6.3.2 All Councillors are required to attend and complete essential training. Any new Councillors will also have to undertake or participate in those essential training sessions. Any Councillor who does not meet this requirement is then ineligible to serve on any Scrutiny or Regulatory Committee until this requirement is met.

6.3.3 Following the election, all Councillors participate in an intensive Induction Programme. This focusses on core knowledge and skills requirements to provide each Councillor with a solid grounding from which to build during their first year in office – and crucially beyond, as this is a continuous programme.

6.3.4 A standing Ethical Standards & Member Development Committee is in operation, which meets as required to review training and development frameworks for Councillors and to identify areas for additional support. This will oversee, with support from the LGA, the member training programme and continuous development of elected members. The LGA will also be supporting a development programme for the leadership team. Important elements of the Improvement Plan for the Council will require considerable commitment from Councillors and Officers with supporting capacity and resource.

6.3.5 Moving forward, a comprehensive development and training framework will continue to be required to address the skills and knowledge requirements of Councillors as the Council's relationship with residents and communities evolves. Overseen by the Ethical Standards & Member Development

Committee, continued commitment is required from Councillors in terms of time and effort to retain the required skills and knowledge to undertake their diverse responsibilities.

d) Ward Co-ordination

- 6.4.1 Fundamental to neighbourhood delivery is integrated services for people, communities, and place. This approach in Sandwell is underpinned by an asset-based approach to ward working, where Councillors recognise the community and residents as assets with the solution to many issues they face. This also supports a modal shift in the relationship between the Council and residents, from transactional to enabling.
- 6.4.2 The historical approach of the Council “fixing” problems has moved to increased partnership working and co-production with communities. Whilst this approach is the right way to operate to achieve sustainable improvements, it is also resource intensive and Councillors representative role has, as a result, changed significantly over time.
- 6.4.3 Anchor organisations within wards including registered housing providers, NHS and public sector partners, children’s centres, voluntary and community sector organisations are increasingly as (if not more) central to Councillors ward activity than more traditional council services. It is vital that this is properly reflected in how the Council operates moving forward
- 6.4.4 Integrated Care Teams (ICTs) are well-established in Sandwell. Historically, Councillors have been involved at a strategic level through the Health and Well Being Board and the various Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) across the borough. Recognition of the wider determinants of health and the broadening out of the ICTs to Multi-Disciplinary Teams which is likely to see an increased role for Councillors in informing decisions around the commissioning of services for the communities they serve.
- 6.4.5 To support communities to be self-supporting and resilient, we need to agree a footprint where partners can form collaborates and services integrate resulting in reduced demand and improved service to communities, maximizing efficiency.

Conclusion

The Council is currently embarking on an ambitious and far reaching review of its neighbourhood working arrangements. This is likely to see a fundamental shift in arrangements and structures and will bring decisions and actions down to community level. This in turn will refresh the linkages between the Council, Councillors and the communities they both serve. It is of vital importance that there are enough Councillors to balance all these competing objectives.

7 Comparison Data & Alternative Options

a) Comparison Data

- 7.1.1 Comparisons between individual local authorities or core cities are of limited weight in terms of assessing the optimum council size. All local authority areas are unique with different community requirements and models of delivery and governance.
- 7.1.2 However, they are useful to demonstrate that the proposed council size falls within an average range of representation of cities and metropolitan districts in England. It is for these purposes that the following comparisons are suggested – firstly an analysis of metropolitan districts, mean and median levels of electorate per Councillor.
- 7.1.3 The chart below at Figure 7 identifies that Sandwell's current representation levels are only slightly above the mean and median for comparator metropolitan districts.

Figure 7 – Electorate comparison data with peer authorities

Local Authority	Population	Electorate	No. Wards	No. of Councillors
Birmingham	1,144,900	748,811	69	101
Coventry	345,300	232,194	18	54
Dudley	323,600	234,257	24	72
Sandwell	341,900	230,408	24	72
Solihull	217,487	161,646	17	51
Walsall	286,700	119,254	20	60
Wolverhampton	263,700	183,153	20	60

- 7.1.4 The Council undertook a public consultation during 2022 to gather views on how often elections for Councillors should be held. Two options were available – elections by thirds or elections every four years. Reports submitted to Full Council and placed in the public domain during the consultation process were supported by an analysis of each option. This analysis identified both benefits and dis-benefits for each option. As the current boundary review process does not propose changes to this electoral cycle, this analysis is not repeated in this submission.
- 7.1.5 The 2022 public consultation generated a limited public response rate of 0.25% of the boroughs residents (487 responses) of which 69% supported retaining the current model of elections by thirds. Due to the low response rate Full Council determined to retain elections by thirds and that a future public consultation revisiting this matter be undertaken the conclusion and implementation of the outcomes of the current boundary review process, after the all-out elections in May 2026.

b) Alternative Options

7.2.1 The Council in developing this submission has carefully considered alternate options for council size. Each option balanced against core objectives, service delivery and emergent future needs in respect of:

- Strategic Leadership;
- Accountability; and
- Community Leadership.

7.2.2 Four options for council size have been considered and are explored below –

1. An increase in council size;
2. Maintaining the council size; and
3. A reduction in council size.

Option 1 - Increasing Council size

7.2.3 This option has been discounted as a viable option for the following reasons.

- a) The last review conducted in 2003 resulted in a reduction to current levels. Whilst this number has remained constant since 2004, the roles, responsibilities, and governance context within which Councillors are required to operate, has been subject to radical transformation and substantially differs to that seen in 2004.
- b) An increase in council size, would result in proportionate increases in the size of Committees and decision-making bodies but would see a reduction in the average population and electorate of each Ward and represented by each Councillor below that of comparable authorities.
- c) This period has also seen substantial financial pressures and budget cuts which the Council has worked hard to deliver with engagement from local communities and stakeholders. That has required trust and transparency and a commitment to deliver efficiency savings right across the Council. An increase in the size of the Council does not align with the nature of those conversations with the electorate.

Option 2 – Maintaining Council Size

7.2.4 The breadth of this submission sets out a range of data and comparators which make a compelling case for maintaining the existing Council size of 72. These include but are not limited to required governance arrangements, Councillor caseload, socio-economic challenges and opportunities for Sandwell as the authority moves beyond intervention and seeks to take forward.

7.2.5 As a counterpoint, Sandwell Council is moving beyond intervention and is committed to transformation, improvement and innovation in structure and service delivery, underpinned by effective governance and agility of

decision-making.

- 7.2.6 Scrutiny and accountability are intrinsic to the decision-making process. Any reduction in the numbers of Councillors would greatly impact capacity and weaken the effectiveness of scrutiny processes.
- 7.2.7 Continuing economic regeneration and investment across Sandwell and each of its six towns in the form of new residential, commercial and retail development continue to be overseen by the Council in its capacity as Local Planning Authority, with the Planning Committee at the heart of decision-making.
- 7.2.8 It is also important to look beyond the realms of the Council, to recognise the key role played by Councillors across the communities of Sandwell which this submission explores in detail.
- 7.2.9 The role of Councillor is often misunderstood or understated - yet all Councillors work tirelessly every day to reach, engage and represent residents. Their roles extend to building new community organisations, networks and the business community alongside campaigning on issues of local concern across the six towns on behalf of and representing residents.
- 7.2.10 The reasons why 72 remains the optimum council size are summarised as:
- a) A continuing requirement for robust, transparent, and accountable leadership based on a recognition of the scale of the challenges facing the Council, borough and its communities counterbalanced with significant opportunity for development and transformation. The size of the executive is not anticipated to reduce below the current number of eight, reflecting the extent of responsibilities of a large metropolitan authority and level of change facing the Council.
 - b) A programme of continuous review of scrutiny arrangements taking account of national sector best practice to align with the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030.
 - c) The Council discharges a range of regulatory and partnership functions which, whilst largely delivered through delegation, still requires sufficient Councillors to discharge these responsibilities alongside the other duties they hold as Councillors.
 - d) The role of Councillor is fundamentally changing with a focus on supporting greater empowerment for residents and communities. This will see of new neighbourhood structures developed, ensuring visibility and accountability of local Councillors, and providing an overarching structure to support our communities. It is essential that there are enough Councillors to discharge these responsibilities balanced with the other representative and community leadership roles which lie at the heart of Councillors remit.

7.2.11 Data within this submission shows comparable local authorities operate effectively and efficiently with a lesser number of Councillors and it is therefore right that the Council consider alternative options. The Council has therefore considered options to reduce the council size, explored in more detail below.

Option 3 - Reducing Council size

7.3.1 Two options for a reduced Council size were considered, to either 66 or 60. Analysis of the future governance and strategic direction of the Council against the core components of - Strategic Leadership; Accountability; and Community Leadership – have led the Council to conclude that such a significant reduction in Councillors would have significant negative impacts.

- a) The role and functions of the executive will remain under any council size; however, it is crucial that there is capacity to ensure robust, transparent, and accountable leadership. A reduction in council size to 66 or below would inhibit the effectiveness and capacity of the Council executive, weakening strategic and political leadership and compromising community leadership.
- b) A reduction would directly impact on accountability and holding the executive to account through the effectiveness of the scrutiny function and the ability and capacity of the Council to discharge regulatory and partnership functions, even with the high levels of delegation already seen. It remains critical that there are sufficient Councillors to discharge these functions whilst maintaining capacity for community leadership to develop and delivering against emergent neighbourhood structures alongside the objectives of the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030.

Conclusion

This submission sets out the clear aims of the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030, and how these will see a range of new neighbourhood structures developed, ensuring visibility and accountability of local Councillors, and providing an overarching structure to support our communities.

These actions require sufficient Councillors to undertake key roles at community and partnership level. Any reduction in council size would significantly weaken Council's ability to achieve genuine engagement with its diverse communities and to ensure effective levels of community representation.

8 Conclusion

8.1.1 The Council has, in line with the Boundary Commission's requirements, produced this submission having regard to the current and future direction of the Council in these key areas:

- **Strategic Leadership** - providing evidence about the current Council decision-making structure, involvement and workload of those Councillors involved as well as on the Scheme of Delegation and other bodies and emergent future trends for governance;
- **Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory Functions & Partnerships)** - providing evidence about how Councillors hold decision-makers to account and ensure that the Council can discharge its responsibilities to other organisations and how these responsibilities will evolve in the coming years; and
- **Community Leadership** - providing evidence about how Councillors interact and engage with their communities, their caseloads and the support required to represent local residents and groups effectively and on emergent trends for the future, including how the relationship between Council, Councillors and communities will continue to develop.

8.2.2 Whilst this review is undertaken following the natural passage of time, it provides an opportunity for pause and reflection. Reviewing and assessing the future needs of the Council in terms of resident expectations and the operational structure of the organisation allow for a positive reset of both the Council's governance and its relationships with citizens, service users, business community and partners.

8.2.3 This is designed to increase transparency and trust in the Council, change the culture and enable the Council to deliver on its ambitions in the Sandwell Plan.

Conclusion

The Council has a positive view of the future relationship between itself and its electorate, which is an essential part of the delivery of the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030, enabling and empowering local communities to do more for themselves.

A council size of 72 remains the optimum number for that relationship to develop and embed over the long term and will lead to the positive improvement in outcomes that the Sandwell Plan and Vision 2030 envisages.

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillors Survey 2024

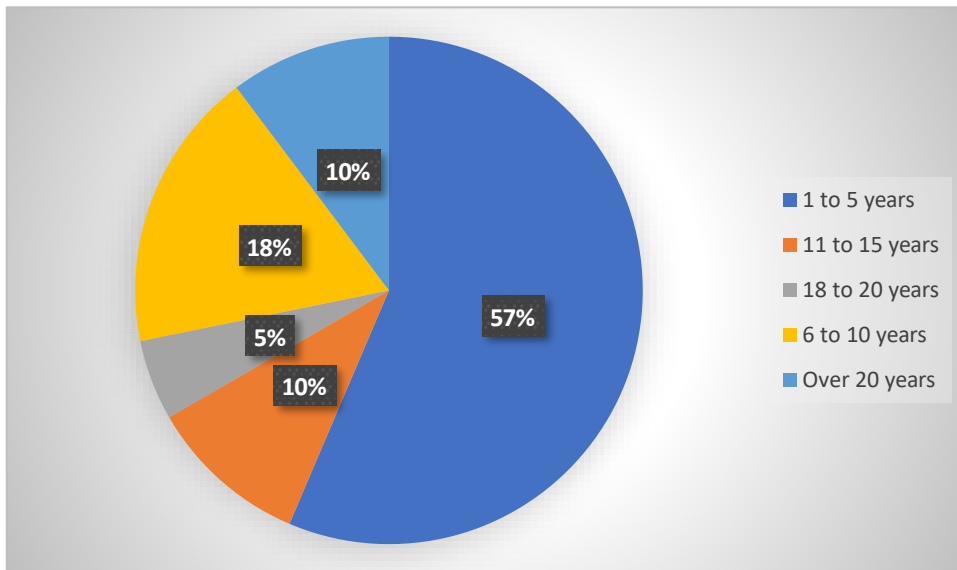
March 2024

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 1:

How long have you been an Elected Member with Sandwell Council?

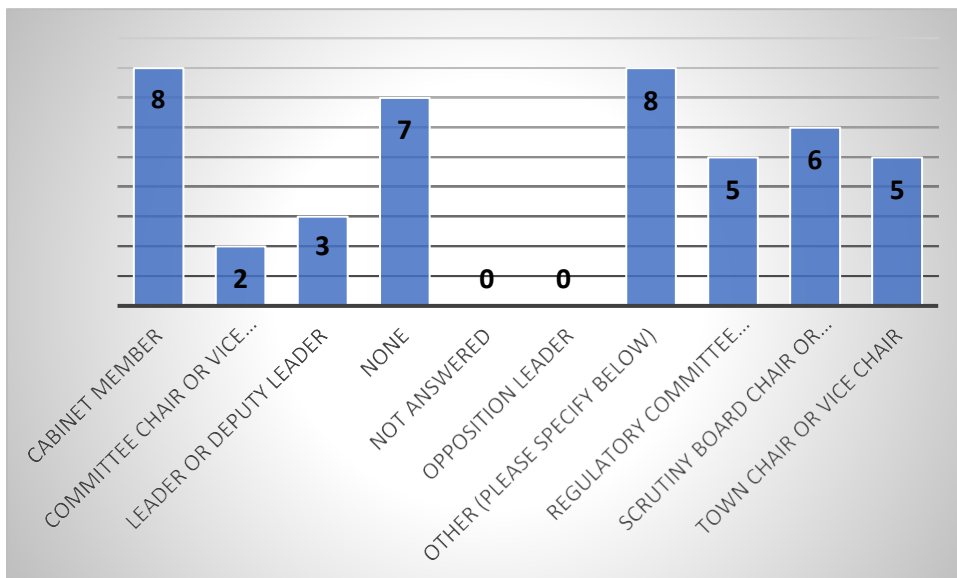
Option	Total	Percentage
1 to 5 years	22	57%
11 to 15 years	4	10%
18 to 20 years	2	5%
6 to 10 years	7	18%
Over 20 years	4	10%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 2: In addition to your role as an Elected Member, what other positions do you hold within the Council? (Please select all options that apply.)

Option	Total	Percentage
Cabinet Member	8	18%
Committee Chair or Vice Chair	2	5%
Leader or Deputy Leader	3	7%
None	7	16%
Not Answered	0	0%
Opposition Leader	0	0%
Other (please specify below)	8	18%
Regulatory Committee Chair or Vice Chair	5	11%
Scrutiny Board Chair or Vice Chair	6	14%
Town Chair or Vice Chair	5	11%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

In addition to your role as an Elected Member, what other positions do you hold within the Council? (Please select all options that apply.) - If you specified other, please outline below: -

Chair HWBB

Planning committee. Licensing committee.

Sit on Scrutiny Boards, Town Board and EDI Board

Member of various boards

Lead Performance Champion - Neighbourhoods

Performance Champion for Safer Communities and Member of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Equality Commission, Strategic Waste Board, West Bromwich Partnership, Land and Asset Committee Member

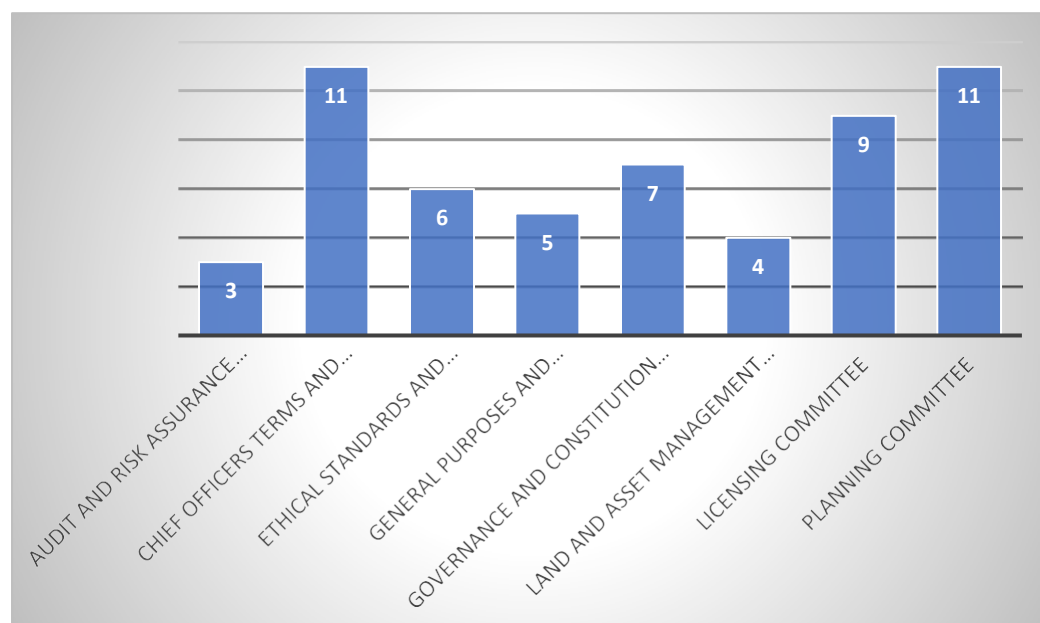
Safer Neighbourhood Scrutiny, General Purpose and Arbitration Committees

Performance Champion our economy

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

**Question 3: Which Committees have you been appointed to?
Please select all options that apply.)**

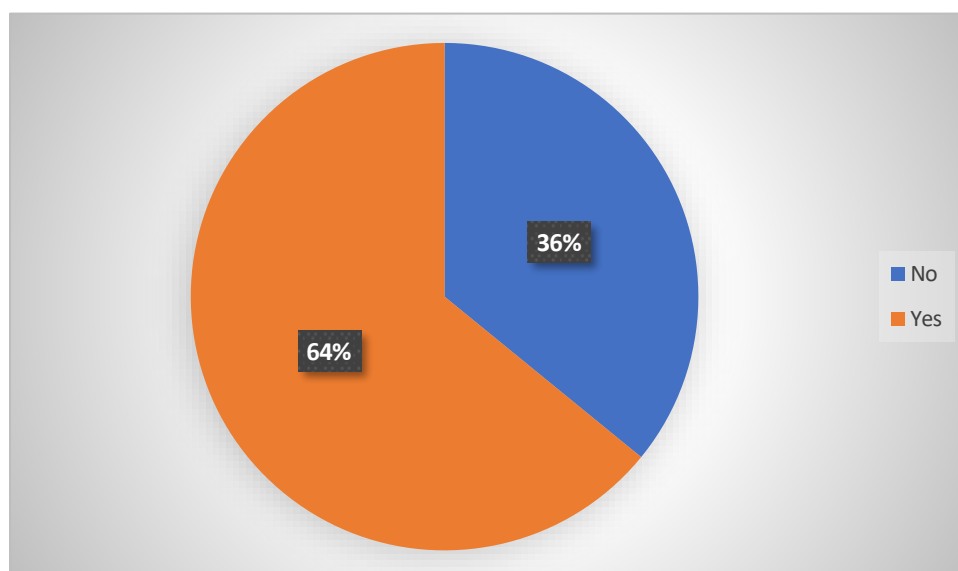
Option	Total	Percentage
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	3	5%
Chief Officers Terms and Conditions Committee	11	20%
Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee	6	11%
General Purposes and Arbitration Committee	5	9%
Governance and Constitution Review Committee	7	13%
Land and Asset Management Committee	4	7%
Licensing Committee	9	16%
Planning Committee	11	20%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 4: Have you been appointed by the Council to any Regional or Outside Bodies (for example, Strategic Waste Partnership Board, Scrutiny, Housing Association Boards)?

Option	Total	Percentage
No	14	36%
Yes	25	64%



Have you been appointed by the Council to any Regional or Outside Bodies (for example, Strategic Waste Partnership Board, Scrutiny, Housing Association Boards)? - Please list organisation(s) and role(s) below.

Harborne Parish

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

ADASS member HWBB regional

HWBB WMCA member

West Bromwich town deal board member

West Midlands Pensions Authority Board

Harborne Parish Council (now a housing association).

WM Police and Crime Panel

Scrutiny - Neighbourhoods.

West Midlands Combined Authority - Overview and Scrutiny Committee

West Midlands Scrutiny Network

Akrill Homes Trust

WMCA Housing and Land Delivery Board West Bromwich Town
Funds Board

Strategic Waste partnership board, Rowley Town board, West Midlands Transport

Waste Partnership

Airport Consultative Committee WMCA Economic Growth Board

Joint Health overview and scrutiny committee

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Local government general assembly SIGOMA Association of Black Country Associations West Midlands Rail West Midlands airport Contract management Board WMCA Board Growth Company
S.I. P's Board
Joint health and adult scrutiny Board with Birmingham council
Police and Crime commissioner Panel
Strategic Waste Partnership Board
West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner's Panel (as named substitute member)
Equality Commission Strategic Waste Board West Bromwich Partnership Land and Asset Committee Member
Barlow homes trust
West Midlands fire and rescue authority
SMBC INCLUSIVE ECONOMY & COMMUNITY WEALTH BOARD - Member ROWLEY REGIS TOWN DEAL BOARD – Member SMETHWICK TOWN DEAL BOARD - Member WEST BROMWICH TOWN DEAL BOARD – Member WEDNESBURY LEVELLING UP PARTNERSHIP BOARD – Member WEST BROMWICH TOWN BID BOARD - Council Nominee REGIONAL BLACK COUNTRY EXECUTIVE JOINT COMMITTEE – Substitute Member WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY (WMCA) BOARD – Substitute Member WMCA ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY BOARD - Member WMCA INVESTMENT BOARD - Member WMCA ENERGY CAPITAL BOARD - Member WMCA STRATEGIC TRANSPORT BOARD - Member WEST MIDLANDS RAIL EXECUTIVE BOARD LTD. – Company Director NATIONAL PATROL ADJUDICATION JOINT COMMITTEE (PARKING & TRAFFIC REGULATIONS OUTSIDE LONDON) – Substitute Member
Leonard Andrews Poole Trustee,
Health and well-being Board Corporate Parenting Board children's scrutiny Budget and Corporate scrutiny
West Midlands Combined Authority West Midlands Police and Crime Panel
West Midlands Combined Authority Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 5: If you are a member of, or have been appointed to any other organisation (s), please list organisation(s) and role(s) below. (For example, school governors, charities.)

If you are a member of or have been appointed to any other organisation (s), please list organisation(s) and role(s) below. (For example, school governors, charities.)
West Midlands fire. Governor at Birmingham women's and children's hospital NHS foundation trust
Action Yemen Charity
Tanhouse Community Centre Management Committee
N/A
Mackmillan Education Foundation
none
School governor - Perry fields Academy, National Committee (trustee) - Fabian Society
School Governor - Primary School. Mackmillan Educational Foundation - Trustee.
Two local charities.
N. A
none
Hateley Cross Big Local - Steering group member; Sandwell Litter Watch - member
N/A
None
Trustee of Spays 4 Strays
Board of governors at high school
None
Better Understanding of Dementia, (BUDS), Warley Woods Community Trust
Leonard Poole's trust trustee and Barlow Homes board member
Mackmillan Trust, Dudley Kidney Patients Association, LAKSH community group
member
none
Millennium Centre
No
None
None
None
Independent Governor of Sandwell College and Governor of Galton Valley Primary School
None
School governor
School Governor and STEPs Board Member
Tenant and leaseholder's scrutiny group
NA
WEDNESBURY RUGBY UNION FOOTBALL CLUB - LIFE MEMBER/DISCIPLINARY SECRETARY; ROTARY CLUB OF WEDNESBURY - JUNIOR PRESIDENT/FELLOWSHIP OFFICER/FOUNDATION OFFICER; MID COUNTIES CO-OPERATIVE - MEMBER; UNISON TRADE UNION – RETIRED MEMBER; LABOUR HOUSING GROUP [LHG] - MEMBER; CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING – ASSOCIATE MEMBER; BLACK COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP NHS FOUNDATION TRUST – PUBLIC MEMBER; BIRMINGHAM & BLACK COUNTRY WILDLIFE TRUST – INDIVIDUAL MEMBER; FRIENDS OF TENACRE WOOD - MEMBER; FRIENDS OF

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

WOOD GREEN CEMETERY - CHAIR; ROYAL BRITISH LEGION - MEMBER; SPIRES HEALTH CENTRE PATIENT PARTICIPATION GROUP - MEMBER

Rotary Club, fellowship world over, service before self, part of events co-ordinating

None

Cape Primary School - School Governor

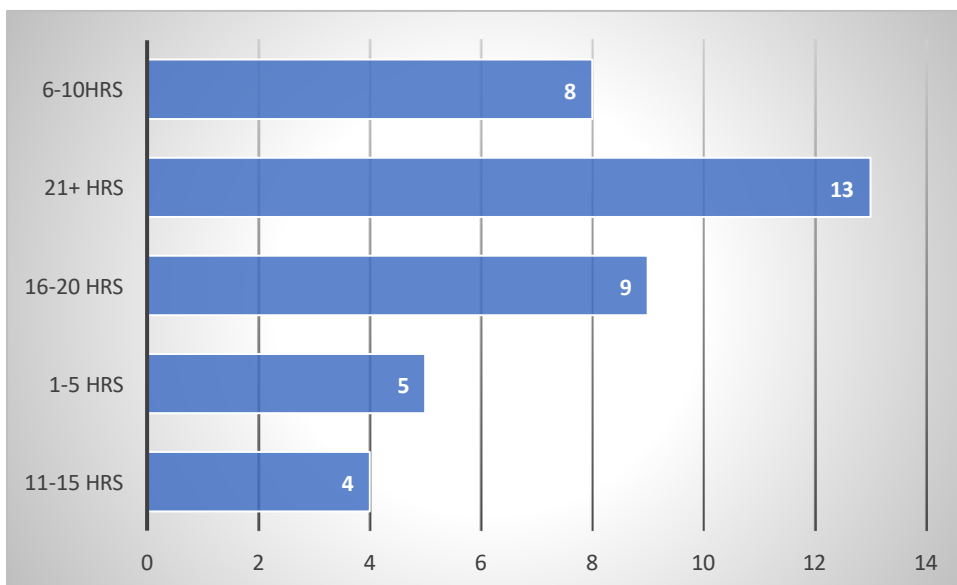
Akrill Trust

Chair of Governor's. West Bromwich Town Fund Board. Sandwell Business Ambassadors. Sandwell Children's Trust Board member

Question 6: On average, how many hours per month do you spend on council, region and political business?

Attendance at Council Committees (such as Planning, scrutiny)

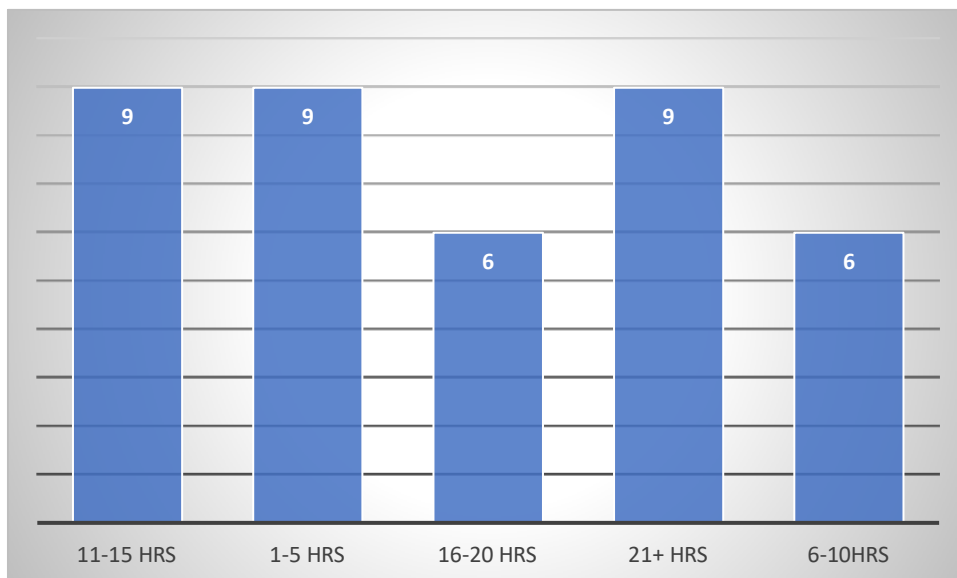
Option	Total	Percentage
11-15 hrs	4	10%
1-5 hrs	5	13%
16-20 hrs	9	23%
21+ hrs	13	33%
6-10hrs	8	21%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

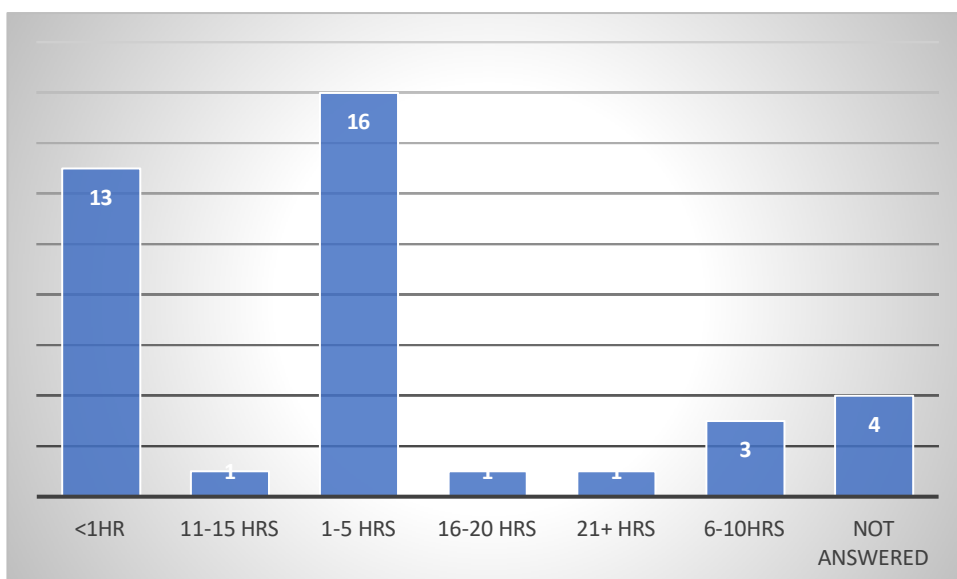
Attendance at other Council meetings (such as meetings with officers)

Option	Total	Percentage
11-15 hrs	9	23%
1-5 hrs	9	23%
16-20 hrs	6	15%
21+ hrs	9	23%
6-10hrs	6	15%



Attendance at Regional, Local Government Association (LGA) or WMCA meetings or activities

Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	13	33%
11-15 hrs	1	3%
1-5 hrs	16	41%
16-20 hrs	1	3%



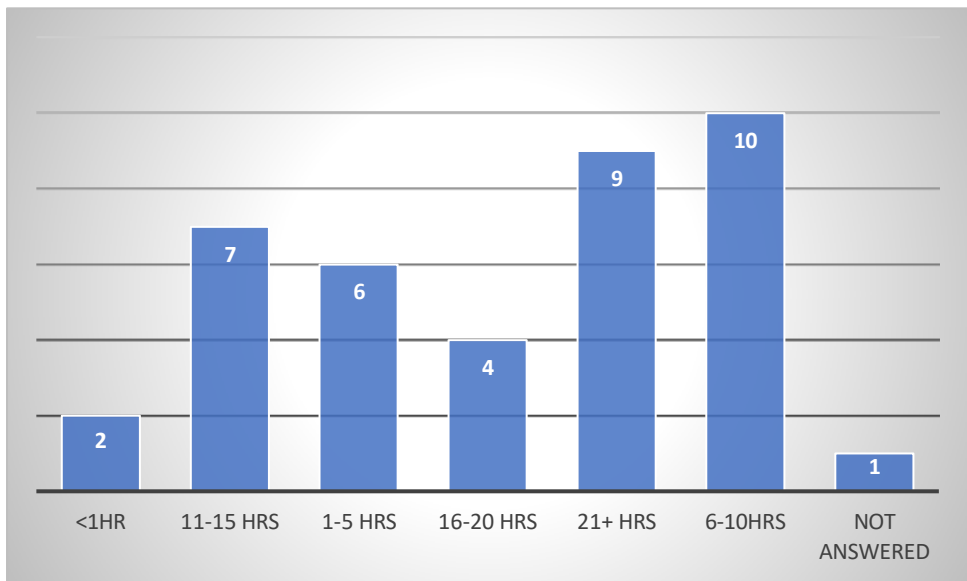
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

21+ hrs	1	3%
6-10hrs	3	8%
Not Answered	4	10%

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

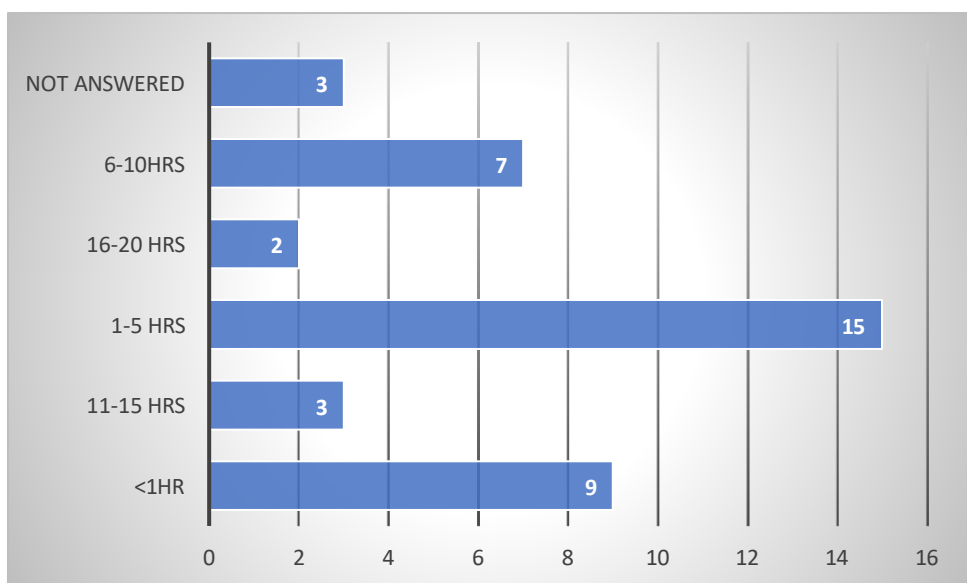
Time spent on party or political business

Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	2	5%
11-15 hrs	7	18%
1-5 hrs	6	15%
16-20 hrs	4	10%
21+ hrs	9	23%
6-10hrs	10	26%
Not Answered	1	3%



Attendance at outside bodies

Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	9	23%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
1-5 hrs	15	38%
16-20 hrs	2	5%



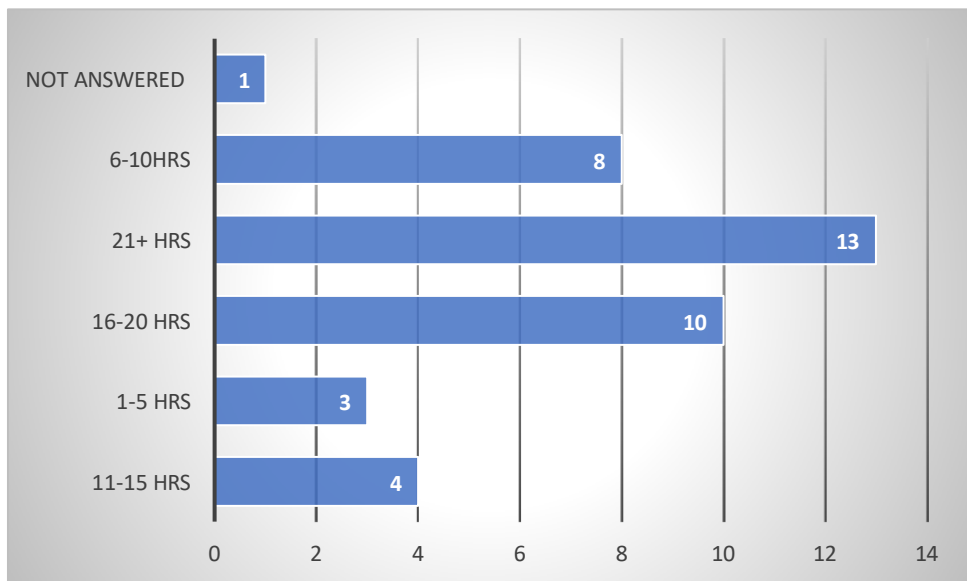
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

21+ hrs	7	18%
6-10hrs	3	8%
Not Answered	9	23%

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

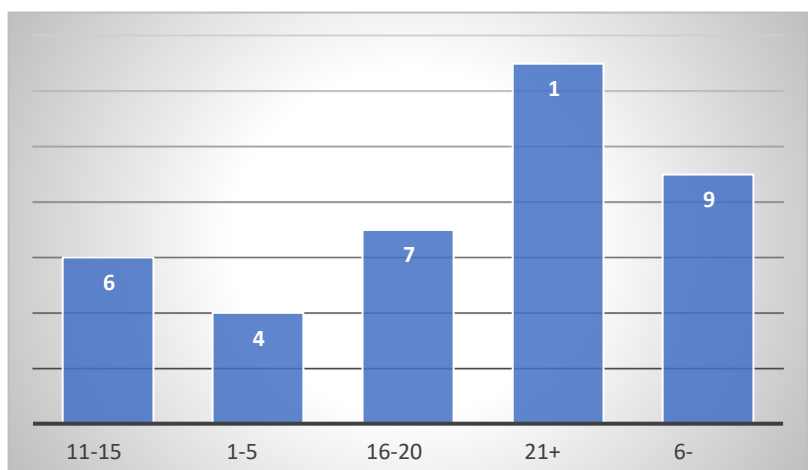
Community commitments and representation (for example, community engagement such as surgeries, street surgeries, home visits, walkabouts, phone calls etc)

Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	4	10%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
1-5 hrs	10	26%
16-20 hrs	13	33%
21+ hrs	8	21%
6-10hrs	1	3%
Not Answered	4	10%



Casework and advice

Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	6	15%
11-15 hrs	4	10%
1-5 hrs	7	18%
16-20 hrs	13	33%
21+ hrs	9	23%
6-10hrs	6	15%

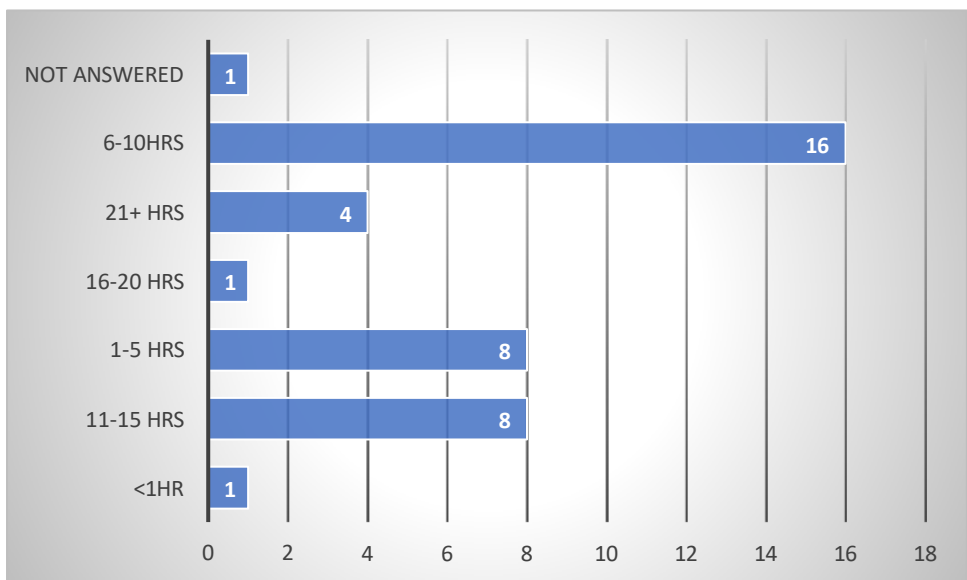


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Not Answered	4	10%
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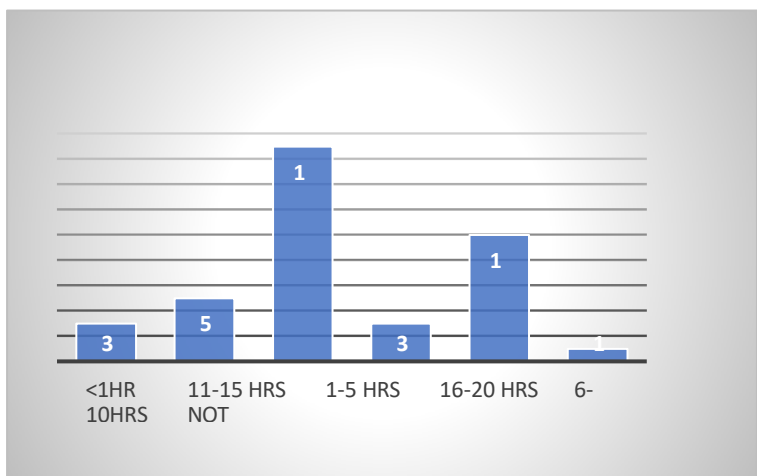
Preparing for meetings

Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	1	3%
11-15 hrs	8	21%
1-5 hrs	8	21%
16-20 hrs	1	3%
21+ hrs	4	10%
6-10hrs	16	41%
Not Answered	1	3%



Training, awareness and development

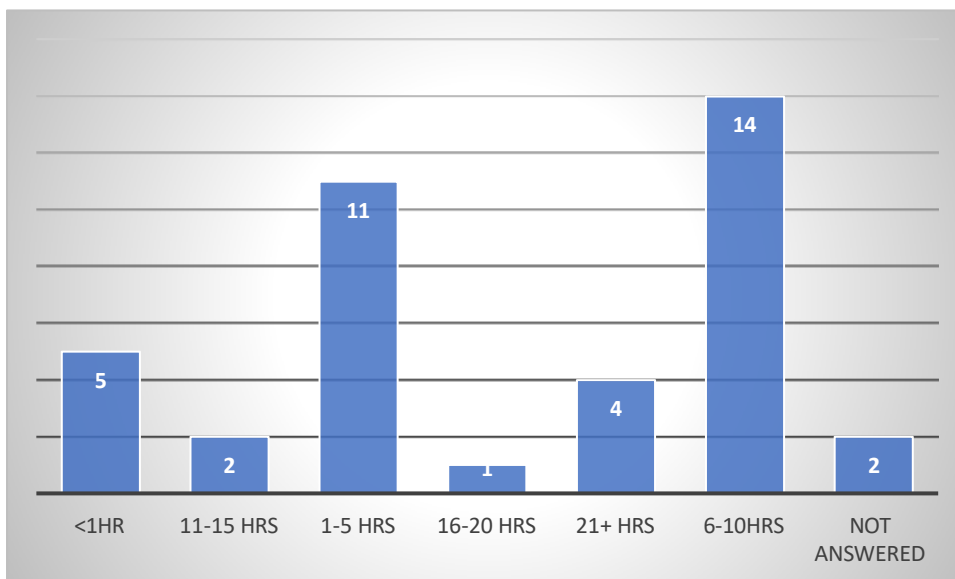
Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	3	8%
11-15 hrs	5	13%
1-5 hrs	17	44%
16-20 hrs	3	8%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

21+ hrs	10	26%
6-10hrs	1	3%
Not Answered	3	8%

Publishing information on social media and communications with residents

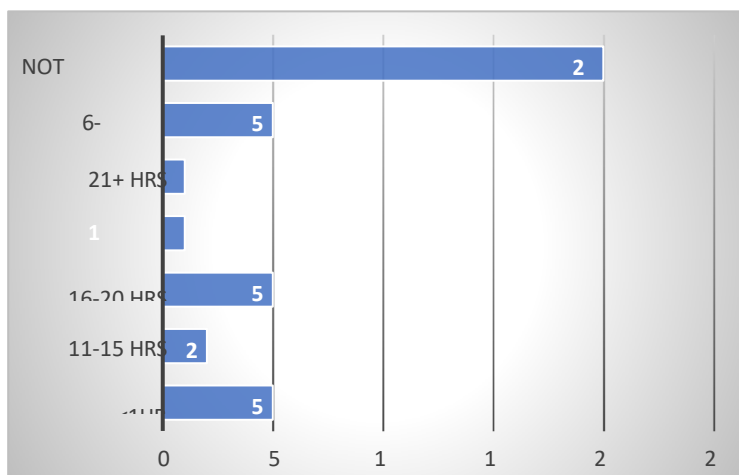


Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	5	13%
11-15 hrs	2	5%
1-5 hrs	11	28%
16-20 hrs	1	3%
21+ hrs	4	10%
6-10hrs	14	36%
Not Answered	2	5%

Other

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Option	Total	Percentage
<1hr	5	13%
11-15 hrs	2	5%
1-5 hrs	5	13%
16-20 hrs	1	3%
21+ hrs	1	3%
6-10hrs	5	13%
Not Answered	20	51%



On average, how many hours per month do you spend on council, region and political business? - Please give details of any other council activities to assist our understanding

As a member of the Armed Forces committee I regularly attend local veteran associations

Chasing unresolved casework, collaboration with community working groups, planning community engagement workshops

I regularly have meetings with local residents. I take on casework for other councillors. Also, I volunteer with the mums and tots club at my local church.

Helping out at local charities with my councillor hat on if needed.

Meetings with cabinet members, chief officers and officers of the Council. Also walkabouts and ward meetings.

Deputy mayor events

My contact and casework are direct with residents, face to face meetings, conversations, being present in the ward

(Please note I had to select an option on Q3 to continue with the completion of the Survey - I was not a member of the Ethical Standards Committee)

Home visits 20 hrs per week

Volunteering

ATTENDING COMMUNITY EVENTS/PHOTOCALLS ETC.

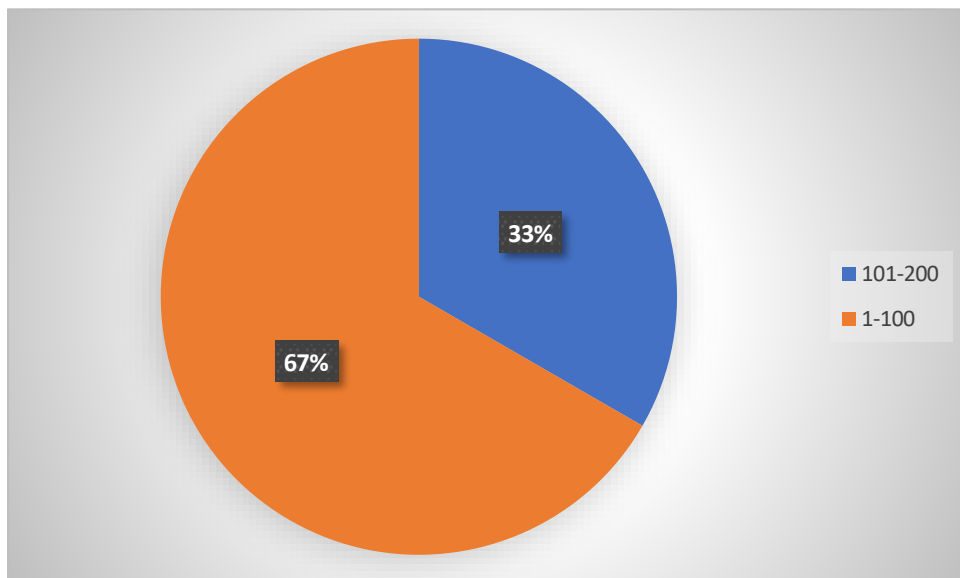
community events representation

Ward Walkabout. Meeting new businesses in Sandwell due to my role

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 7: On average, how many issues do you deal with from local residents each month? Issues may include emails from residents, social media queries, phone calls, matters raised at surgery or during walkabouts in your ward. If you are dealing with a whole ward issue affecting all residents, this would count as one issue even though understandably substantial.

Option	Total	Percentage
1-100	26	67%
101-200	13	33%
201-300	0	0%
301+	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%

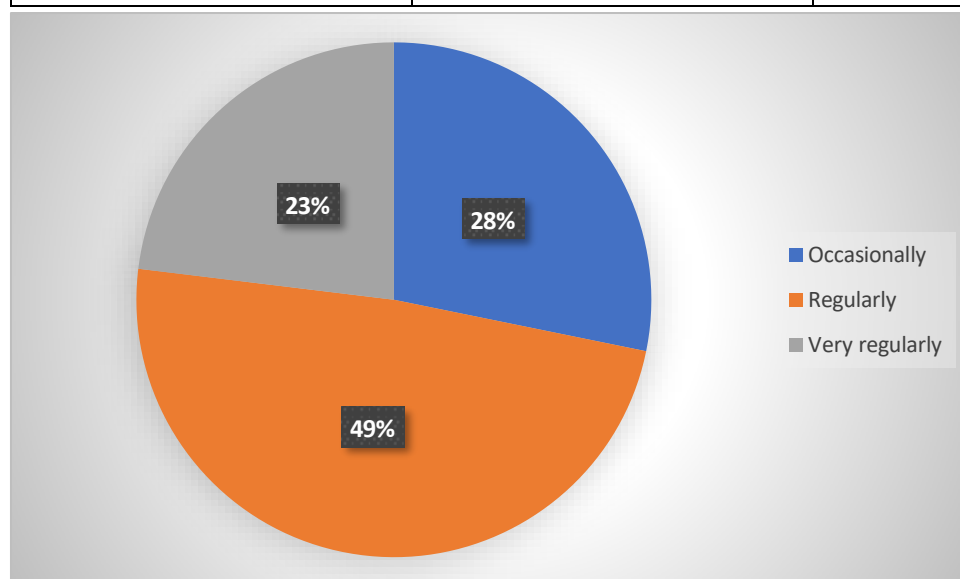


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 8: What types of casework issues do you typically deal with? (Please categorise each option as appropriate and tell us about any other issues below.)

Income and benefits issues

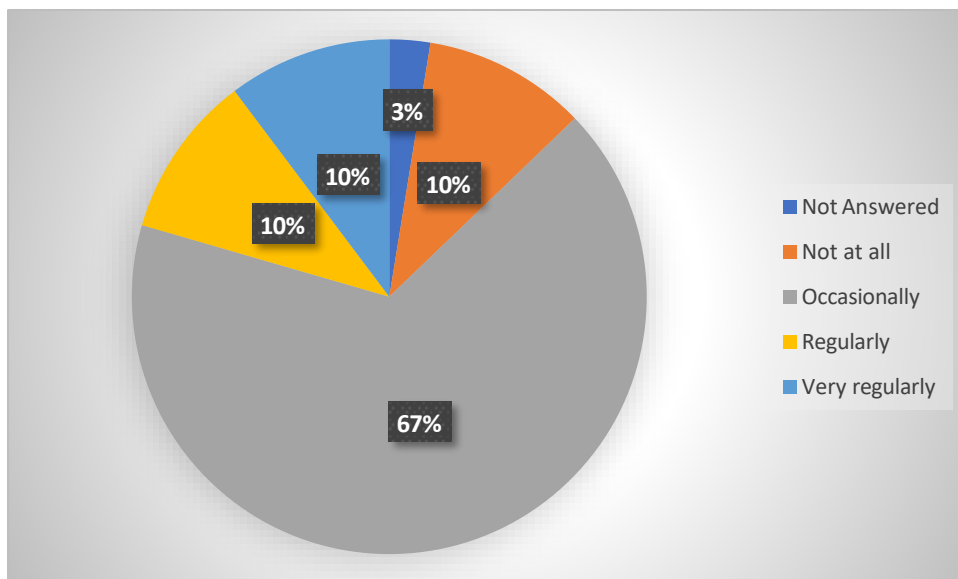
Option	Total	Percentage
Very regularly	9	23%
Regularly	19	49%
Occasionally	11	28%
Not at all	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%



Employment issues

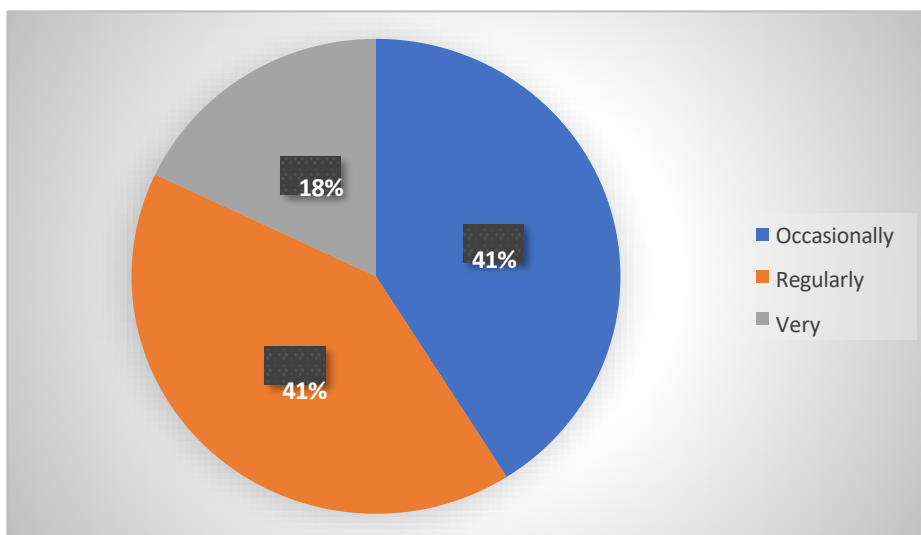
Option	Total	Percentage
Very regularly	1	3%
Regularly	4	10%
Occasionally	26	67%
Not at all	4	10%
Not Answered	4	10%

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Schools and education

Option	Total	Percentage
Very regularly	7	18%
Regularly	16	41%
Occasionally	16	41%
Not at all	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%

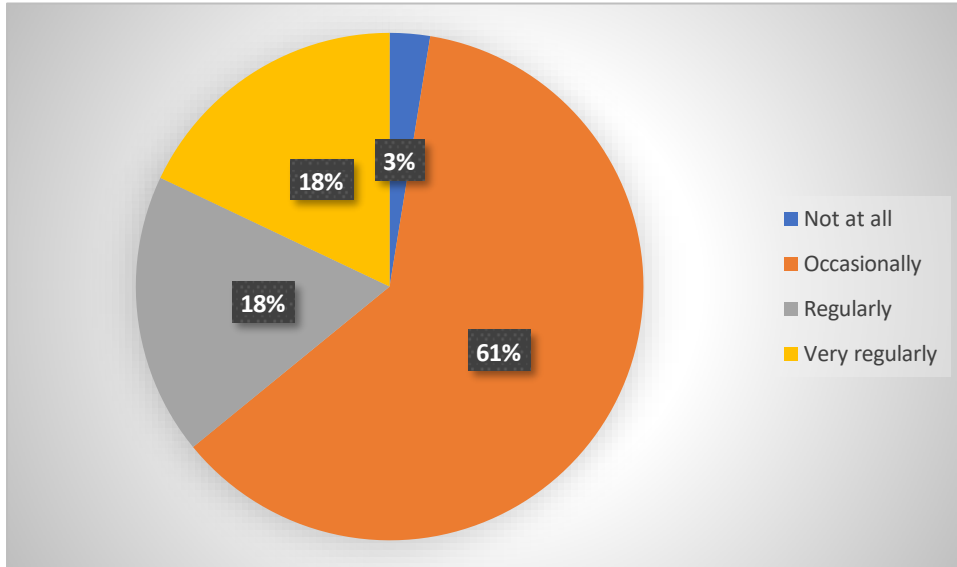


Children's social care

Option	Total	Percentage
Very regularly	7	18%

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

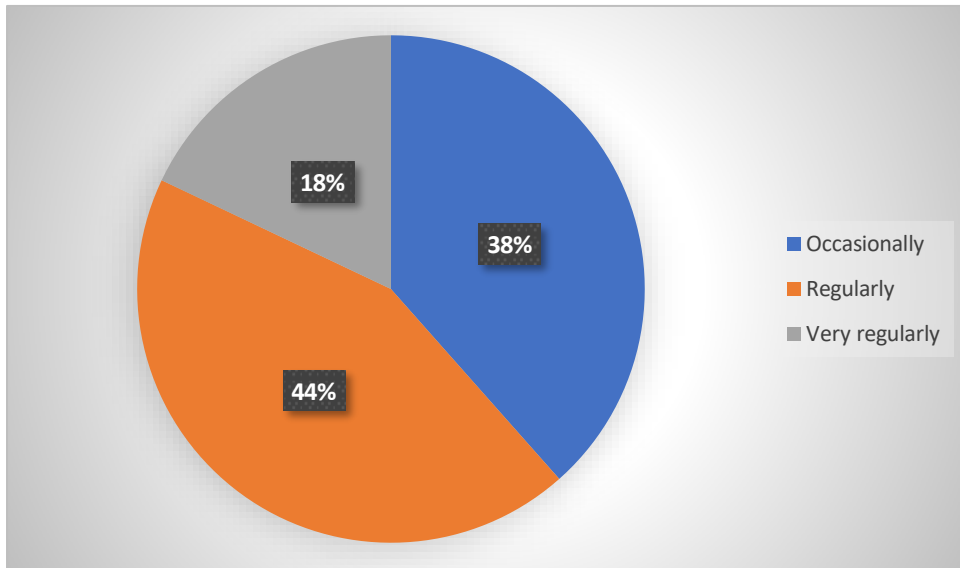
Regularly	7	18%
Occasionally	24	61%
Not at all	1	2%
Not Answered	0	0%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Adults' social care

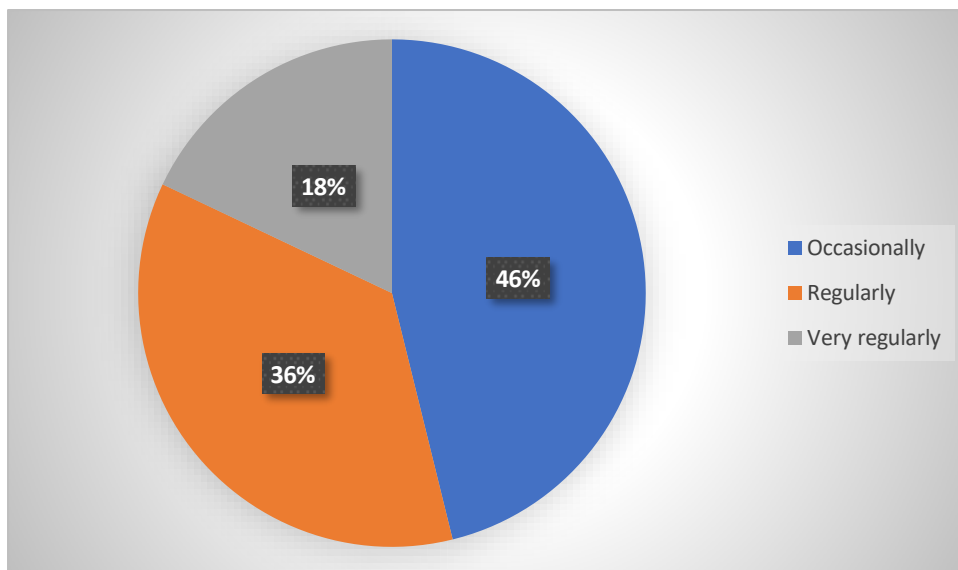
Option	Total	Percentage
Very regularly	7	18%
Regularly	17	44%
Occasionally	15	38%
Not at all	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Mental health issues and support

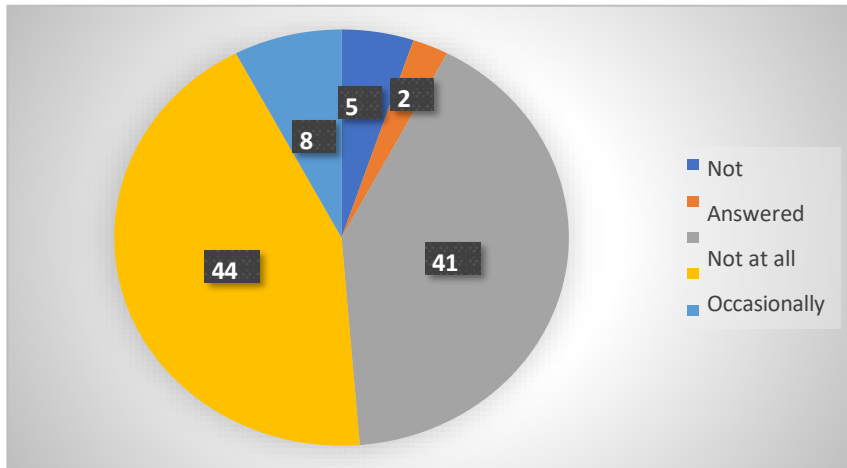
Option	Total	Percentage
Very regularly	7	18%
Regularly	14	36%
Occasionally	18	46%
Not at all	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%



Physical health issues and support

Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	2	5%
Not at all	1	3%
Occasionally	16	41%
Regularly	17	44%
Very regularly	3	8%

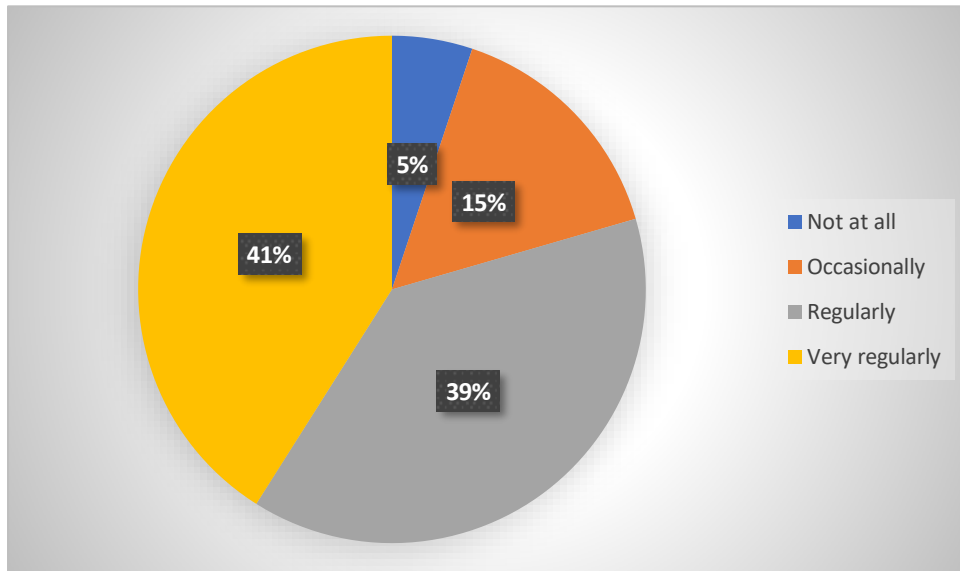
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Homelessness

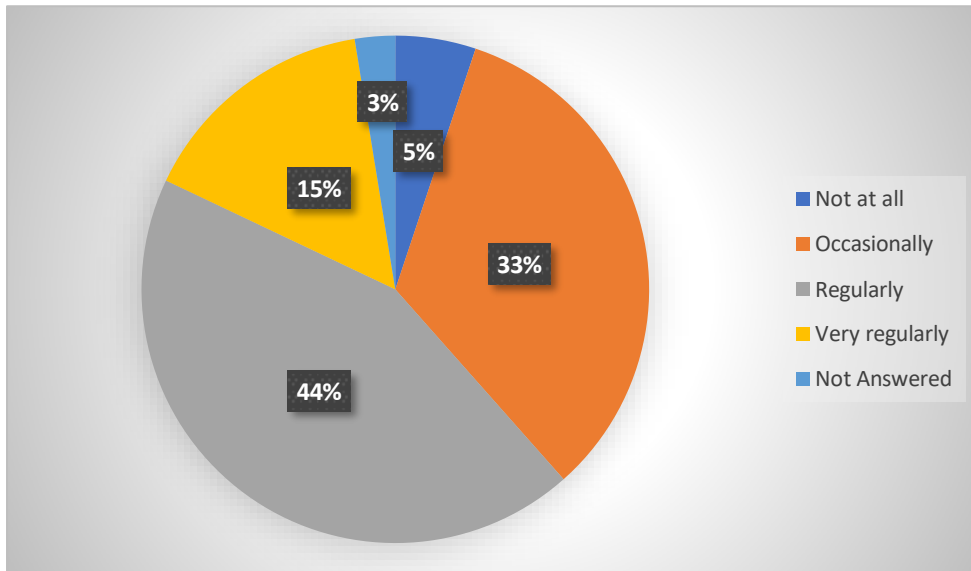
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	2	5%
Occasionally	6	15%
Regularly	15	38%
Very regularly	16	41%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Planning issues (for example, applications, objections, disputes)

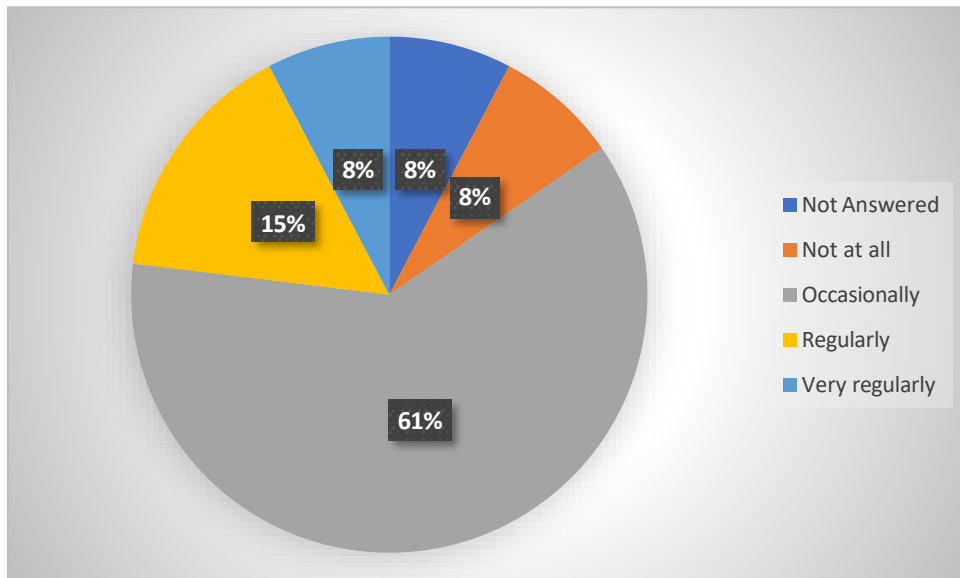
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	1	3%
Not at all	2	5%
Occasionally	13	33%
Regularly	17	44%
Very regularly	16	15%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Licensing issues (for example, complaints over applications)

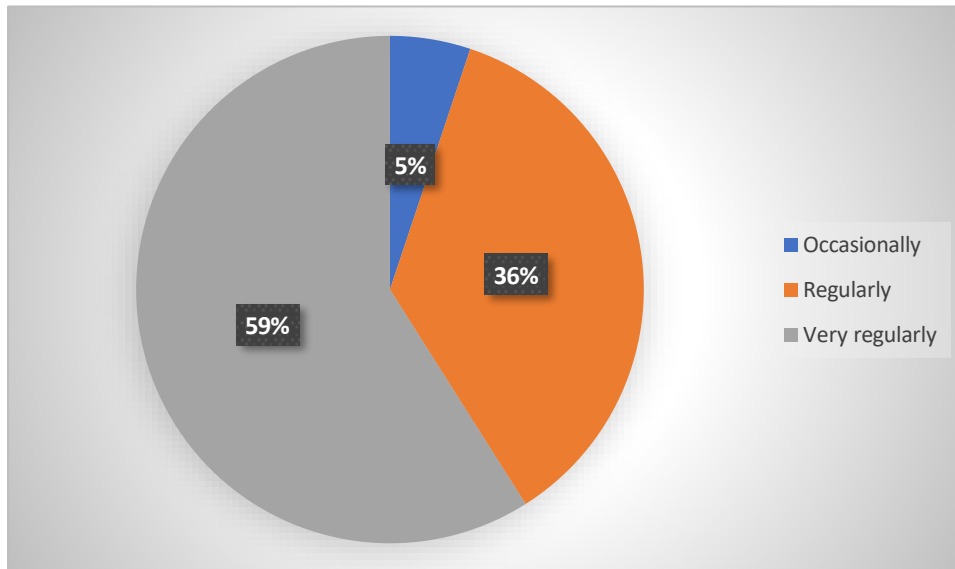
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	3	8%
Not at all	3	8%
Occasionally	24	62%
Regularly	6	15%
Very regularly	3	8%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Highways complaints (for example, road maintenance)

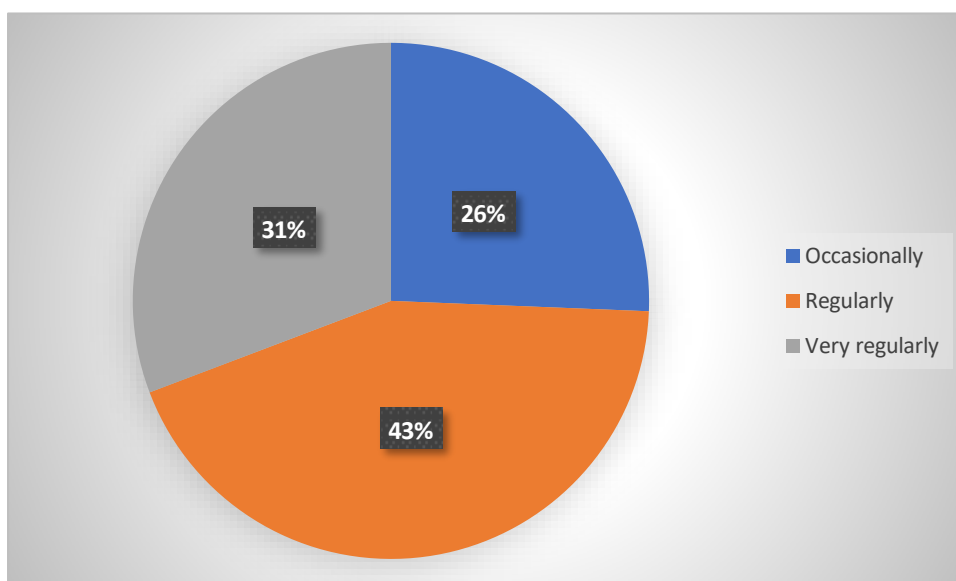
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%
Occasionally	2	5%
Regularly	14	36%
Very regularly	23	59%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Home waste and recycling collections

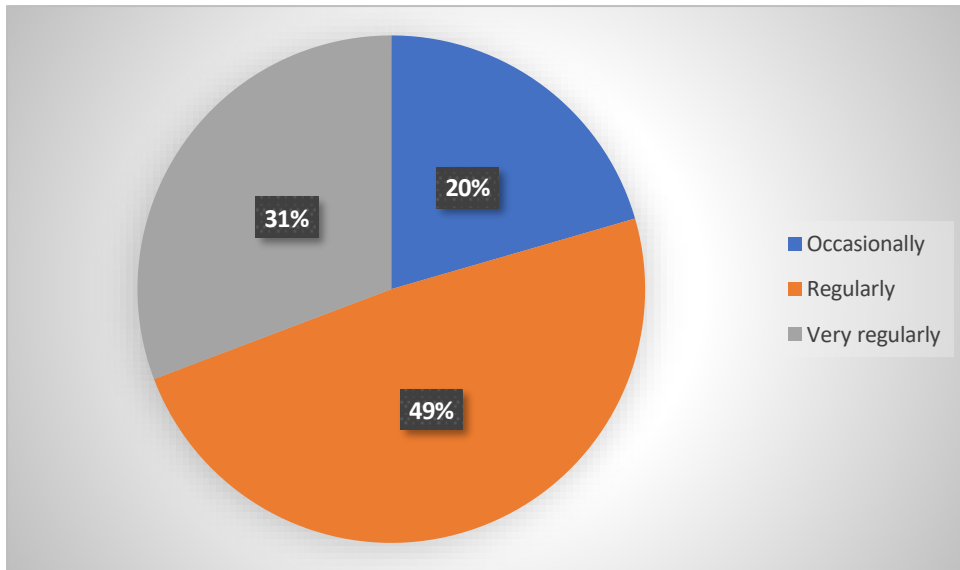
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%
Occasionally	10	26%
Regularly	17	44%
Very regularly	12	31%



Street waste and recycling

Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%
Occasionally	8	20%
Regularly	19	49%
Very regularly	12	31%

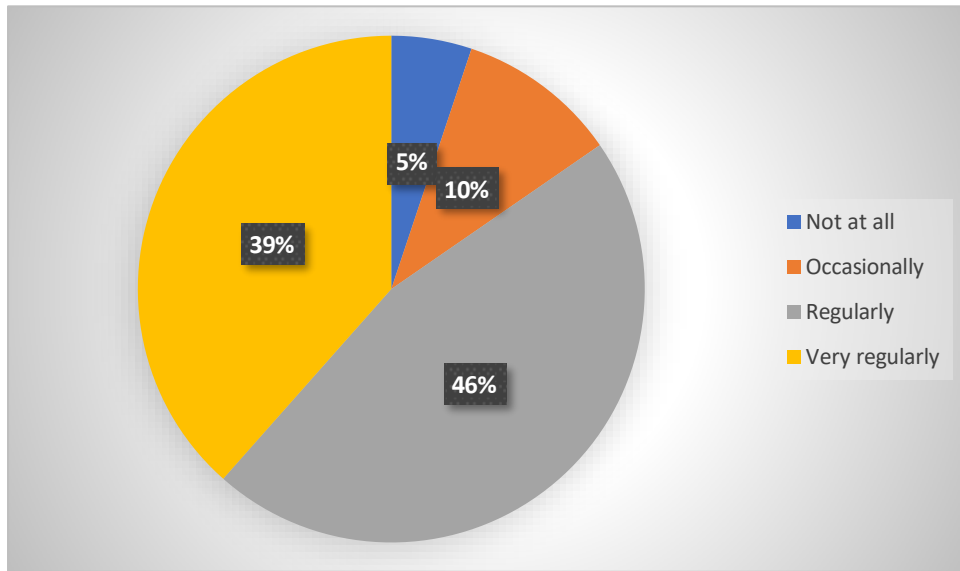
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Illegal dumping

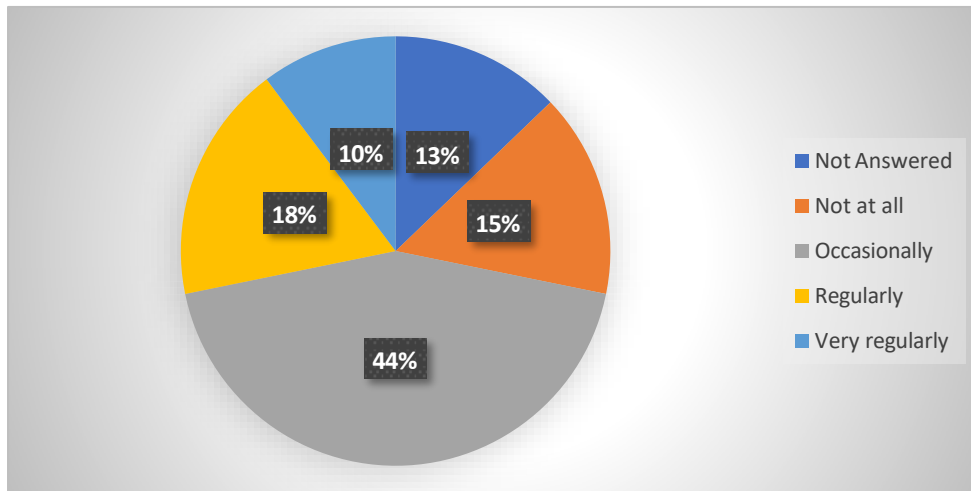
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	2	5%
Occasionally	4	10%
Regularly	18	46%
Very regularly	15	39%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Alley gates

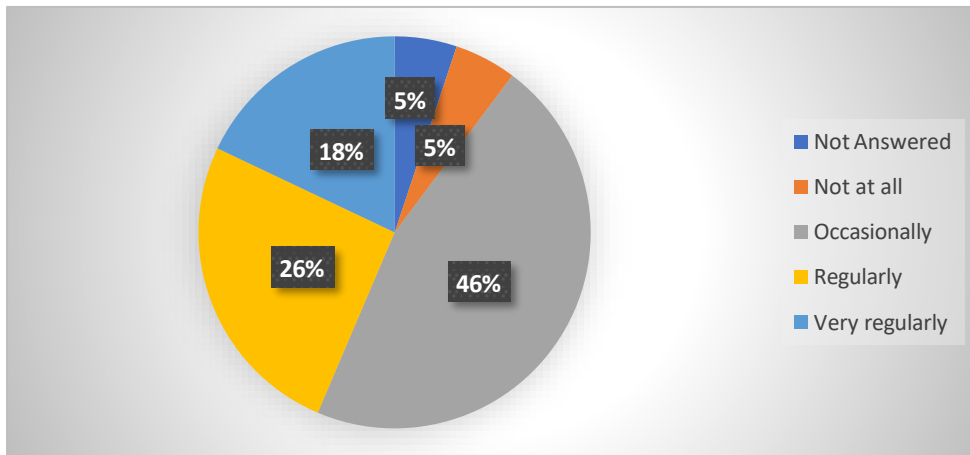
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	5	13%
Not at all	6	15%
Occasionally	17	44%
Regularly	7	18%
Very regularly	4	10%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

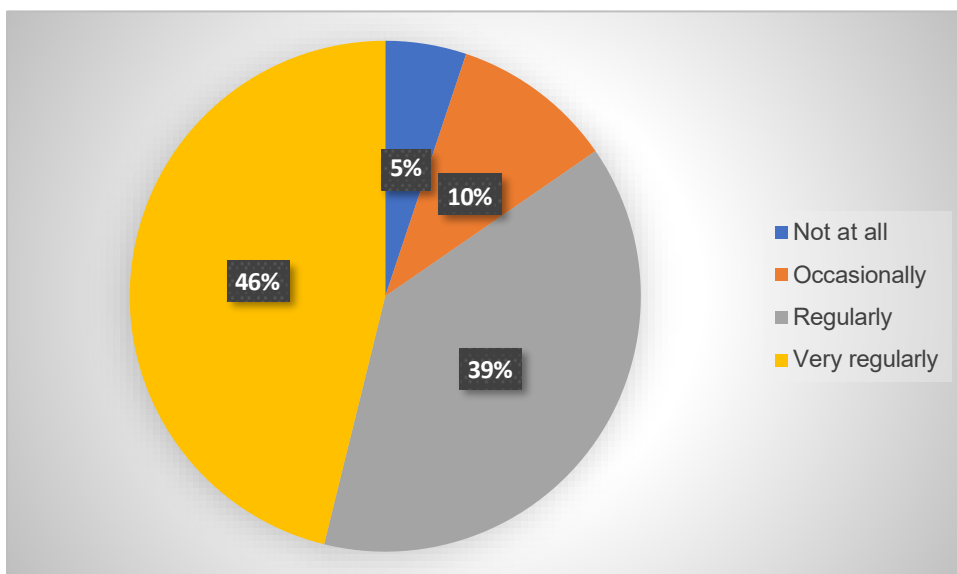
Streetlights

Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	2	5%
Not at all	2	5%
Occasionally	18	46%
Regularly	10	26%
Very regularly	7	18%



Parking problems

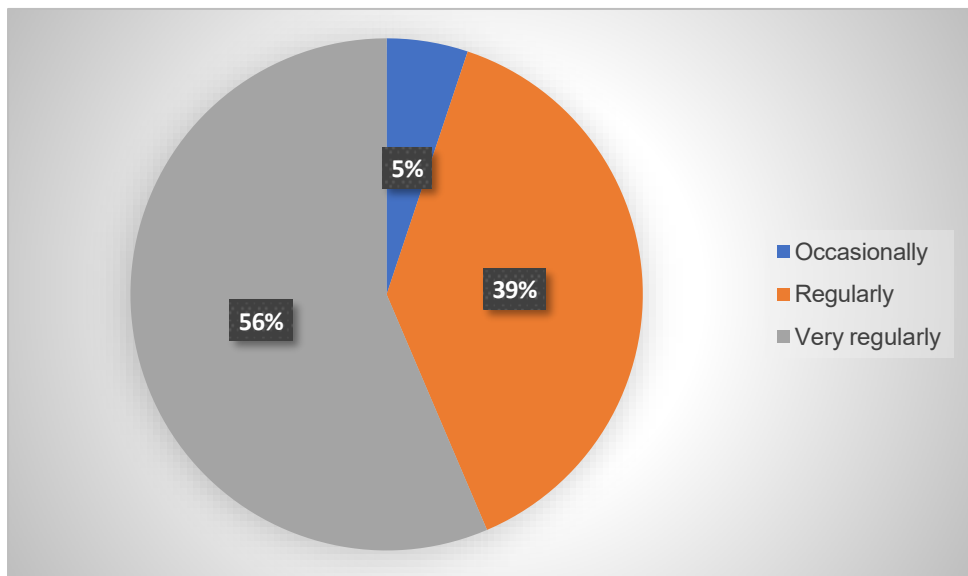
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	5%
Not at all	2	5%
Occasionally	4	10%
Regularly	15	38%
Very regularly	18	46%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Anti-social behaviour

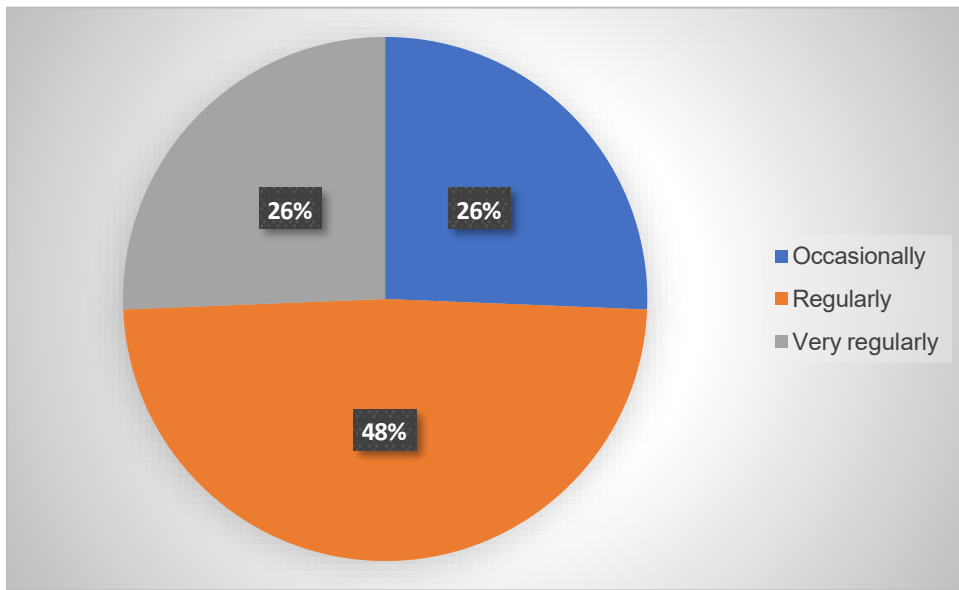
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	5%
Not at all	0	5%
Occasionally	2	5%
Regularly	15	39%
Very regularly	22	56%



Noise and nuisance issues

Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%
Occasionally	10	26%
Regularly	19	48%
Very regularly	10	26%

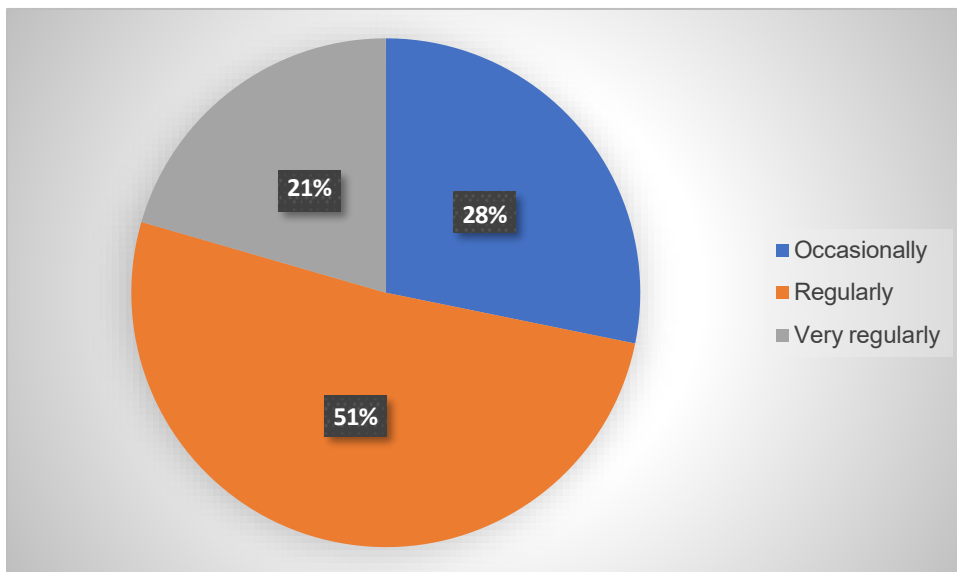
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Parks and greenspace issues

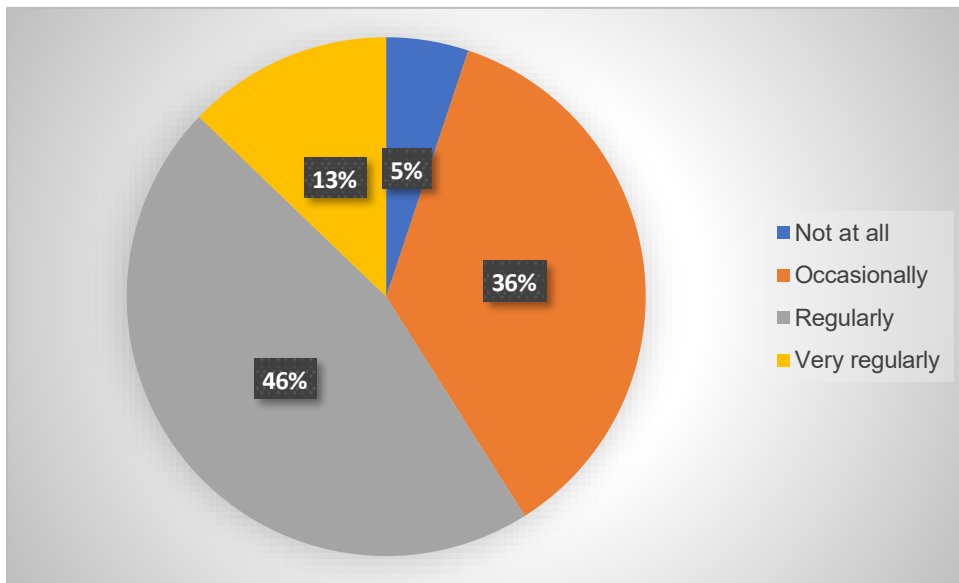
Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%
Occasionally	11	28%
Regularly	20	51%
Very regularly	8	21%



Verge cutting and leaf collection

Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	0	0%
Not at all	2	5%
Occasionally	14	36%
Regularly	18	46%
Very regularly	5	13%

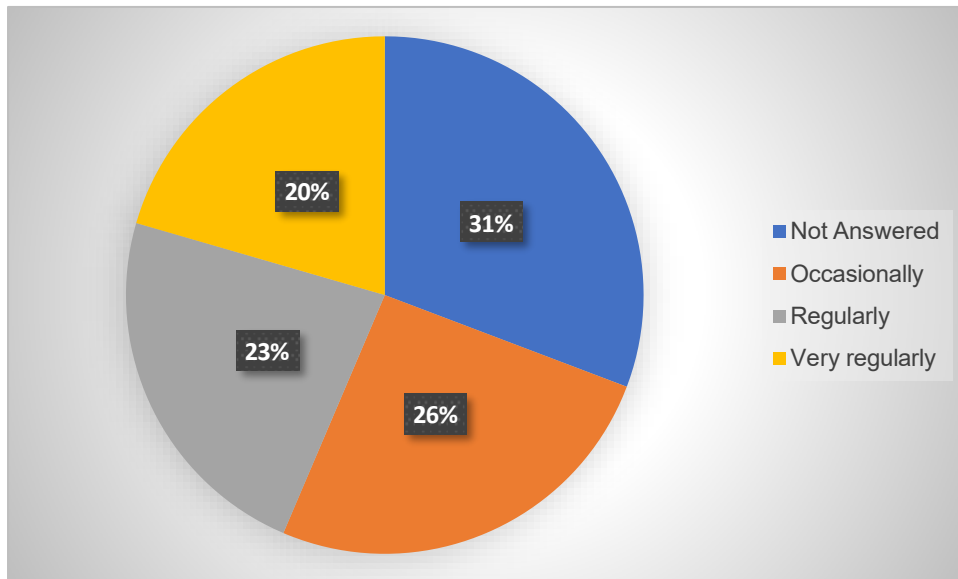
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Other

Option	Total	Percentage
Not Answered	12	31%
Not at all	0	0%
Occasionally	10	26%
Regularly	9	23%
Very regularly	8	21%

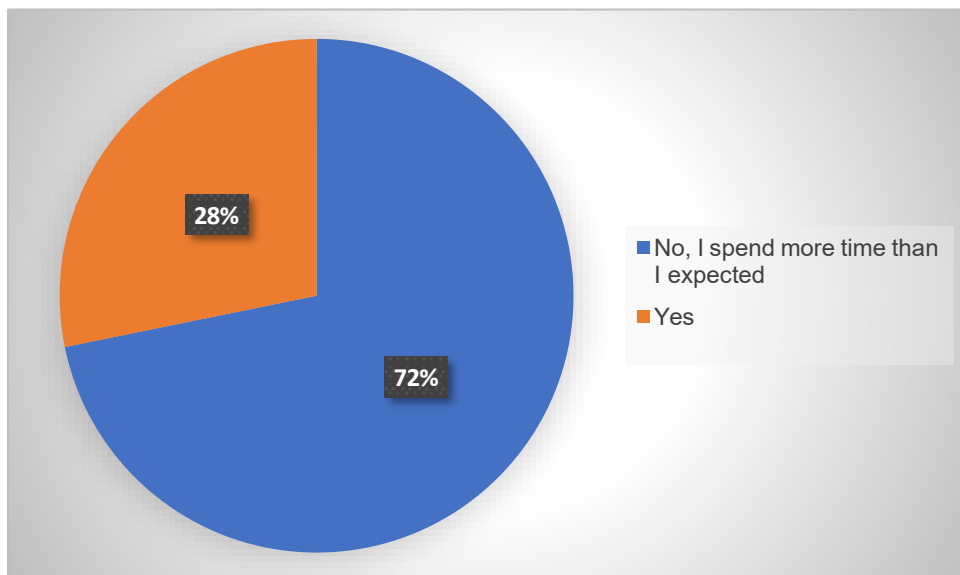


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 9: Based on your experience, is the time you spend on Council work each week what you expected when you first agreed to stand for Election?

Based on your experience, is the time you spend on Council work each week what you expected when you first agreed to stand for Election?

Option	Total	Percentage
Yes	11	28%
No, I spend more time than I expected	28	72%
No, I spend less time than I expected	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%

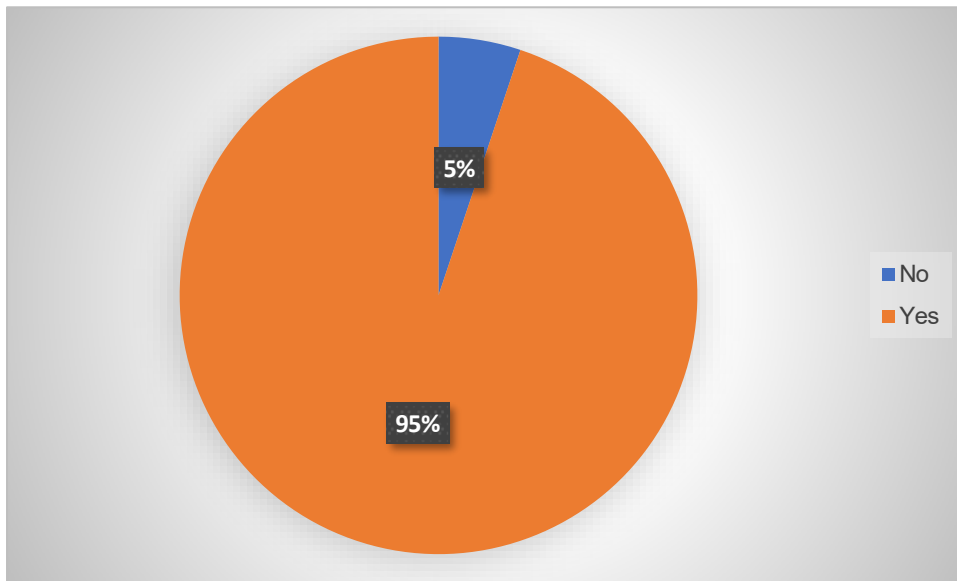


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 10: Has the time you spend on Council work increased since you were first elected?

Has the time you spend on Council work increased since you were first elected?

Option	Total	Percentage
Yes	37	95%
No	2	5%
Not Answered	0	0%

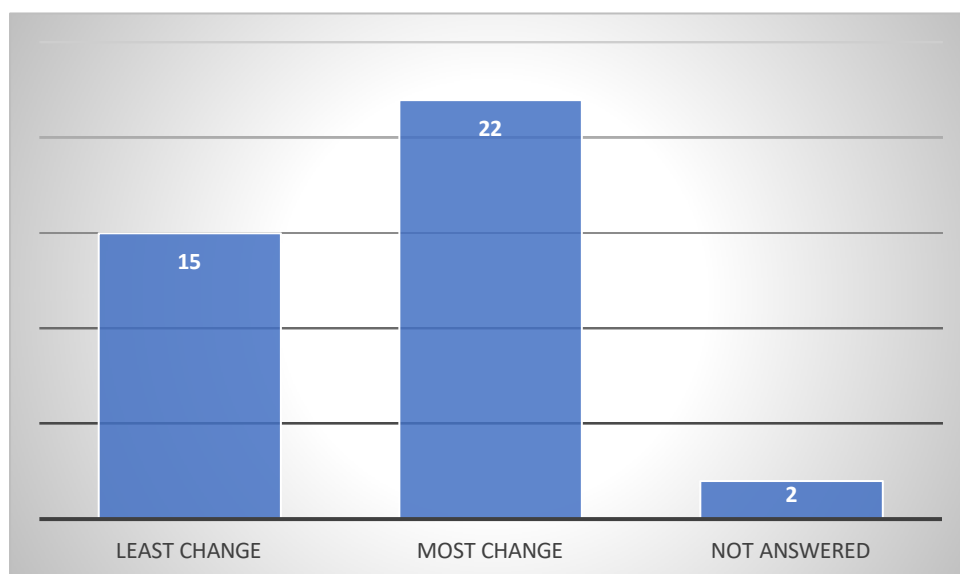


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 11: Which aspects of your role as an Elected Member have changed the most? (Please categorise each option as appropriate and tell us about any other aspects that have changed below.)

Attendance at Council Committees (such as Planning, Scrutiny)

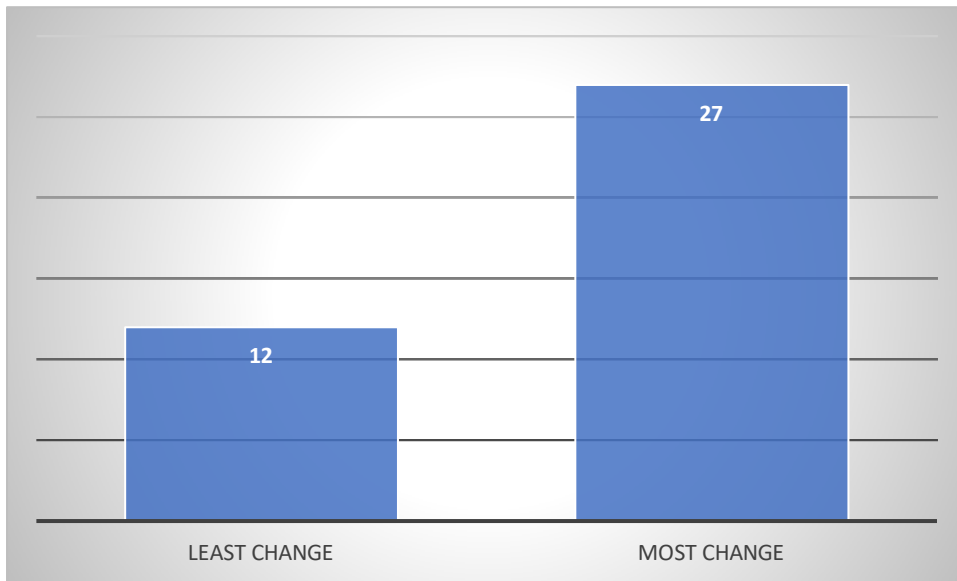
Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	15	39%
Most change	22	56%
Not Answered	2	5%



Attendance at other Council meetings (such as meetings with officers)

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	12	31%
Most change	27	69%
Not Answered	0	0%

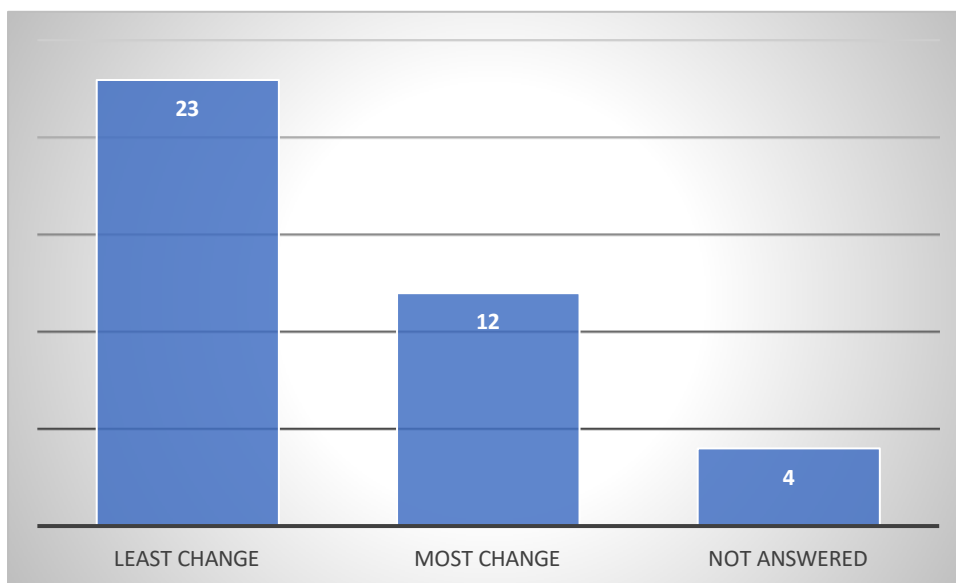
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Attendance at Regional, Local Government Association (LGA) or WMCA meetings or activities

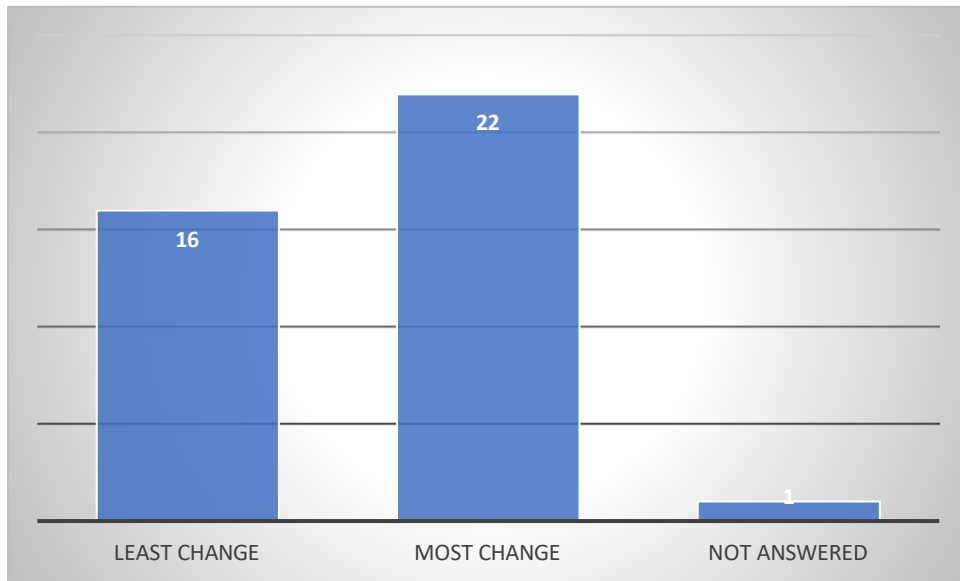
Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	23	59%
Most change	12	31%
Not Answered	4	10%



Time spent on party or political business

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	16	41%
Most change	22	56%
Not Answered	1	3%

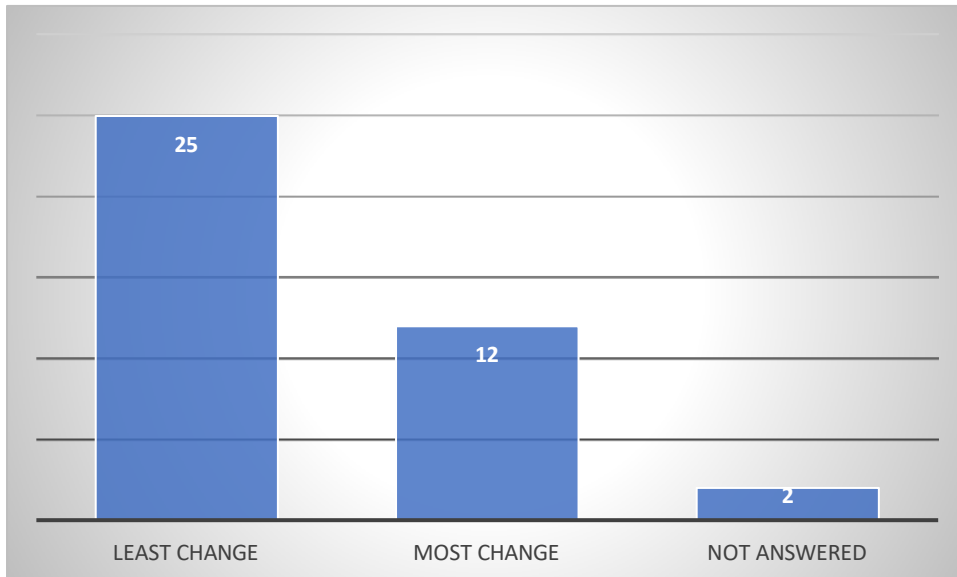
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

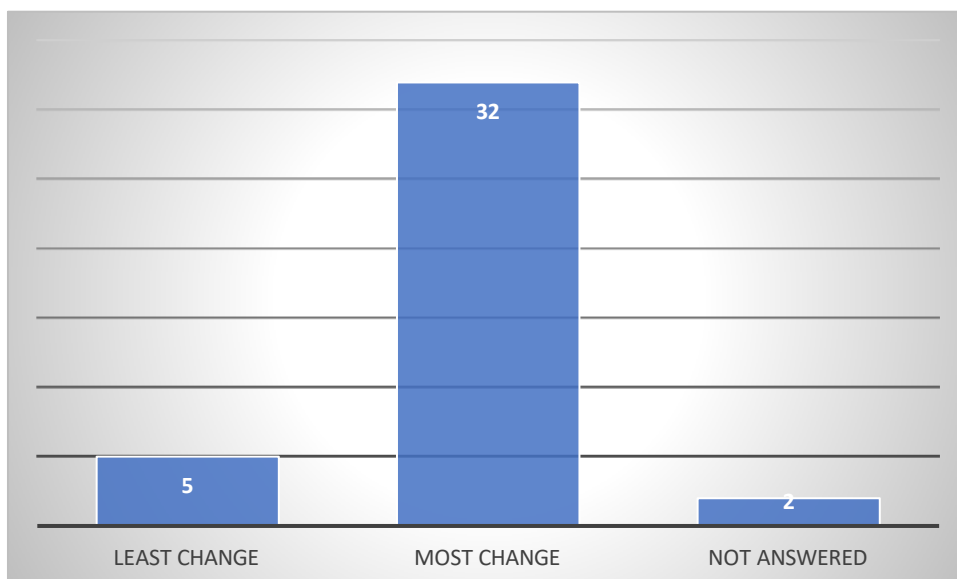
Attendance at outside bodies

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	25	64%
Most change	12	31%
Not Answered	2	5%



Community commitments and representation (for example, community engagement such as surgeries, street surgeries, home visits, walkabouts, phone calls etc.)

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	5	13%
Most change	32	82%

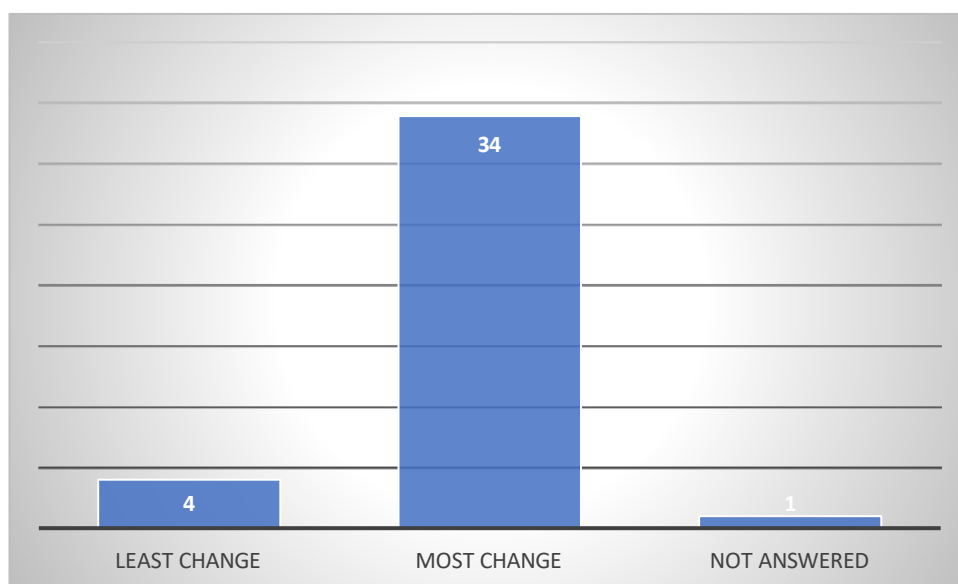


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Not Answered	2	5%
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Casework and advice

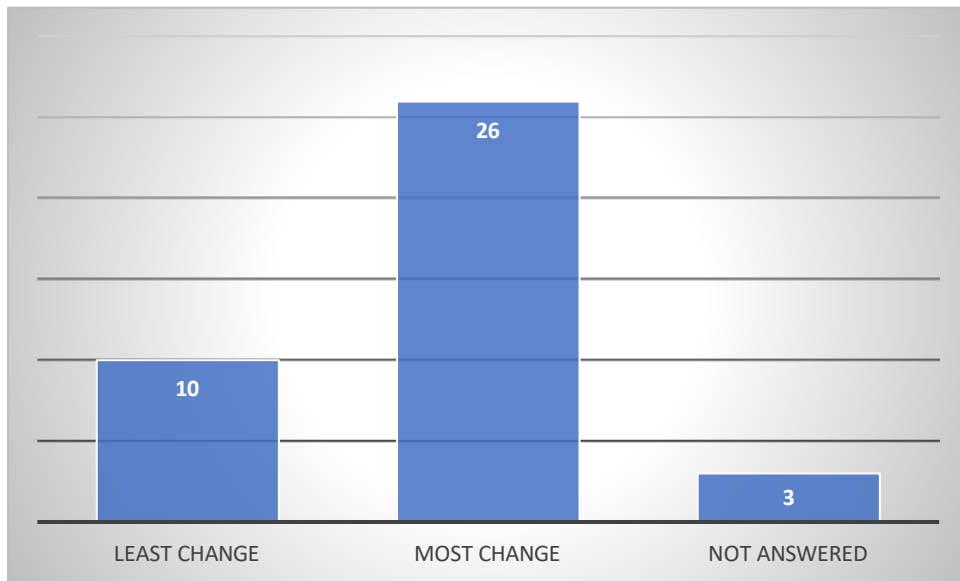
Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	4	10%
Most change	34	87%
Not Answered	1	3%



Preparing for meetings

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	10	26%
Most change	26	67%
Not Answered	3	8%

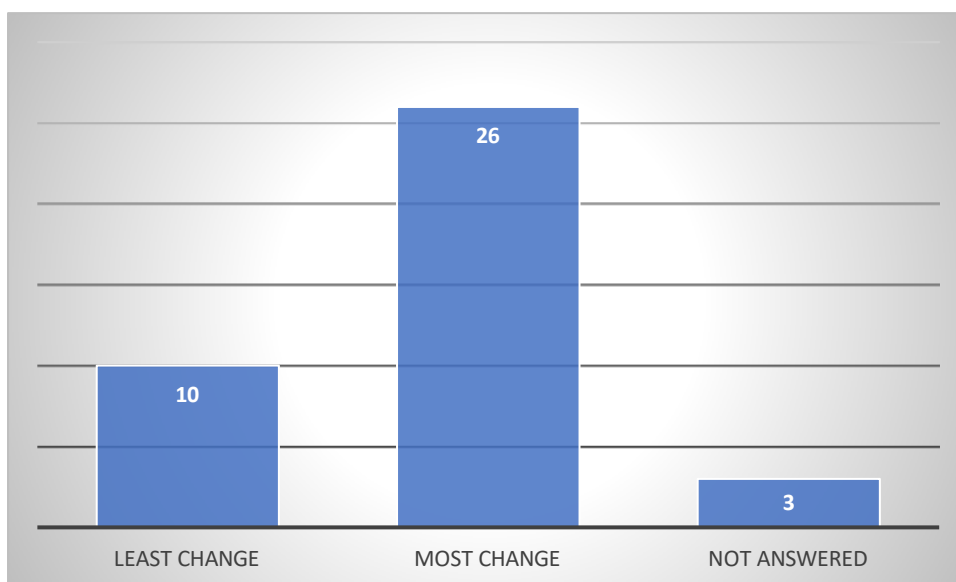
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Training, awareness and development

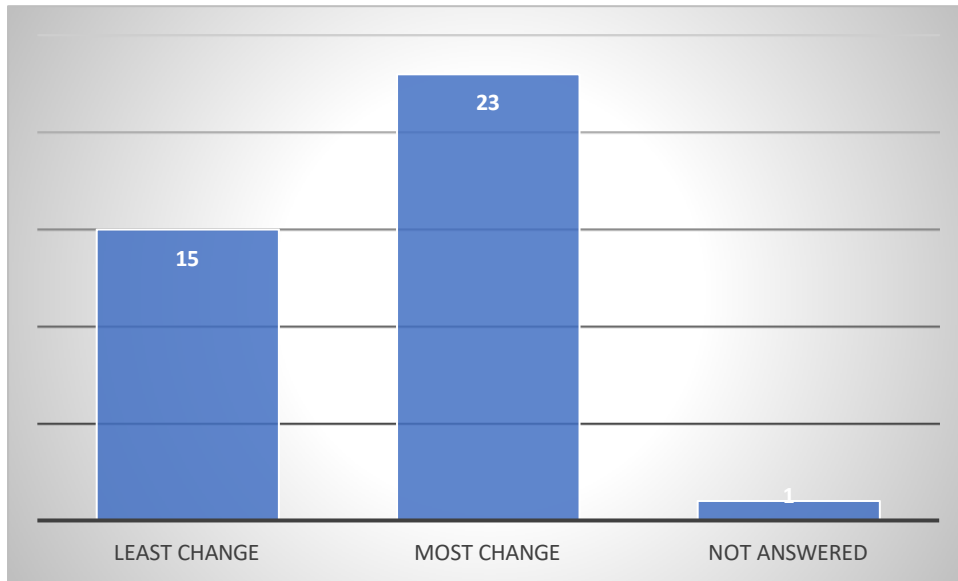
Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	10	26%
Most change	26	67%
Not Answered	3	8%



Travel relating to your role as an Elected Member

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	15	38%
Most change	23	59%
Not Answered	1	3%

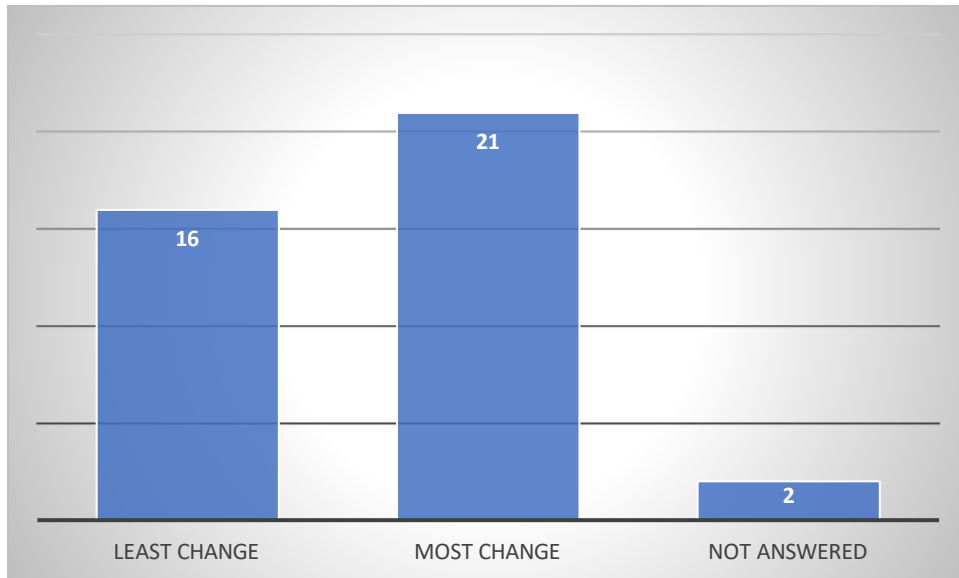
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

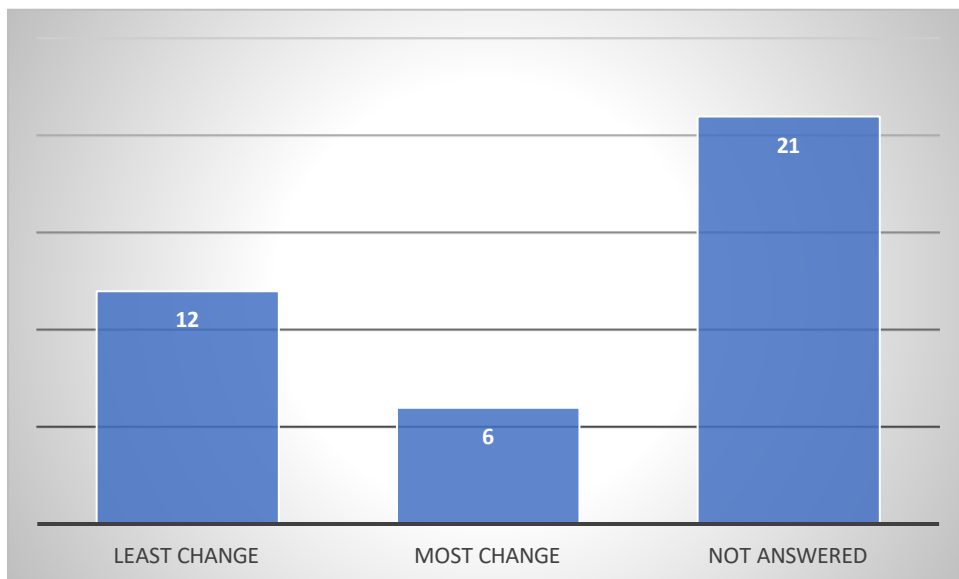
Publishing information on social media and communications with residents

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	16	41%
Most change	21	54%
Not Answered	2	5%



Other

Option	Total	Percentage
Least change	12	31%
Most change	6	15%
Not Answered	21	54%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Please tell us about any other aspects of your role that have changed:

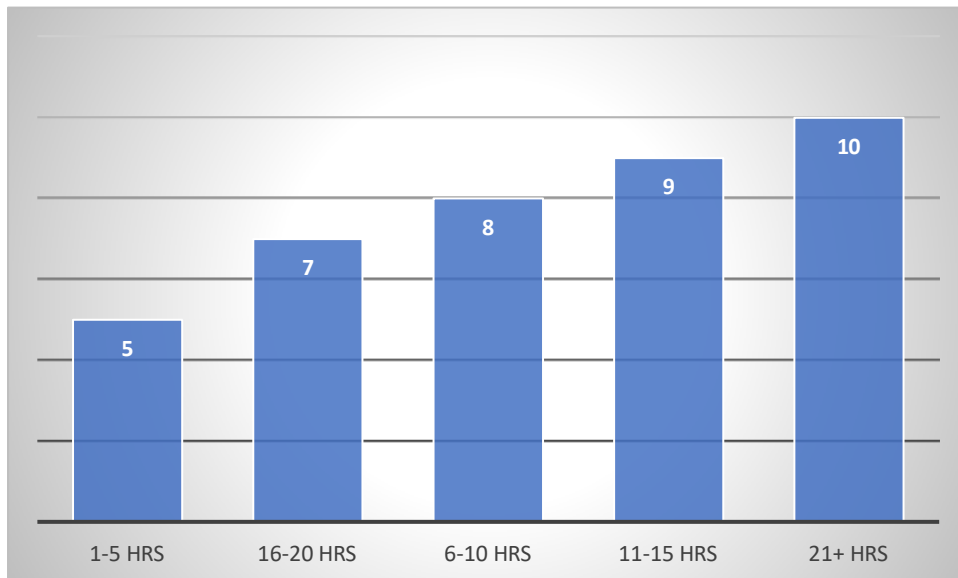
<p>Which aspects of your role as an Elected Member have changed the most? (Please categorise each option as appropriate and tell us about any other aspects that have changed below.) - Please tell us about any other aspects of your role that have changed:</p>
I'm newly elected hence I have no comparison
Seems to be an increase in ASB incidents. Increase in help needed during the cost of living. Both lead to more one to one appointment.
I deal with anything up to 1000 casework enquiries a year which is increasing each year.
As a career backbencher I have found the demands on a Cabinet member have been massive in terms of time commitment. I am fortunate that having two other Ward members who are both capable enables me to concentrate on Cabinet commitments while they assist greatly with casework. Party work and campaigning can mostly be dealt with in the evenings or weekends, but after a particularly busy week it can leave you exhausted.
A lot more evening work meaning 8-hour days are now 12-hour days. I live in the ward, so I frequently have residents knock the door for a 'chat'.
Council work is an all year-round commitment
People's lives have changed, the problems increased, pressures of money, housing, neighbourhoods, drugs
The cost of living crisis has meant that residents have more complex needs.
Overall as I have become more established and experience more time has been necessary to fulfil my council duties
Volunteering
MEDIA & COMMS WORK; PUBLIC SPEAKING; ATTENDANCE AT EXTERNAL MEETINGS/CONFERENCES AS SPEAKER; SPEECH PREPARATION; EMAIL TRAFFIC IS ENORMOUS
community support and networking
Engaging in more ways to meet hard to reach communities

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 12: On average, how many hours per month do you spend on the following methods to engage with residents and your community?

In Person

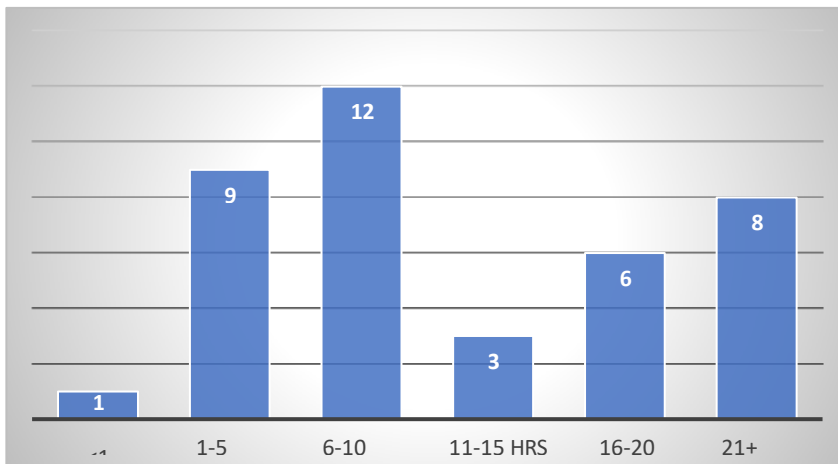
Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	0	
1-5 hrs	5	13%
6-10 hrs	7	18%
11-15 hrs	8	20%
16-20 hrs	9	23%
21+ hrs	10	26%
Not Answered	0	



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Phone

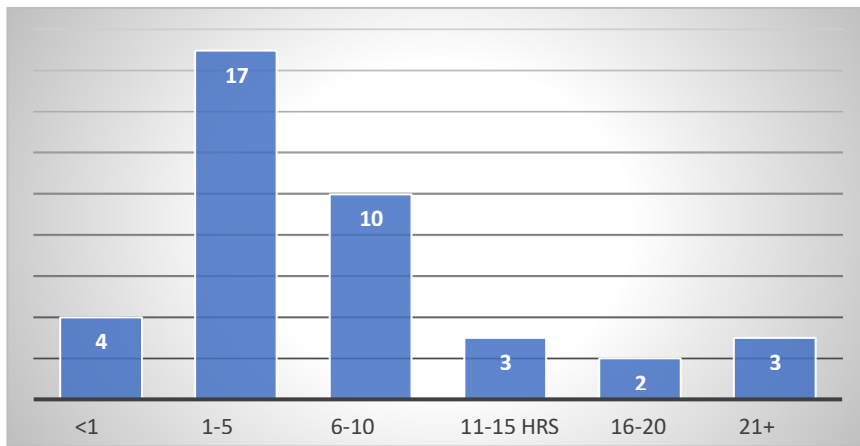
Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	1	3%
1-5 hrs	9	23%
6-10 hrs	12	31%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
16-20 hrs	6	15%
21+ hrs	8	20%
Not Answered	0	0



Text

Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	4	10%
1-5 hrs	17	43%
6-10 hrs	10	26%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
16-20 hrs	2	5%
21+ hrs	3	8%
Not Answered	0	0

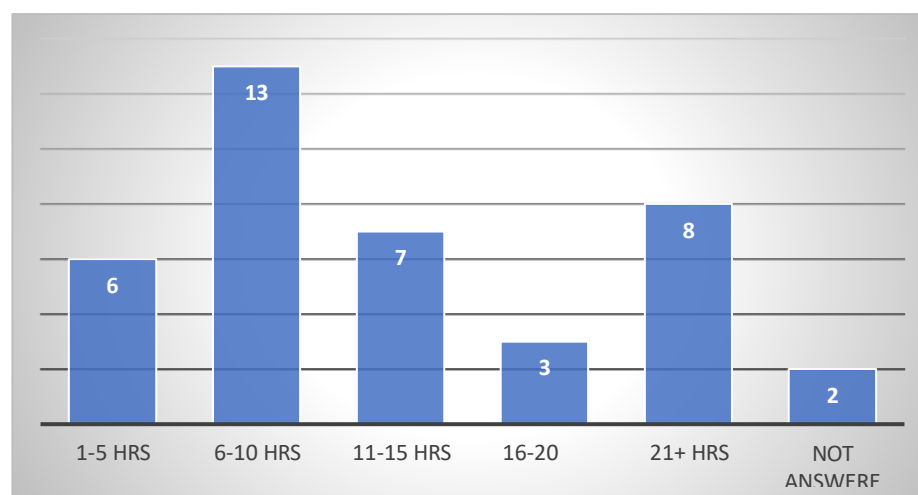
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Email

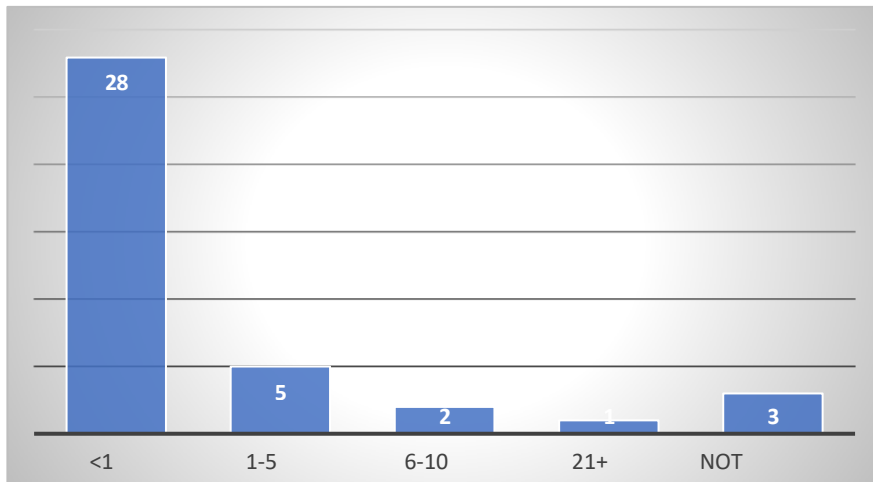
Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	0	0%
1-5 hrs	6	15%
6-10 hrs	13	33%
11-15 hrs	7	18%
16-20 hrs	3	8%
21+ hrs	8	21%
Not Answered	2	5%



Newspaper or magazine notice

Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	28	72%
1-5 hrs	5	13%
6-10 hrs	2	5%
11-15 hrs	0	0%
16-20 hrs	0	0%
21+ hrs	1	3%
Not Answered	3	8%

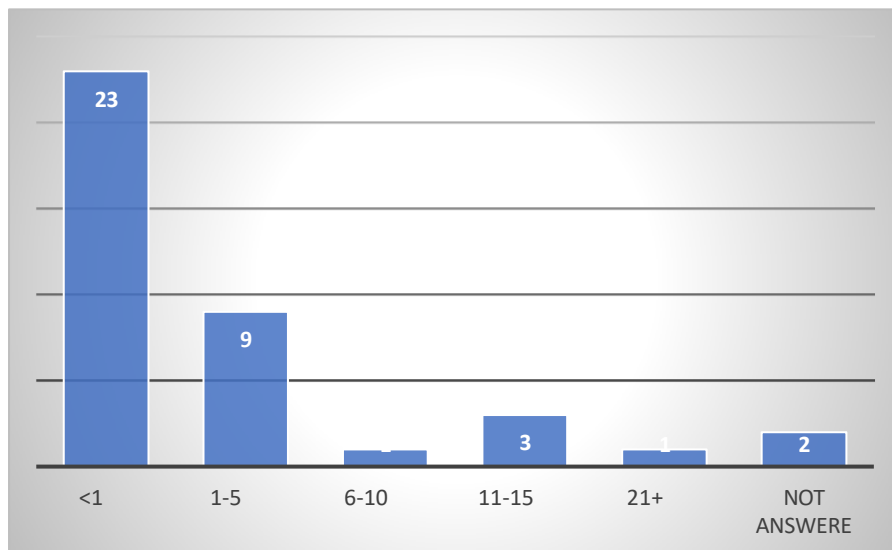
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Letter

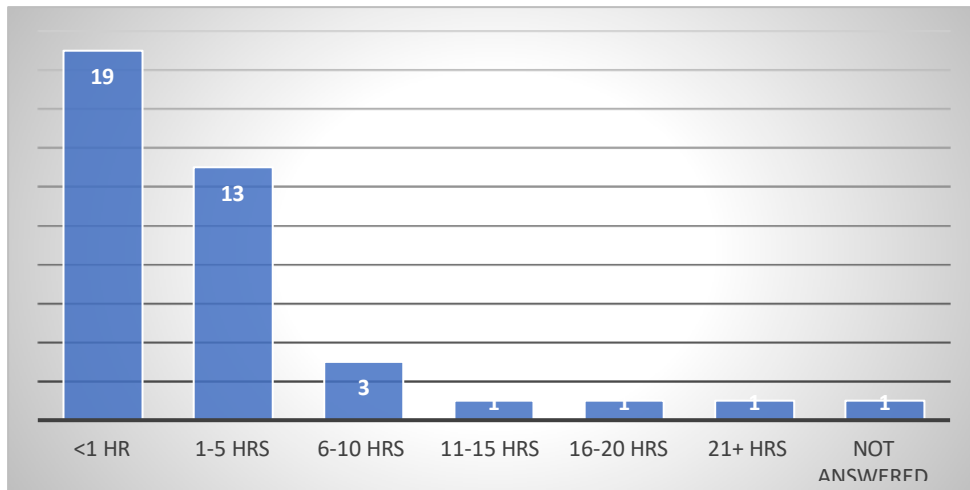
Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	23	59%
1-5 hrs	9	23%
6-10 hrs	1	3%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
16-20 hrs	0	0%
21+ hrs	1	3%
Not Answered	2	5%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Street Letter

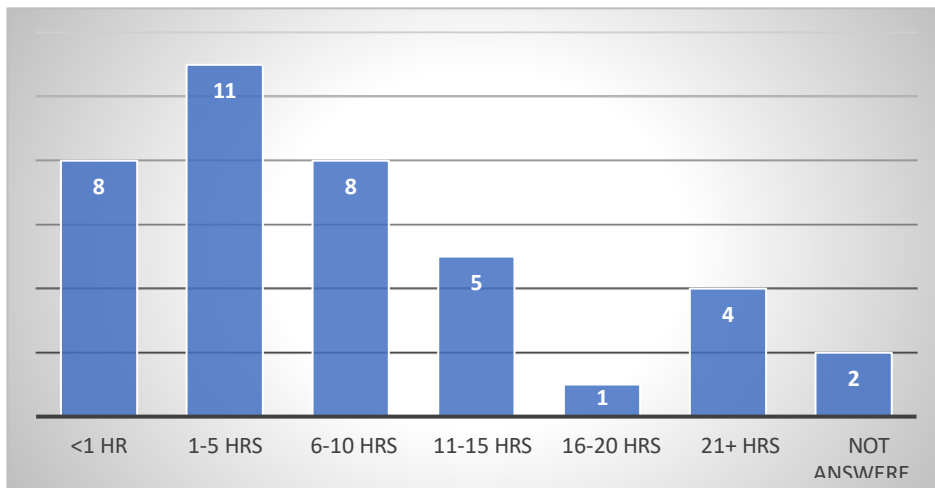
Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	19	49%
1-5 hrs	13	32%
6-10 hrs	3	7%
11-15 hrs	1	3%
16-20 hrs	1	3%
21+ hrs	1	3%
Not Answered	1	3%



Facebook

Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	8	21%
1-5 hrs	11	28%
6-10 hrs	8	21%
11-15 hrs	5	13%
16-20 hrs	1	3%
21+ hrs	4	10%
Not Answered	2	4%

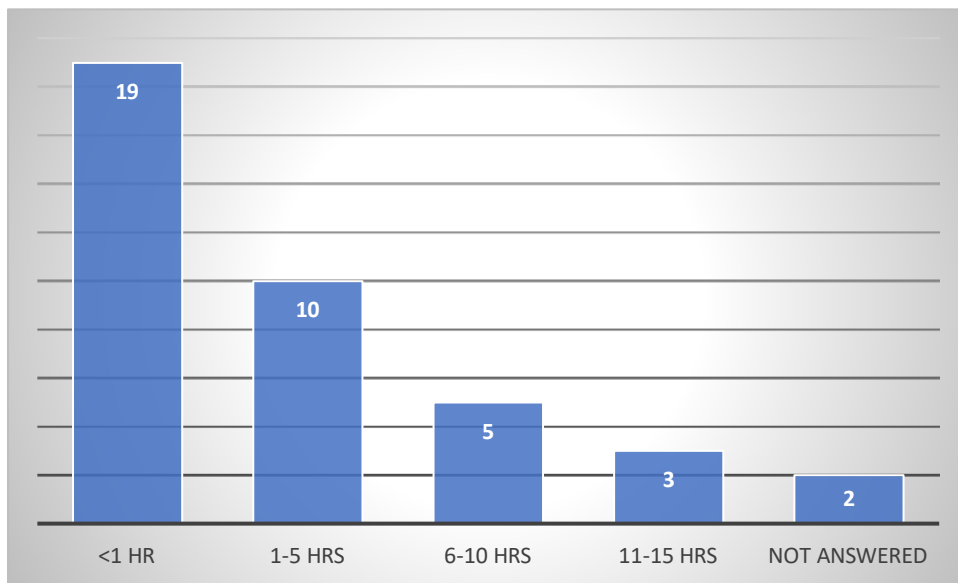
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Twitter

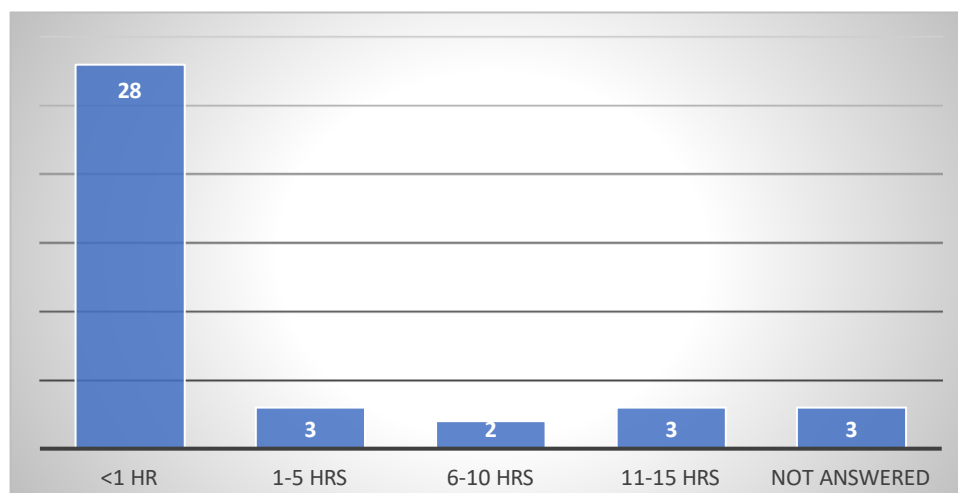
Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	19	49%
1-5 hrs	10	26%
6-10 hrs	5	13%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
16-20 hrs	0	0%
21+ hrs	0	0%
Not Answered	2	4%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Twitter

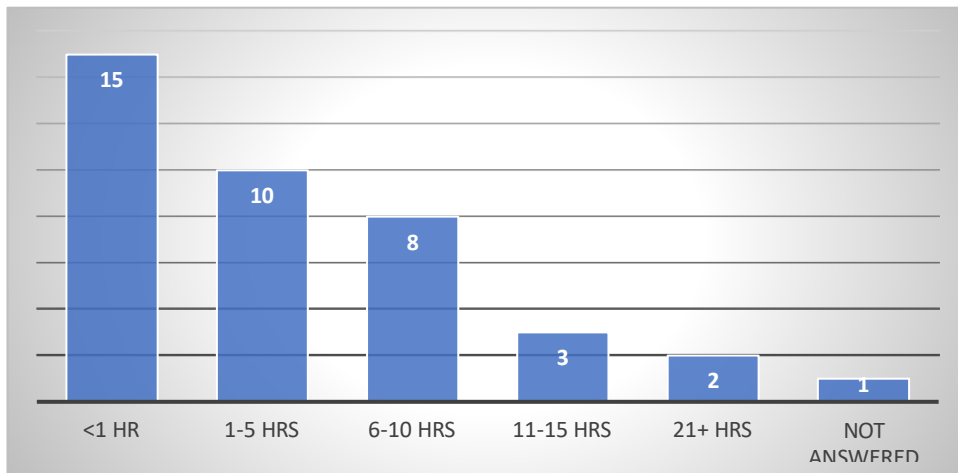
Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	28	72%
1-5 hrs	3	8%
6-10 hrs	2	4%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
16-20 hrs	0	0%
21+ hrs	0	0%
Not Answered	2	8%



Newsletter

Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	15	38%
1-5 hrs	10	26%
6-10 hrs	8	21%
11-15 hrs	3	8%
16-20 hrs	0	0%
21+ hrs	2	4%
Not Answered	1	3%

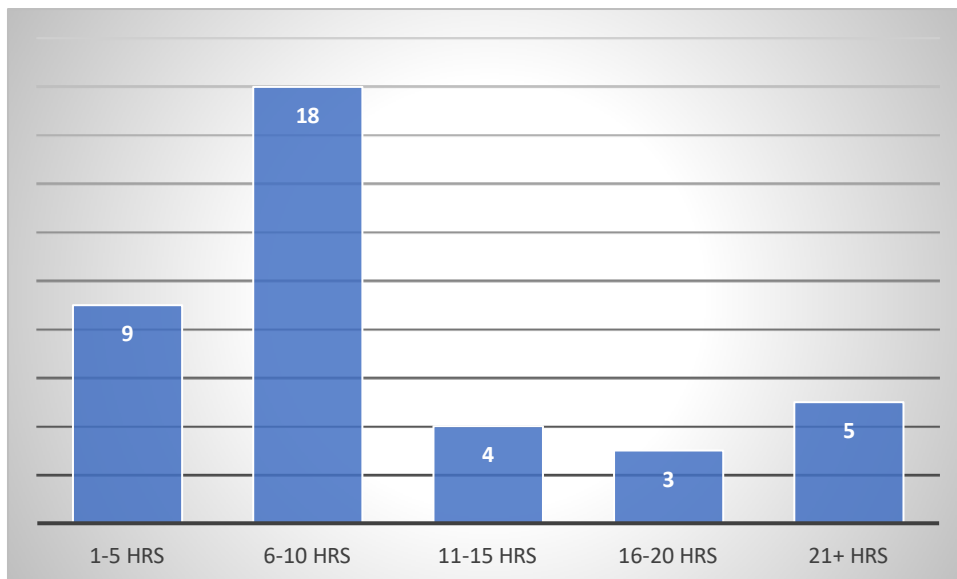
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

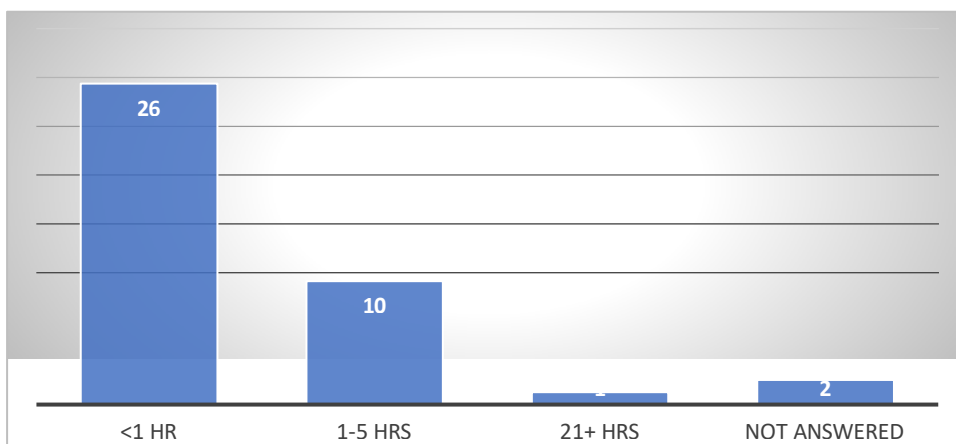
Walkabout

Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	0	0%
1-5 hrs	9	23%
6-10 hrs	18	46%
11-15 hrs	4	10%
16-20 hrs	3	8%
21+ hrs	5	13%
Not Answered	0	0%



Poster

Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	26	67%
1-5 hrs	10	26%
6-10 hrs	0	0%
11-15 hrs	0	0%
16-20 hrs	0	0%
21+ hrs	1	3%

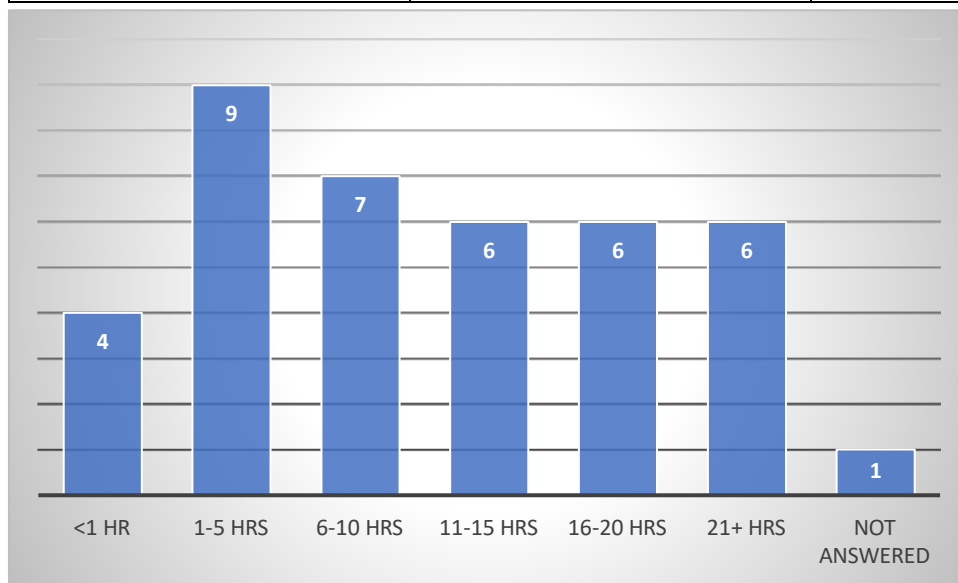


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Not Answered	2	4%
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Meetings

Option	Total	Percentage
<1 hr	4	11%
1-5 hrs	9	23%
6-10 hrs	7	18%
11-15 hrs	6	15%
16-20 hrs	6	15%
21+ hrs	6	15%
Not Answered	1	3%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Please give details of any other engagement methods you are using:

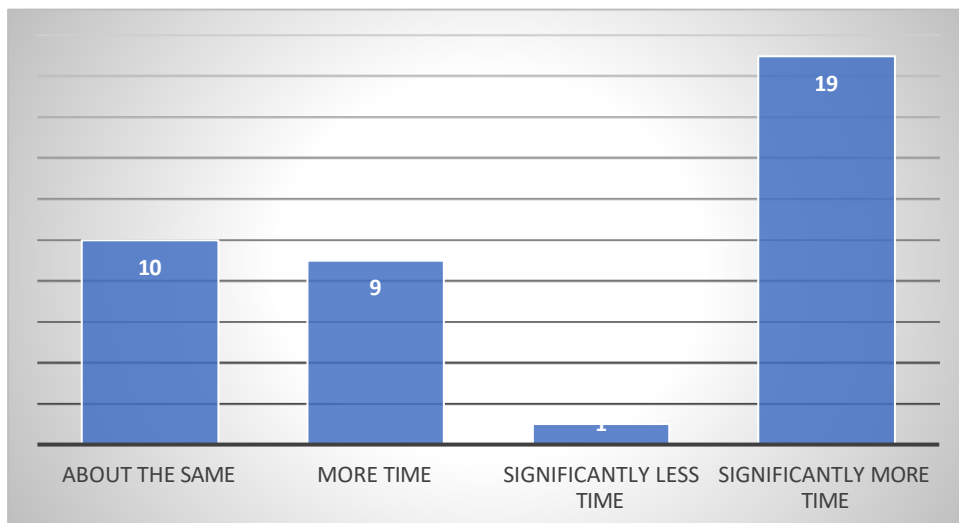
On average, how many hours per month do you spend on the following methods to engage with residents and your community? - Please give details of any other engagement methods you are using:
Being seen in the local community, talking with residents (of any age)
Advice surgeries and community events
None
I live in my ward and frequently have residents knock on the door for a 'chat'.
Residents What's App groups.
My connection with residents is based on personal service and delivering results, that's why I'm so busy
I am constantly out in the ward. Representation matters.
My 'day job' is located within my ward, residents often seek me out there for advice and to discuss local issues
STATIC SURGERIES/STREET SURGERIES
Street surgeries resident meetings

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 13: Have you noticed any significant changes in the amount of time you communicate via these methods in the last 2 years?

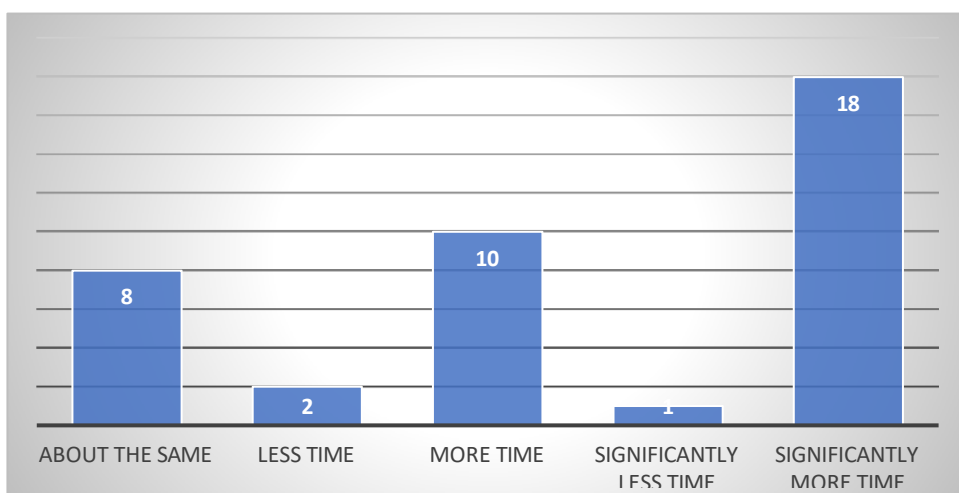
In Person

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	10	26%
More Time	9	22%
Significantly More Time	19	49%
Significantly Less Time	1	3%
Less time	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%



Phone

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	8	21%
Less time	2	5%
More Time	10	26%

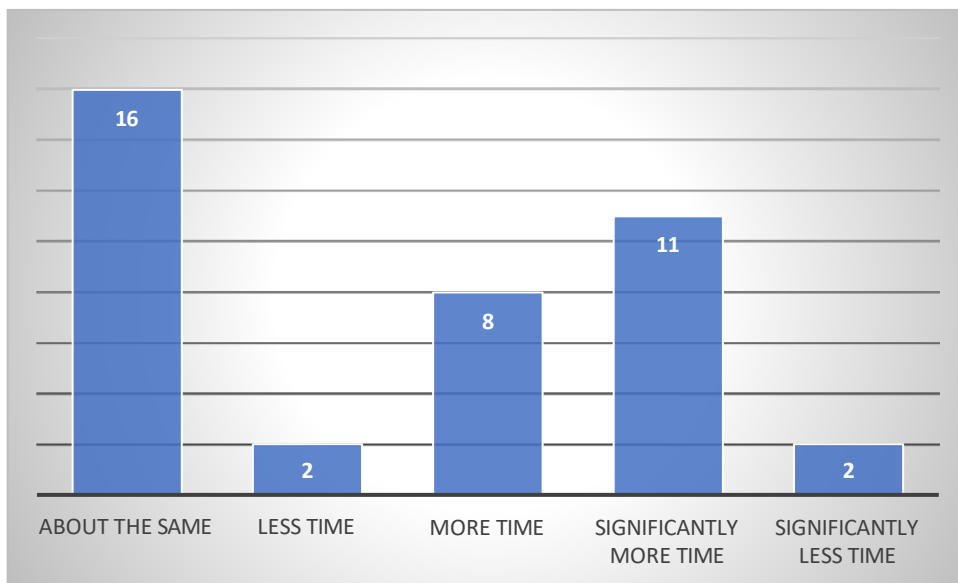


Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	18	46%
Significantly Less Time	1	3%

Text

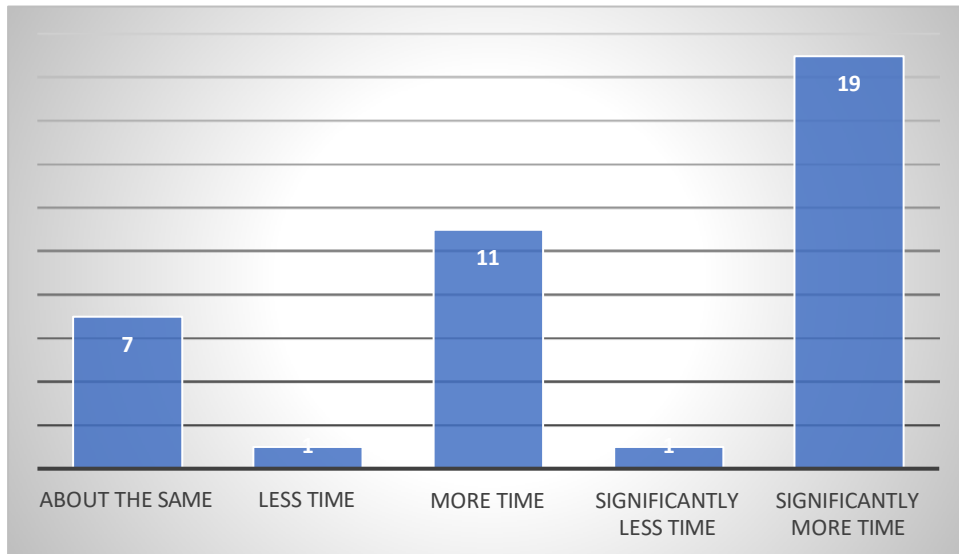
Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	16	41%
Less time	2	5%
More Time	8	21%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	11	28%
Significantly Less Time	2	5%



Email

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	7	18%
Less time	1	3%
More Time	11	28%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	1	3%
Significantly Less Time	19	49%

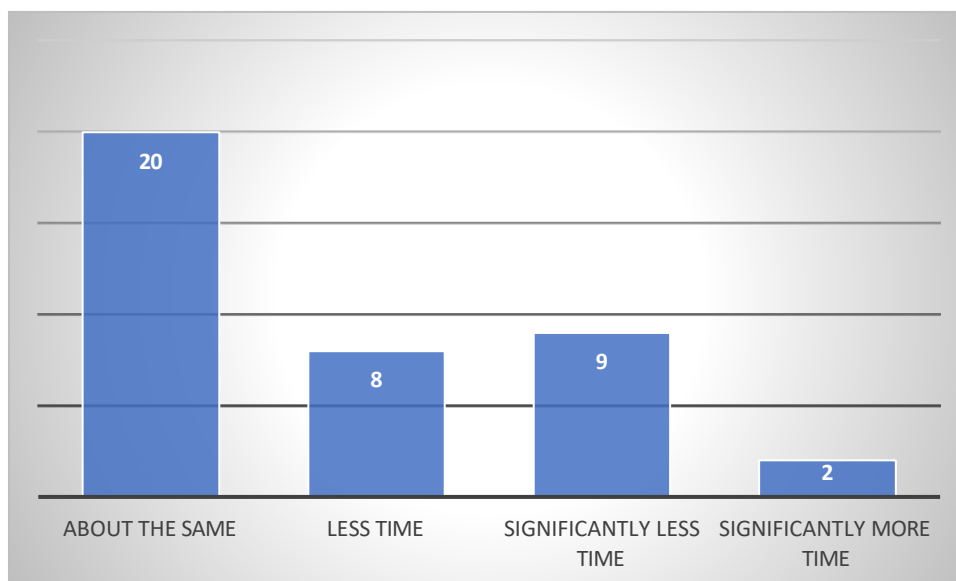
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Newspaper or magazine notice

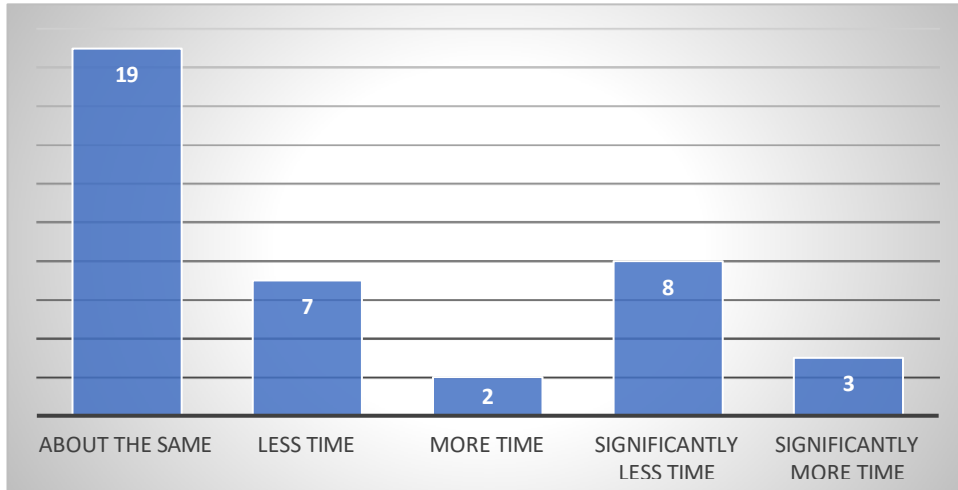
Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	20	51%
Less time	8	21%
More Time	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	9	23%
Significantly Less Time	2	5%



Letter

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	19	49%
Less time	7	18%
More Time	2	4%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	8	21%
Significantly Less Time	3	8%

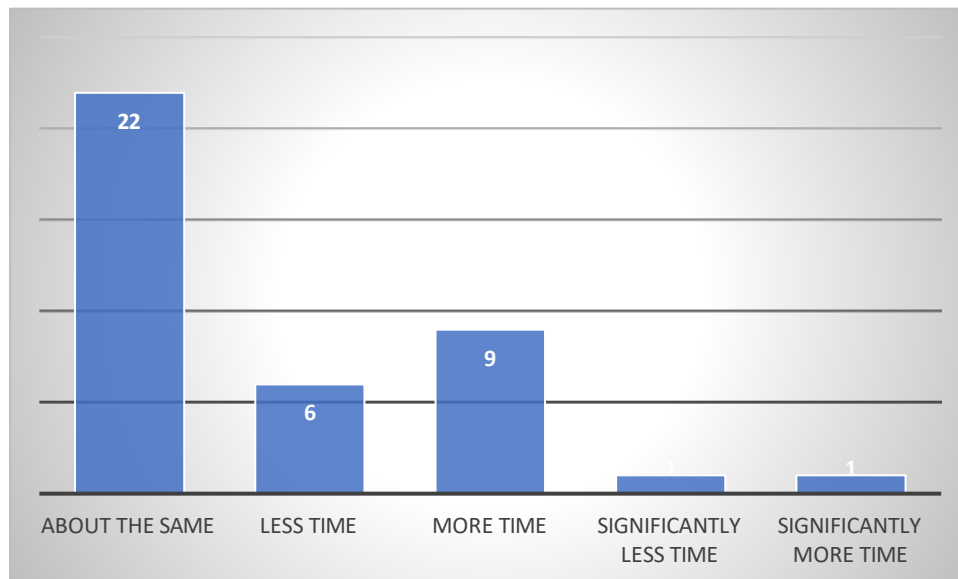
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

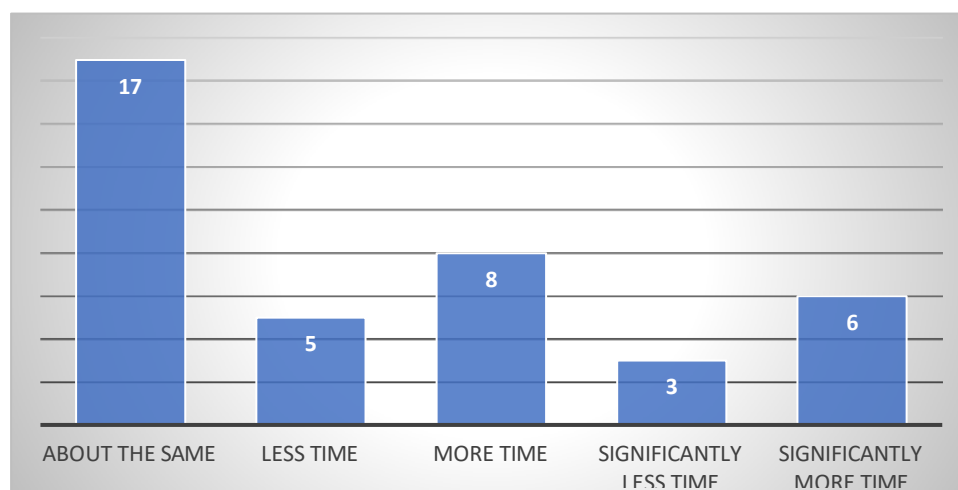
Street Letter

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	22	56%
Less time	6	15%
More Time	9	23%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	1	3%
Significantly Less Time	1	3%



Twitter

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	17	44%
Less time	5	13%
More Time	8	21%
Not Answered	0	0%

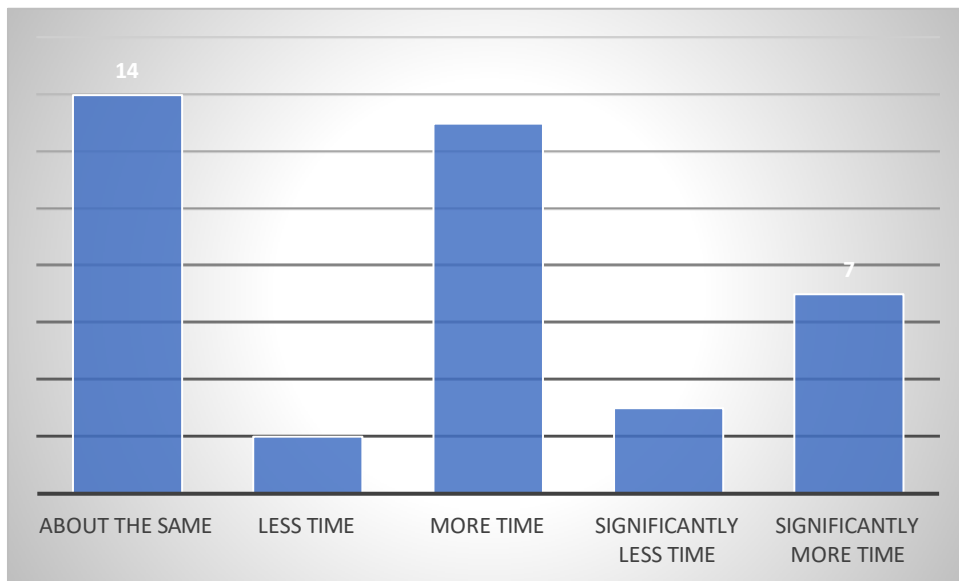


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Significantly More Time	3	8%
Significantly Less Time	6	15%

Facebook

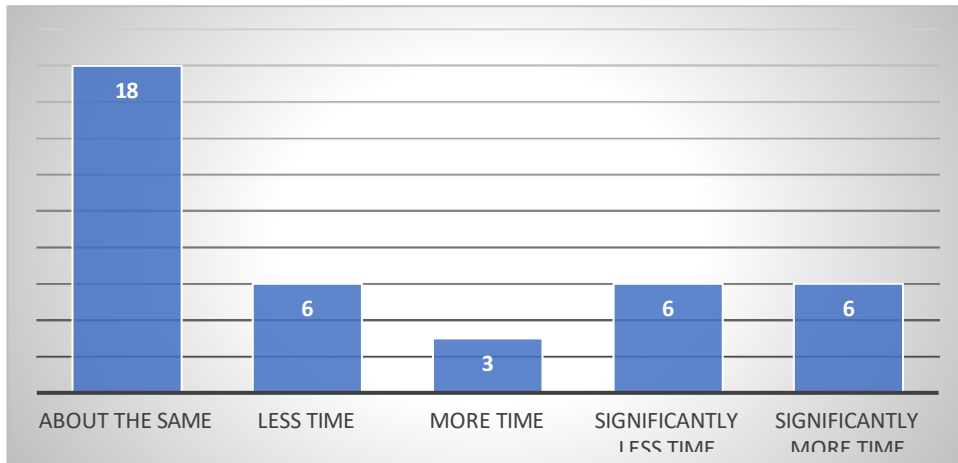
Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	14	36%
Less time	2	5%
More Time	13	33%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	3	8%
Significantly Less Time	7	18%



Other Social Media

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	18	46%
Less time	6	15%
More Time	3	8%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	6	15%
Significantly Less Time	6	15%

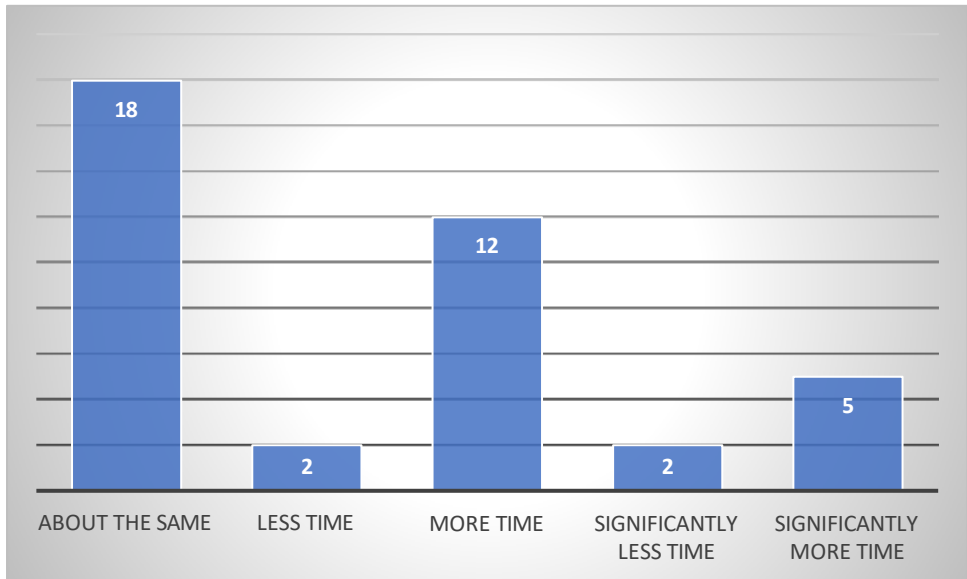
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

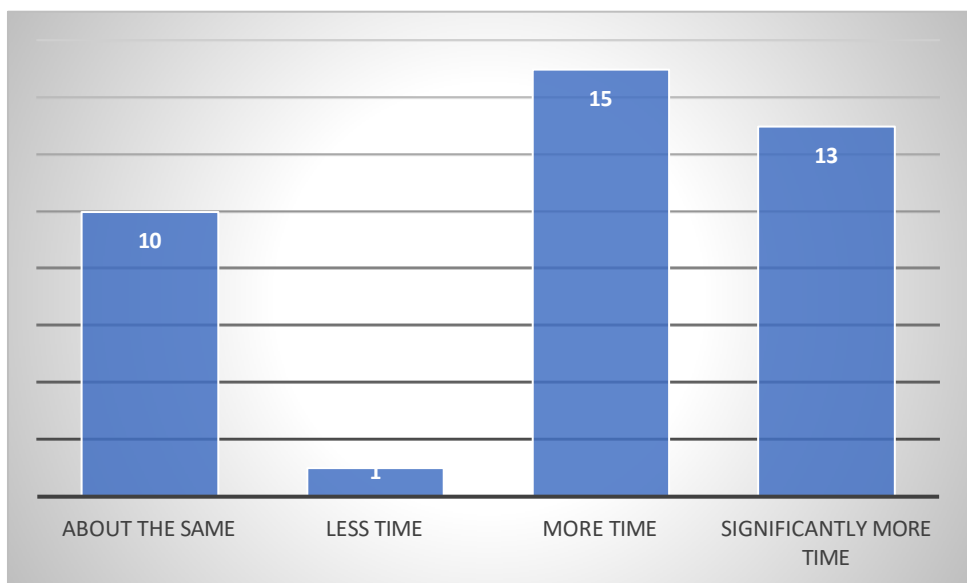
Newsletter

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	18	46%
Less time	2	5%
More Time	12	31%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	2	5%
Significantly Less Time	5	13%



Walkabout

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	10	26%
Less time	1	3%
More Time	15	38%
Not Answered	0	0%



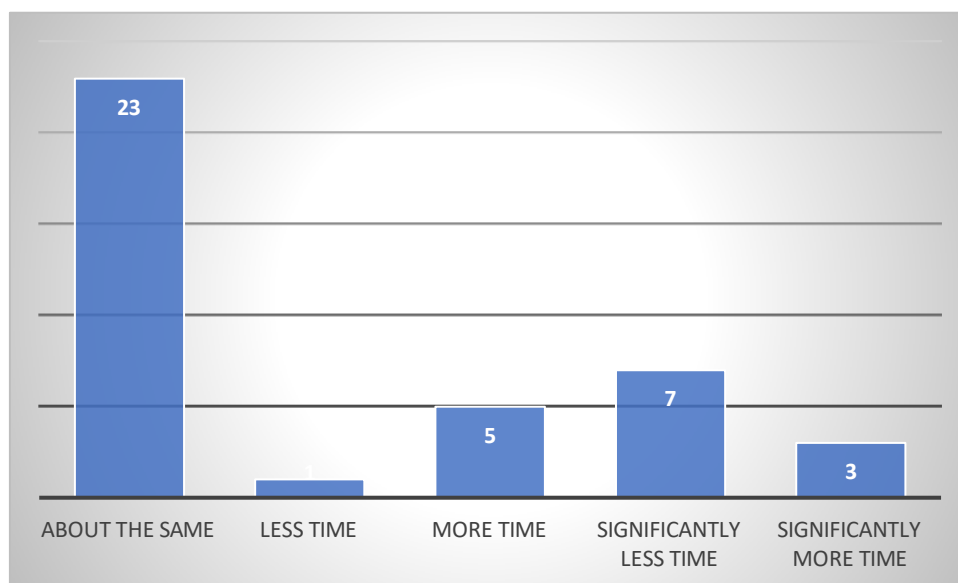
Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Significantly More Time	13	33%
Significantly Less Time	0	0%

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Poster

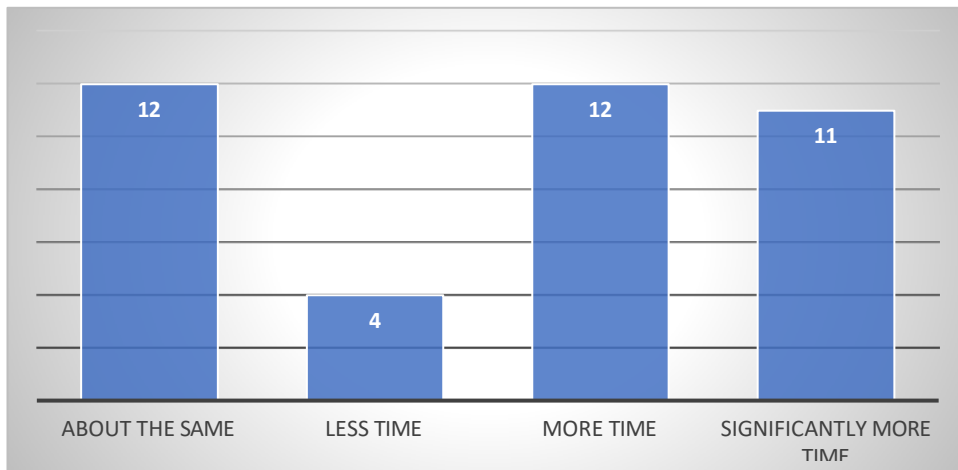
Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	23	59%
Less time	1	3%
More Time	5	13%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	7	18%
Significantly Less Time	3	8%



Meetings

Option	Total	Percentage
About the Same	12	31%
Less time	4	10%
More Time	12	31%
Not Answered	0	0%
Significantly More Time	11	28%
Significantly Less Time	0	0%

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Have you noticed any significant changes in the amount of time you communicate via these methods in the last 2 years? - Please give further details about any other methods to assist our understanding:

Have you noticed any significant changes in the amount of time you communicate via these methods in the last 2 years? - Please give further details about any other methods to assist our understanding:
In person via street surgery style door knocking, also use phone banking through party engagement system
I am newly elected member hence I have no comparison
NA
I have found social media, especially Twitter, to be exceedingly poor as a tool to communicate, leading only to aggressive responses. In person engagement is more effective, so I have deliberately reduced my social media output and increased in person output.
My workload has grown significantly
None
I choose not to use social media; I don't have the time. It doesn't detract from my popularity re-election votes- people know who I am
Teaching English to residents
This year I have spent less time dealing with individual case work issue as my ward colleague has been focusing on that aspect, this has freed up time to focus on strategic ward problems and council functions

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 14:

How has social media, and instant communications such as email, impacted on how you undertake your role and on your life outside of the Council?
Massive impact as it takes away allot of family time
Its become part of life.
Face to face surgery contact has decreased, although I have replaced with more door knocking street surgeries that has significantly increased my contact rate with residents.
Most of my free time is taken up by councillor duties
Seen I was elected onto the council, this has been a significant increase in the use of ICT
more impact on time pressure but positive way of communication
Social media negatively. It is aggressive and I am concerned about it, especially over the gaza crisis, with the anger directed at councillors and especially as my address (and therefore my child's address) has to be published in the register of interest. Email use is high, it seems to be the preferred method of communication for the residents, so I check them on my lunch break and after work regularly.
You feel like the role is 24/7, 365 days a year
I get far more emails. I use FB mainly to advertise events and give useful info.
N.A
I can be contacted at any time of the day or day of the week
Being a councillor is now a 24 hour job with a huge growth in online communications and residents often expecting quick replies. I am very active on social media and accessible. This contributes to my huge casework of up to 1000 enquiries a year before undertaking any other work. I receive hundreds of emails a week and the volume is vast.
There is never an evening/day off.
Yes
There is an expectation that councillors are available to respond instantly 24/7 which means often responding to messages and enquiries during time spent with family/friends.
Increase in time and planning. And responses required. Need to practice and learn.
Some weeks I feel I can't catch my breath with the sheer amount of casework that can come in a one go.
It often impacts on your private and family life. Whereas in the past people may be reluctant to phone if it was inconvenient, now they feel happy to fire off an email or social media post at any time of the night or day. You can try to be discerning, but I find I worry I may miss a constituent in need of urgent help or advice.
Most enquiries are through my emails, nothing from social media so far
Impacted greatly - if a notification is received i always take time to read it instantly as it could be a person who requires urgent help. Urgent help to me is not just about a non-flushing loo, it is about the mom who has run out of nappies, the family who need food for the next day - it is therefore not an option not to check on any notification.

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

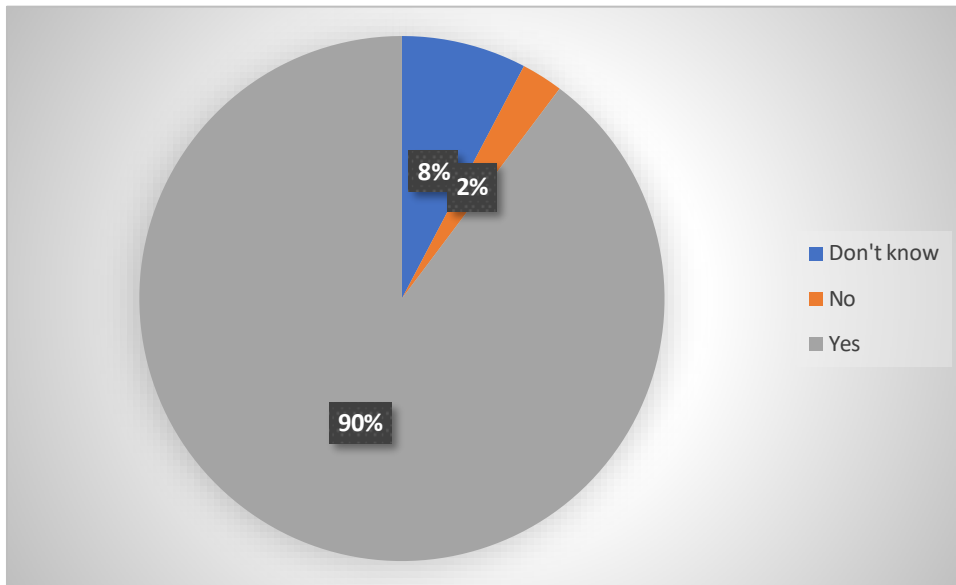
They have made me more accessible to residents and able to communicate to them, but also more open to abuse.
it has made us more accessible to residents but it has also made us more vulnerable to abuse as well.
We are easily accessible 24/7.
It takes up a lot of time I am not used to technolog.
Constant communication and expectation of instant response
Difficult to distinguish at times, life inside and outside the Council
Additional communication which is great but can be open to trolls
Constituents' expectations increased, they demand instantaneous response. Therefore, this has put pressure on personal time spent outside of council duties. It has become of paramount importance respond to queries even in unsociable hours.
None
More visible
Social media is very helpful. But a diverse ward as mine is very much tactile. Requiring a visible Councillor
Community groups on facebook are a great place to engage the community, however I made the decision not to have a personal councillor page to avoid online abuse and so encourage people to call or email me
Yes
YO HAVE TO CONSTANTLY BE ON TOP OF YOUR EMAILS & AS THERE IS SUCH A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF EMAIL TRAFFIC, IT CAN BE VERY STRESSFUL; SOCIAL MEDIA HAS LED TO 'TROLLING' AND I HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF THIS, AS WELL AS SPURIOUS FOI REQUESTS LEADING TO LIBELLOUS MISINFORMATION BEING PUT INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN WHICH HAS HAD A SIGNIFICANT ON MY MENTAL HEALTH.
increased exposure, supporting residents changing lives in some cases, supported quicker response time
We can be contacted more easily we get a clear outline of the issue
As a councillor, this has been useful for getting additional context such as images and videos for issues the constituents raise. However, as a result, this means that I often get phone calls or cases which require rapid attention during personal occasions in my life outside of the council, etc.
Social media can be useful to disseminate information quickly, however instant communication often means that resident feel that they can contact you at unsociable hours and expect a quick response. I've found it harder to protect tie for my family. Social media also makes i much easier for people to spread misinformation about you, your family or Party. Anonymous accounts (particularly in X) don't just carry acceptable criticism but can be very insulting or hurtful.
Good & bad depending on issue

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 15: From your experience, do you think the balance of communication methods you are using is effective?

From your experience, do you think the balance of communication methods you are using is effective?

Option	Total	Percentage
Don't Know	3	8%
No	1	2%
Yes	35	90%



Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Question 16: In relation to the Council’s submission on council size, are there any other comments you'd like to make or issues you'd like to raise based on your experience as an Elected Member?

In relation to the Council’s submission on council size, are there any other comments you'd like to make or issues you'd like to raise based on your experience as an Elected Member?
Councillors need to start getting active as allot of pressure on me
The ward requires 3 councillors due to the workload- if the number is reduces i would consider stepping down.
Casework levels have significantly increased since the pandemic and the increased use of email and social media means that the role is know 24/7 and has moved away from fixed surgery meetings
Not sure what this means
The has been a significant increase in the population, which is covered by the Local Authority since I was originally elected onto the council
in my ward i rely on my 2 ward cllrs due to the volume of commitments / meetings i participate in,
First, we have a highly deprived Borough. This means we have more casework, but we also need to spend time digging it up as residents are less likely to come to us. This increases our workload. We also have a very diverse Borough in terms of the Towns, we are the Misc. drawer of the West Midlands. It is vital we keep sub-Borough structures to recognise the different communities we serve. It is also important to keep three members per ward, in case of sickness or other absence.
I believe it is important to keep three members per ward in case somebody is unwell, away, or has a conflict of interest.
At any one time a colleague can be unwell, on annual leave or have a conflict of interest. So we do really need three cllrs per ward to enable us to keep our standards high.
I think that the amount of members could be reduced by a third. Single member wards
We need a broad ethnic mix of councillors to reflect the diversity of the population.
We need to maintain three member wards and the current number of councillors. The amount of casework, meetings and work I am doing every year is growing and makes this a full-time job. It would be completely unmanageable to have fewer ward colleagues or a larger ward to manage in an area like mine. I represent an area with a high level of deprivation and poverty which generates up to 1000 enquiries a year. I also deal with many other enquiries that I have to signpost to others or the local MP. The area I represent is also distinct with a strong focus on the town itself, West Bromwich. Moreover, the work I do chairing a scrutiny committee, and the Council's overall scrutiny function, is time consuming. This involves meeting members, cabinet members, directors and outside auditors. Increasingly, the combined authority takes up a large proportion of my time with usually two meetings a month and large amounts of papers to read.

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

<p>Maintaining the structure and identity of its six distinct Towns is crucial for the governance structure of Sandwell. Residents feel a strong sense of attachment and pride to their town. This must be reflected in the boundaries of the wards of each town. As with neighbouring Dudley, Sandwell struggles with widespread deprivation, resulting in a significant workload for councillors. Three councillors per ward allows this burden to be shared and enables better representation of - and engagement with - the residents. Sandwell is also very diverse. Therefore effective representation of its residents requires diversity in the councillors. This can only be achieved when there are sufficient number of councillors across all wards of all the towns. Diversity in the makeup of the various committees and boards is also vital. Again, this can only be achieved when there are sufficient number of councillors from which to form representative groups. Three member wards allow for cover and contingency and also enable institutional knowledge to be more easily maintained across the Council.</p>
<p>Sandwell is very deprived borough and residents needs lots of councillor contact</p>
<p>The time required to adequately fulfil duties should not be underestimated. On top of reducing my work hours by 15 hours a week and regularly doing council activities on evenings and weekends, as a cabinet member, I also had to use in the region of 20 annual leave days last year to attend additional council meetings/engagements.</p>
<p>Committed to flexible working at full time job due to demands of councillor responsibility</p>
<p>Given the strain on council resources which have got worse year upon year i would be reluctant to see a change in the ratio of members to constituents. It is unreasonable to expect members who work in full-time jobs to take on an increased burden of meeting commitments and providing accessible representation.</p>
<p>I feel I've so far been able to handle the workload and am lucky with the help from officers. Tends to be workload increases when I go door knocking asking people for any help. Reaching it out, residents so far tend to go to my other fellow councillors</p>
<p>It is difficult to define exactly how busy it is being a councillor - the expectations and reliance on the council since the cost of living is a strain and can be difficult to manage the work-load as well as coping mentally with the desperation that is seen. I would not be able to manage in my ward with the demands without the support of my two ward colleagues. I also live in my ward so i frequently have people knocking on the door or a note through the letter box. I also believe that we have balanced gender and diverse wards where members of the public can relate to at least one of us. Our nearest neighbour Dudley and based in the Black Country has recently undergone a review and has retained 24 wards and 72 council seats to ensure that the community is well represented - i believe that we as boroughs are not dissimilar but Sandwell has a larger and growing population and also has a greater proportion of deprivation which can be difficult to manage. The casework has grown since the cost of living crisis began and reliance on our councillors is significant. Blackheath has recently been chopped up in the parliamentary review and Rowley Regis removed - residents are proud of their culture, heritage and have a sense of belonging and have not warmed to this - so another review of Blackheath would not go well with the residents.</p>

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

<p>Scrutiny is a vital part of a council function and its important that there are is a diverse amount of voices on that theme.</p>
<p>Sandwell, like Dudley, is a borough of high deprivation and this means a higher level of casework which three councillors per ward ensures that the needs of the residents are met. With meeting increasing it ensures that someone is always available to assist it also ensures that councillors can have some me time for holidays and family, unlike MP's we have no staff to research or answer complaints we have to do it alone.</p>
<p>Sandwell is one of the most deprived areas in the country. Residents require a significant amount of help and support. Having 3 councillors per ward and 24 wards spreads this work load. Sandwell is very diverse. We need councillors who represent this diversity. To have effective scrutiny we need a broad range of voices. Sandwell is six towns This is important to retain. Finally having 3 councillors per ward means there is cover if unwell, away, conflict of interest issues or unable to do a piece of casework.</p>
<p>We need 3 councillors per ward So we can take our holidays off Or sickness cover also for safe when going home</p>
<p>The more councillors the better for the community as you can be overwhelmed but what is expected</p>
<p>My ward is one of the most 'deprived' wards in Sandwell and indeed the Country. It is a diverse neighbourhood with multiple challenges. Casework levels are high and people depend on their Councillors to be there to fight their corner. That requires me to work 7 days a week at times. We need Councillors who offer a personalised service to residents and are committed to making the area an indeed area better. Each town in Sandwell is different and distinct.</p>
<p>I believe that it works well as it is. There is depredation and this equates to more casework. Scrutiny is vital to the improvement of any council, the more diverse voices the better. Sandwell is made up of 6 towns, each uniquely different needing slightly different decisions.</p>
<p>Sandwell is a borough with a lot of deprivation, (12th) within the 10% most deprived local authority areas in the country. This means there is more casework for councillors compared to other local authorities. at least 50% of the residents do not have the skills or confidence in tackling their own issues or access services they need. Having more councillors means we can spread the workload more and get more done for the residents. Our diverse Councillors are able to relate to residents issues, cultural/linguistic barriers and be their voice to address multiple issues faced by the residents. We have a very diverse Borough, which means we have a lot of communities with different cultures. It is important for our communities to be represented by a similarly diverse group of councillors, which means we need a bigger pool of them. Also, having more Councillors mean we are able to represent our communities in different forums within and outside Council by sharing our workload effectively. We have a lot of new migrants in the borough who are not familiar with local services and need more intensive support to fulfil their potential or make positive contribution to the local economy. Councillors are well positioned to enable them to help integrate into their local communities.</p>
<p>Sandwell is poor borough</p>
<p>Council needs more councillors as demand in area is high</p>

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

<p>Representation matters. Sandwell Council has at present 5 Black (African/Caribbean) . Councillor before I became a councillor there was none . Representation does matter and with this in mind there are many people out of my ward who will make contact with me and I have to refer them to their Councillors in other areas..</p>
<p>A reduction in ward members would greatly impact our ability to focus on all areas of council business, unless I were to become unemployed, this would have a serious financial impact on my family. Sandwell as a borough is diverse, it has very distinct towns with their own local culture, no two towns are the same, any changes that impacted on the town structure would have a detrimental effect of the residents in each area.</p>
<p>It is important that we have diversity within our ward and Sandwell Council. As a Councillor for Smethwick Ward, I Represent different faith groups ie Sikhs, and Muslims. I need to understand, and speak their language when they have concerns with the ward.</p>
<p>I THINK TO DECREASE THE AMOUNT OF MEMBERS PER WARD WILL INSTANTLY PUT EXTRA BURDEN ON THE REDUCED NUMBER OF ELECTED MEMBERS CONCERNED. TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF MEMBERS ACROSS THE BOARD WOULD ALSO MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO FILL THE EXTENSIVE AMOUNT OF RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS WITHIN THE COUNCIL (PARTICULARLY THE QUASI-JUDICIAL COMMITTEES AND THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF SCRUTINY BOARDS).ALSO REPRESENTATION ON EXTERNAL BODIES (SUCH AS WMCA & ITS NUMEROUS BOARDS; ABCA; TfWM; FIRE AUTHORITY; POLICE & CRIME PANEL ETC.) WOULD BE IMPACTED CONSIDERABLY. BOTH EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS & LGA PEER REVIEWS HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCRUTINY IN SANDWELL, AS WELL AS THE NEED FOR SANDWELL MEMBERS TO HAVE MORE REGIONAL VISIBILITY, IN TERMS OF ATTENDANCE AT KEY DECISION-MAKING BOARDS ETC. TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF MEMBERS WOULD REDUCE THE COUNCIL'S EFFICACY IN THESE AREAS, AND WOULD DIRECTLY IMPACT ON THE REAL IMPROVEMENTS ACHIEVED IN THESE AREAS OVER THE PAST YEAR OR SO, WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TOWARDS THE COMMISSIONERS' VIEW ON THE COUNCIL COMING OUT OF INTERVENTION.</p>
<p>My opinion on the decrease of required Members per ward is that this would most definitely add extra pressures to provide a quality of service to residents and I believe most definitely without doubt would increase the work load and pressures for reduced members. Further concerns around a reduction in members would also make it rather challenging to fill substantial amount of responsible positions within the council, especially the important role of scrutiny boards also the representation of external bodies would be at risk of detrimental impact. It feel it would also raise concerns in the area of key decision making boards. To reduce the members I believe it would directly impact and reduce the councils efficacy in key areas which would impact on the improvements achieved over the past year or so, which have contributed towards the commissioner views on the council's progression of coming out of intervention.</p>
<p>Continue yearly elections. 3 Cllrs in each ward up for election each year</p>

Appendix 1 – Councillors Survey 2024

Given Sandwell is a deprived area, especially in certain wards, it results in there being more issues to tackle, and some wards require additional support as a result of the higher poverty and unemployment rates in comparison to Dudley. If the council size was to reduce, this would put an increased pressure on councillors who are already doing their best to make their area a better place. This would make things more difficult for councillors and reduce the number of issues being resolved. It would also increase the risk of burnout, given with three councillors per ward, it means on occasions when one of the councillors is not available due to ill health, etc, there are at least two other councillors available to cover the third councillors work. If there were only two councillors and one councillor was not available due to ill health, etc, this would put all of the burden on a single person, which is not sustainable at any capacity. A reduction in the council would also mean there is less representation in what can be described as a very diverse community, which is especially important in being representative when there are council decisions being made and on scrutiny panels, ensuring all voices of the community are heard. For example, from my experience on scrutiny boards I have witnessed how diversity allows for wider perspectives during scrutiny meetings, resulting in widening inclusion. As a woman from a minority ethnic background, I have also seen the impact this representation has on the community, with more women from a minority ethnic background reaching out to myself and finding it easier to bring up the issues they are facing. Moreover, if there were only two councillors in a ward, this would reduce the level of representation for that ward. It's also important to understand that every town is different, with each community having different levels of diversity resulting in different types of culture representative of the community. As a result, it is necessary for each town having the structure and ability to make some local decision themselves, in understanding of their culture.

I feel the Council should retain 72 members. Being a local councillor is a part time job, it can often feel much more than that. I work full time for the NHS, I fear that a reduction in the numbers of members would make the workload too big for any working age person in full time employment to consider being a Councillor. It is also important to consider that, given the levels of deprivation in Sandwell, councillors here will likely spend more time dealing with casework than the average councillor in England. Finally, Sandwell is a borough of six distinct towns, each with their own identities and priorities, a reduction in councillors risks diluting the voice of the towns within the Council.

Continue with 3 Cllrs to cover each other, diverse to service community & gender balance



Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Technical Report

March 2024

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1. Introduction

This Technical Report is intended to provide details of the approach and methodology applied by Sandwell Council for purposes of forecasting population and electorate change and to in turn inform requirements for democratic representation at a local level as well as the pattern of Wards and geopolitical boundary locations within the area of the borough.

Population and Electorate forecasts for 2030 have been calculated using the methodology detailed within this report on the basis that the number and distribution of both population and electors in the borough will continue to change during the six-year period 2024-2030, based on previous demographic patterns and future projected housing developments.

Wards and Polling District data are presented as follows –

- (i) Current Population (December 2023);
- (ii) Current Electorate (December 2023);
- (iii) Future Population (June 2030); and
- (iv) Future Electorate (June 2030).

Wards and polling district forecasts are presented as current for December 2023 (published January 2024) and future Electorate (as at June 2030), the population aged 18 plus (to show potential Electorate) and the total population (to show potential Councillor caseload).

An explanation of how these figures have been derived is provided within this report, covering –

- ONS Mid-Year Estimate Data
- Electorate patterns;
- HMO population distribution and impacts;
- Individual Electoral Registration (IER) impacts and required adjustments; and
- Housing development projections, the latter reflecting already permissioned developments as well as development areas formally identified in the emergent Sandwell Local Plan and which are projected to have been constructed and in occupation by June 2030, and excluding any development areas which will either not be constructed or in occupation by that stage.

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2. Background

a) ONS Population Data 2007-2022

ONS Mid-Year Estimates for the period 2007 to 2022 show a consistent trend of population growth as detailed below in Table (a) (i)

Table (a) (i) – ONS Mid-Year Estimates & % Change 2007-2022

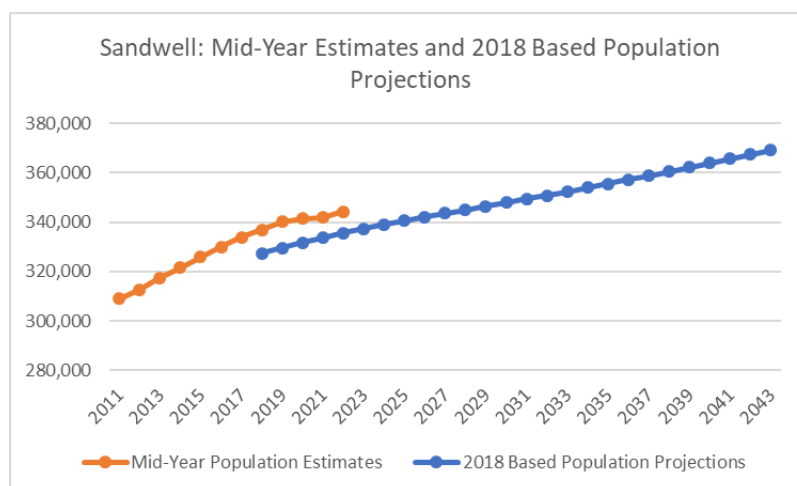
	MYE 2022	MYE 2021	MYE 2020	MYE 2019	MYE 2018	MYE 2017	MYE 2016	MYE 2015
Sandwell	344,210	341,895	341,436	340,198	336,977	333,826	330,051	325,911
% Change to previous	0.7%	0.1%	0.4%	1.0%	0.9%	1.1%	1.3%	1.3%

	MYE 2014	MYE 2013	MYE 2012	MYE 2011	MYE 2010	MYE 2009	MYE 2008	MYE 2007
Sandwell	321,610	317,499	312,710	309,042	306,181	302,303	298,358	294,603
% Change to previous	1.3%	1.5%	1.2%	0.9%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	0.7%

b) Calculating Population – Post 2021 mid-year ONS Projections

Mid-year estimates released by Office for National Statistics (ONS) since the 2021 Census have given Sandwell a lower growth trajectory than expected, based on the previous decade’s growth and administrative data.

The main figures for Sandwell have just been recalibrated 2011 to 2021 and latest ONS Population Projects are 2018 based figures.



The factors detailed below all impact directly on population growth and distribution within Sandwell but are not reflected within the ONS mid-year projections thereby exacerbating the variance between ONS mid-year estimate and actual population. This in turn results in an artificially low electorate base calculation.

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Multi Occupancy Residential Conversions (HMOs)

These typically comprise the conversion of an ordinary dwelling house of a single household to become a dwelling occupied by multiple households with shared communal kitchen, bathroom, and amenity space. These conversions are described under the planning process as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

Over the past decade, Sandwell has seen a significant rise in the number of HMOs in certain parts of the Borough. In part this reflects a demand for accommodation for single person households but is also driven by current national Government welfare changes as well as the lucrative potential yield such conversions may offer landlords (a private landlord can readily generate an income of £450-500 per week through a 5 or 6 bedroom HMO).

Whilst HMOs provide a necessary part of Sandwell's housing market, they can cause significant problems from both a housing and neighbourhood point of view including –

- removing family homes from the housing market;
- creating street level management problems such as car parking and waste collection;
- generating both actual and perceived neighbourhood problems such as anti-social behaviour; and
- creating poor quality and poorly managed living environments for some of the Borough's most vulnerable residents.

All the above issues require the ongoing intervention and actions of Councillors and results in significant casework and intervention responsibilities falling across large areas of the borough. These place more demands on the limited capacity of the existing cohort of Councillors. Critically, the prevalence of conversions results in upwards pressure on population and associated electorates for concentrated geographic areas whilst not being captured within ONS mid-year estimates. This results in inaccuracies in terms of both population size and distribution across the entire borough.

An analysis of planning applications and completions and building control notifications combined with data from the borough's Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme has been utilised for purposes of this report. This has identified that whilst conversions are evident across all areas of the borough, these are concentrated predominantly in the existing wards detailed below –

Ward	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30%
Abbey	128	90
Soho and Victoria	128	90
St Pauls	53	37
Smethwick	50	35
Oldbury	48	33
Blackheath	46	32
Great Bridge	46	32

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Ward	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30%
Greets Green and Lyng	46	32
West Bromwich Central	46	32

Evidence also demonstrates significant conversion rates but at a lower order of magnitude in areas of covered by several polling districts across the borough. This forecast model therefore incorporates adjustment factors to quantify the impacts of conversions on population and electorate based on a robust analysis of existing data as detailed below.

c) Sandwell Forecast Model (SFM)

To provide robust projections for purposes of the Boundary Review process, Sandwell Council has developed and utilised a Forecast Model, which combined ONS Mid-Year Estimates data with qualitative and quantitative data analysis and projections taking into consideration the following factors –

- Housing & Residential Development Projections;
- Multi-Occupancy Residential Development & Conversions; and
- Population Distribution.

The above factors are explained in detail below and in the accompanying Annexes to this Technical Report, including data sources and methodology applied.

In relation to the above factors, these are included to take realistic account of administrative change at neighbourhood level during the period using established ONS data projection models combined with specific local considerations. This is because:

- ONS projections are only at district level and there are significant differences in demography across Sandwell;
- Sandwell's population was undercounted in the 2021 Census (acknowledged by ONS);
- The methodology that undercounted Sandwell before the 2021 Census has been used nationally on estimates and subnational population projections since 2011. Without adjustment this consistently underestimates actual population and in turn exacerbates statistical discrepancy year on year; and
- Combined with the pull-factor of established Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, the actual population of the borough is adversely affected by the current ONS methodology.

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3. Methodology

a) Overview

Subnational population projections are released at district level only, for the purposes of electoral boundary calculations this is inadequate. Using ONS ward distribution from mid-year estimates projected forward would not take account of specific local factors influencing population distribution and growth, as detailed below.

Sandwell Council's forecasting model for purposes of this review uses the ONS Mid-Year Estimates (MYE) as a base reference point, to which factor adjustments as detailed below are applied. All factor adjustments have been developed and informed using historic local data from a wide range of sources, to inform, enhance or change the likely future population at polling district and ward levels.

b) Calculating the 2030 Population & Electorate

For purposes of the Boundary Review process, the SFM has been used to estimate the 2030 total population and the 2030 population aged 18 and over by polling district, as well as by Ward using current boundaries.

Electorate

A comparison between the December 2023 electorate (published January 2024) and the 2021 ONS mid-year population estimate proportion of registered electors to population aged 18 and over has been used as a starting point for calculating the expected 2030 electorate.

ONS mid-year estimates have been used because these represent a consistent baseline methodology utilised across the UK and is therefore beneficial for purposes of the review process in aiding the work of both LGBCE and the Borough Council in quantifying specific local adjustment factors and how these translate into more accurate population and electorate forecasts.

(i) Housing Development Projections

The Council's Residential Development Pipeline figures derived from the Council's emergent Local Plan and population forecast have been compared to confirm the two are aligned throughout the timeline modelled. This approach recognises that growth in the borough – both economic and population – will not be distributed evenly. This is borne out by the current inequality in electorate per Ward, which has developed since the last review of 2004.

Future approved housing development have informed the distribution of residents in wards from 2023 up to 2030 by redistributing migration within wards in relation to the expected average household size and type of proposed units (as detailed in this methodology. As part of this comparison, an allowance is made for unimplemented approved Planning, which is fixed at 30% reflecting an analysis of Planning Applications submitted for the period 2017 to 2023.

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Population Distribution, Adjustment Factors & Methodology

The following factors have been taken into consideration when modelling population and electorate projections across the borough –

(ii) Conversions to Multi Occupancy Dwellings (HMOs)

An analysis of the public register of HMOs of premises in multiple occupation (up to 6 individual occupiers) based on the Council's Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme covering the period 2018 to 2023.

Analysis identifies that whilst most Wards present as having seen some conversions, the following Wards offer the most demonstrable ongoing trend of conversions –

- Abbey and Soho & Victoria wards

Further population numbers were therefore incorporated using unit development numbers (Sandwell Local Plan - 2025) and projected occupancy rates, for new conversions to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). This is addressed in the adjustment methodology set out below.

Adjustment Methodology

An analysis of licences recorded issued through the Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme register was made using data from both 2018 and 2023.

This identifies the following existing Wards as detailed below anticipated to see further conversions and estimated population change.

Ward	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30%
Abbey	128	90
Soho and Victoria	128	90
St Pauls	53	37
Smethwick	50	35
Oldbury	48	33
Blackheath	46	32
Great Bridge	46	32
Greets Green and Lyng	46	32
West Bromwich Central	46	32
Wednesbury South	25	17
Hateley Heath	22	16
Old Warley	16	11
Tividale	15	11
Great Barr with Yew Tree	14	10
Bristnall	13	9
Langley	13	9
Rowley	11	7

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Ward	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30%
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	7	5
Charlemont with Grove Vale	0	0
Friar Park	0	0
Princes End	0	0
Tipton Green	0	0
Newton	-8	-6
Wednesbury North	-26	-18

The data was processed to identify properties marked as established, new and removed depending in which dataset they appeared. Nine properties records did not include a maximum occupancy rate, in these instances the rate was set to 6 persons. This is then supported by quantitative analysis of the numbers of conversions already extant and number of households in each multi-occupancy dwelling.

Further population numbers were incorporated using unit development numbers (Sandwell Local Plan - 2025) and projected occupancy rates, for new conversions to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). A 70% occupancy was applied to these additions.

Combining data produced through the above analysis processes has been used to inform a lineal projection forecast up to 2030. Noting the impacts of policy change, a deduction on the percentage rate of conversion of 30% has also been applied, further details of which are given below.

Note that each bedroom within a multi-occupancy dwelling is occupied by an adult of aged 18 and over.

For example, the conversion of an existing 3-bedroom single dwelling occupied by 2 adults and 2 children. A conversion to a 6-bedroom HMO will see a net gain of 2 in terms of population, but a net gain of 4 in terms of electorate.

In terms of the distribution of projected conversions within existing Wards and polling districts, this has been applied to dwellings on roads where conversions have already taken place.

Polling District level

Polling district geographies are operational in the delivery of elections and do not align to any statistical boundaries used by ONS. To enable polling district allocations as required by the Boundary Commission, the analysis conducted at ward level has been extended to polling district level. This is a two-stage process –

1. estimating the current population aged 18 and over at polling district level; then

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2. estimating the 2030 electorate and population at polling district level.

The count of a polling district's electorate as a proportion of the overall count in its ward has been calculated as of December 2023. These proportions have then been applied to the 2023 Ward population aged 18 and over to establish a population at polling district level, assuming a direct relationship between electorate size and underlying population size.

Future growth in population and electorate, however, will not be evenly distributed within a ward so using 2023 proportions for 2030 will not produce realistic results.

The predominant factor in changing the distribution of electorate and the underlying population will be the location and types of residential housing development (including the conversions of existing housing stock to multiple occupancy use), assuming that polling districts with additional housing are more likely to increase in population.

To calculate the expected electorate and population at polling district level in 2030, the total number of additional proposed housing units in each polling district from 2023 to 2030 has been identified using spatial analysis and worked out as a percentage within each ward. The results have been used as a proxy for population distribution, applying them to the increase in electors and increase in population aged 18 and over in each ward to establish the spread of a ward's growth within its polling districts.

c) Methodology

The purpose of this process was to produce population projections to 2030 for small geographies in Sandwell – Ward and Polling District. It is noted that the process of forecasting is impacted by the following limitations in currently available population data:

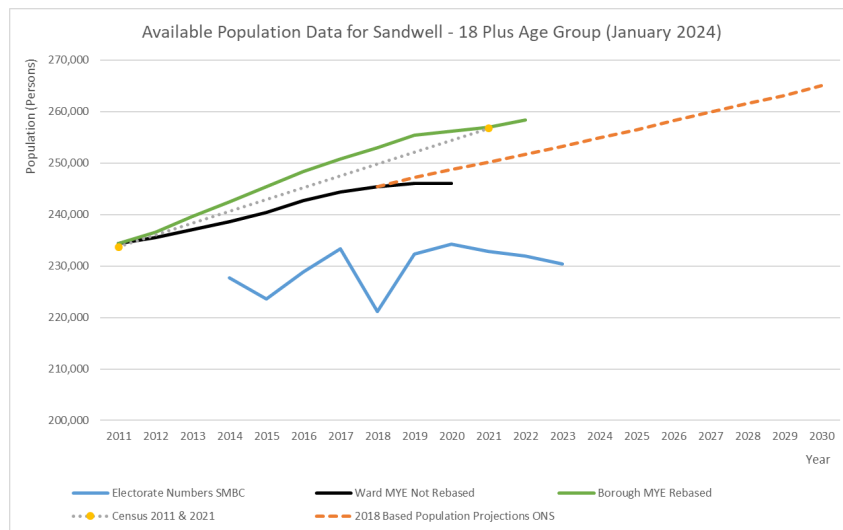
1. **Sandwell MBC's Electorate data** – This is regularly updated, providing population numbers for people registered to vote in Sandwell. However, this only provides a partial picture, as not all Sandwell residents who are eligible to vote register. (Dates: to 2023)
2. **Office for National Statistics (ONS) Mid-Year Population Estimates (MYE)** – Currently the National Population datasets are in a state of flux. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) are currently undertaking carrying out a reconciliation and rebasing of the Mid-Year Population Estimates (MYE). This process happens every ten years and comprises the recalibration of population estimates figures in comparison to 2021 Census data. Currently only the recalibrated Local Authority level geographies have been published. Lower level geographies currently remain based on projecting forwards the previous 2011 Census results.

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The Council in producing its initial population projection has relied on the following data sources -

1. **Borough Level Mid-Year Population Estimates** (Recalibrated Borough MYE) – Recalibrated following the 2021 Census (Dates: 2011 to 2022)
2. **Ward Level Mid-Year Population Estimates** (Uncalibrated Ward MYE) – Not currently recalibrated – 2011 Census based (Dates: 2011 to 2020)

The chart below illustrates the limitations of each dataset currently available.



The most accurate data available is the recalibrated mid-year population estimates. These figures align to the 2021 Census results.

It can be seen, in the chart on the previous page, that all other datasets present lower population numbers. However, the recalibrated mid-year estimates, currently do not provide lower level geography data, only data at borough level.

d) Conversion process – borough to ward level disaggregation methodology

Population projections were based on the uncalibrated Ward Mid-Year Estimate data, to which projected forecast figures were projected using a linear model proportionally to match the recalibrated Borough level figures and in turn calculate a linear ward population projection covering the period 2024-2030. These ward level figures were then proportionally allocated to Polling District areas. Finally, estimated population numbers from future residential developments and estimates of conversions to Houses of Multiple Occupation were then incorporated using the methodology described earlier in this report.

A mismatch between the end dates for the uncalibrated Ward MYE data (Data: to 2020) and the recalibrated Borough level data (Data: to 2022) was observed. An adjustment was applied through the addition of the projected figures to the uncalibrated Ward data producing a recalibrated data set for 2014 to 2020.

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Annual percentage differences between the two datasets were then calculated each at a Borough level geography. The annual percentage differences were then applied uniformly across all wards to the Uncalibrated Ward MYE dataset. This provided derived Ward figures with annual Borough totals matching the calibrated Borough level MYE dataset.

The figures for each Ward were then proportionally distributed across Polling Districts, applying residential property proportions at Ward to Polling District geographies from Sandwell's Local Land and Property Gazetteer.

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4. Summary & Recommendation

The distribution of Sandwell’s electors and population aged 18 and over at ward and polling district levels in 2024 and 2030 are detailed in the Annexes to this Technical Report.

The methodology used should provide estimates that are timely and improve on those that are available nationally at borough level. Ward level population has been derived using software designed specifically for forecasting and has been subject to a peer review.

It is recommended that Sandwell Forecast Model outputs and methodology are used in this electoral review and extend an invitation to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to discuss this further if this approach needs clarification.

Headline findings using this methodology are summarised below –

Current data

(i)	Current Population (All Age Groups) (2023)	345,792
(ii)	Current Potential Electorate (18+) (2023)	259,693
(iii)	Current Electorate (December 2023)	230,408

Forecasts

(i)	Future Population (All Age Groups) (2030)	361,389
(ii)	Future Potential Electorate (18+) (2030)	271,636
(iii)	Future Electorate (2030)	247,060

Annex A

2021 Population & Electorate

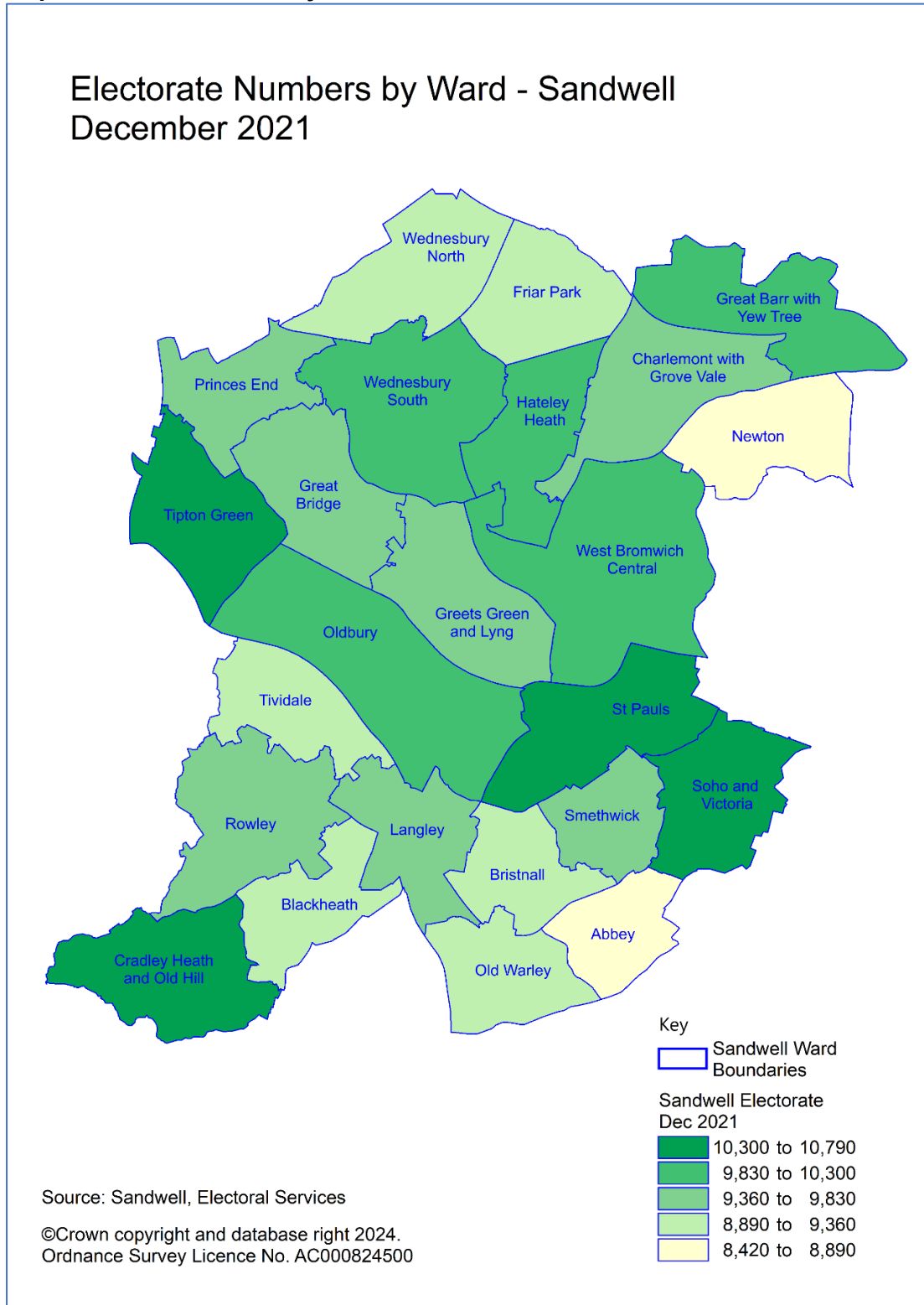
The estimated 2021 total population and the population aged 18 and over are shown in **Table A1** alongside the published electorate for December 2021. The average 2023 ward population is 14,242, an average population aged 18 and over of 10,695, and the average ward electorate is 9,700. This gives a ratio of around 9.7 electors to every 10.7 residents aged 18 and over.

Table A1: 2021 populations by ward and registration rates

Ward	Population 2021 Census- All Ages	Population 2021 Census - 18+ years	December 2021 Electorate	% Variance between Electorate and 18+ Census Population
Abbey	12,186	9,471	8,428	1,043
Blackheath	12,060	9,545	9,236	309
Bristnall	12,519	9,621	9,137	484
Charlemont with Grove Vale	12,710	10,108	9,419	689
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	14,961	11,429	10,360	1,069
Friar Park	12,790	9,340	8,946	394
Great Barr with Yew Tree	13,509	10,412	9,931	481
Great Bridge	14,426	10,850	9,795	1,055
Greets Green and Lyng	14,723	10,648	9,489	1,159
Hateley Heath	15,120	11,321	10,280	1,041
Langley	14,085	10,674	9,532	1,142
Newton	12,146	9,434	8,816	618
Old Warley	12,721	9,767	9,212	555
Oldbury	15,604	11,613	10,210	1,403
Princes End	14,140	10,332	9,464	868
Rowley	13,669	10,398	9,755	643
Smethwick	15,472	11,192	9,817	1,375
Soho and Victoria	19,629	13,476	10,790	2,686
St Pauls	16,720	11,922	10,479	1,443
Tipton Green	15,559	11,599	10,735	864
Tividale	13,082	9,835	9,194	641
Wednesbury North	13,318	10,032	9,328	704
Wednesbury South	15,227	11,711	10,262	1,449
West Bromwich Central	15,426	11,953	10,194	1,759
Sandwell	341,802	256,683	232,809	23,874

The electorate and the population aged 18 and over are mapped to illustrate the concentration of more populated wards (**Map A2**) compared to the Wards with higher numbers of electorate (**Map A3**).

Map A2: 2021 Electorate by Ward



Annex B

Variance from the Average Electorate December 2023

According to the Boundary Commission's definition, variance from average is significant if more than 30% of an authority's Wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average for that authority; and/or it has one Ward with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%. Sandwell had a Ward average of 9,600.3 electors in December 2023 but there were three Wards that were either above or below average.

Figure B1 shows the variance from the borough's Ward average for Sandwell's electorate at December 2023. There is imbalance in three Wards. The current Abbey Ward has the greatest variance from the average electorate in 2023 and as such meets the definition of variance from average set out by the Boundary Commission.

Figure B1: Electoral imbalance by Ward (December 2023)

Electoral Imbalance in Sandwell (Electorate December 2023)			
Ward	Electorate Dec 2023	Variance from Sandwell Ward Average	Electoral Imbalance
Abbey	8,311	-1,289.3	13.43% Y
Blackheath	9,178	-422.3	4.40%
Bristnall	8,875	-725.3	7.56%
Charlemont with Grove Vale	9,235	-365.3	3.81%
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	10,433	832.7	8.67%
Friar Park	8,729	-871.3	9.08%
Great Barr with Yew Tree	9,627	26.7	0.28%
Great Bridge	9,752	151.7	1.58%
Greets Green and Lyng	9,498	-102.3	1.07%
Hateley Heath	10,281	680.7	7.09%
Langley	9,376	-224.3	2.34%
Newton	8,620	-980.3	10.21% Y
Old Warley	9,049	-551.3	5.74%
Oldbury	10,185	584.7	6.09%
Princes End	9,277	-323.3	3.37%
Rowley	9,735	134.7	1.40%
Smethwick	9,666	65.7	0.68%
Soho and Victoria	10,779	1,178.7	12.28% Y
St. Paul's	10,498	897.7	9.35%
Tipton Green	10,559	958.7	9.99%
Tivdale	9,088	-512.3	5.34%
Wednesbury North	9,183	-417.3	4.35%
Wednesbury South	10,225	624.7	6.51%
West Bromwich Central	10,249	648.7	6.76%
Total	230,408		
Sandwell Ward Average	9,600.3		

Annex C

Sandwell Forecasting Model (SFM) – 2030 Population Projection & Electorate Projection (Ward & Polling District Level)

Table C1 shows the estimated population in 2030, the population aged 18 and over and an estimated electorate. These figures include HMOs and New Housing.

Table C1: 2030 populations by Ward

Ward	2030 Estimated Total Population	2030 Estimated final 18+ Population	2030 Estimated Electorate
Abbey	13,793	10,772	9,216
Blackheath	11,900	9,526	8,952
Bristnall	12,567	9,586	9,082
Charlemont with Grove Vale	12,949	9,975	9,363
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	14,467	11,142	10,369
Friar Park	13,338	9,524	8,902
Great Barr with Yew Tree	13,604	10,622	10,320
Great Bridge	14,518	11,089	10,199
Greets Green and Lyng	17,049	12,460	11,288
Hateley Heath	16,599	12,389	10,763
Langley	15,516	11,893	10,247
Newton	12,631	10,230	8,870
Old Warley	12,576	9,726	9,137
Oldbury	17,068	12,845	11,149
Princes End	14,116	10,073	9,189
Rowley	13,322	10,053	10,053
Smethwick	17,004	12,551	10,806
Soho and Victoria	22,056	15,357	13,164
St Pauls	19,199	13,885	12,572
Tipton Green	16,712	12,753	12,089
Tividale	13,767	10,027	9,245
Wednesbury North	13,535	10,194	9,193
Wednesbury South	15,531	11,955	11,287
West Bromwich Central	17,576	13,007	11,604
Sandwell	361,389	271,636	247,060

Source: SFM

The forecast electorate for 2030 is 247,060. The average 2030 ward population for all ages is estimated at 361,389 and the ward average for those aged 18 and over is 271,636. The average ward size of the electorate by 2030 is 10,294 based on the current 24 wards.

The ward distribution of the population aged 18 and over and the electorate at 2030 (with uplift) are illustrated in **Maps C1 and C2**, highlighting that wards (pre- review boundaries) around the extended Borough Centre are significantly above average.

Table C1 previous page above shows the 2023 population and electorate for each Ward and Polling District together with the associated projected population and electorate (aged 18 and over) as at 2030. The electorate and population aged 18 and over at polling district level in 2030 are calculated using the distribution of new housing and conversions as well as housing type factors in each polling district, as outlined earlier in this Technical Report.

Table C2: Published electorate by polling district in 2023 and estimated for 2030
(Note - the 2030 figures include HMOs and New Housing)

Ward	Polling District	2023		2030	
		Age 18+	Electorate	Estimated final 18+ Population	Estimate Electorate
Abbey	ABA	814	755	846	723
Abbey	ABB	1,460	1,383	1,517	1,296
Abbey	ABC	1,080	798	1,123	959
Abbey	ABD	2,383	1,692	2,493	2,132
Abbey	ABE	2,005	1,442	2,149	1,845
Abbey	ABF	1,500	1,227	1,557	1,330
Abbey	ABG	1,038	1,014	1,087	930
Blackheath	BLA	2,591	2,424	2,529	2,377
Blackheath	BLB	537	549	521	490
Blackheath	BLC	534	395	518	487
Blackheath	BLD	1,649	1,735	1,600	1,504
Blackheath	BLE	2,140	1,862	2,077	1,952
Blackheath	BLF	929	814	915	860
Blackheath	BLG	629	579	615	578
Blackheath	BLH	773	820	750	705
Bristnall	BRA	1,231	1,002	1,226	1,162
Bristnall	BRB	710	660	732	695
Bristnall	BRC	1,210	1,194	1,200	1,137
Bristnall	BRD	662	683	657	622
Bristnall	BRE	2,017	1,852	2,001	1,896
Bristnall	BRF	1,336	1,247	1,325	1,255
Bristnall	BRG	1,328	1,238	1,322	1,252
Bristnall	BRH	1,131	999	1,123	1,063
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHA	2,809	2,912	2,798	2,627
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHB	2,691	1,819	2,662	2,499
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHC	693	698	685	643

Ward	Polling District	2023		2030	
		Age 18+	Electorate	Estimated final 18+ Population	Estimate Electorate
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHD	949	1,041	939	882
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHE	1,013	1,045	1,002	941
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHF	773	702	765	718
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHG	1,135	1,018	1,123	1,054
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRA	1,448	1,234	1,452	1,351
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRB	817	594	820	763
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRC	1,374	1,201	1,378	1,282
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRD	1,237	989	1,241	1,155
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRE	1,124	1,081	1,132	1,054
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRF	797	756	800	744
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRG	2,144	2,340	2,150	2,001
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRH	2,164	2,238	2,170	2,020
Friar Park	FPA	3,435	3,202	3,496	3,272
Friar Park	FPB	3,055	2,877	3,016	2,817
Friar Park	FPC	1,200	1,098	1,183	1,105
Friar Park	FPD	1,823	1,552	1,829	1,709
Great Bridge	GBA	3,550	3,363	3,621	3,327
Great Bridge	GBB	2,563	2,444	2,635	2,422
Great Bridge	GBC	2,625	1,956	2,759	2,541
Great Bridge	GBD	2,004	1,989	2,074	1,908
Greets Green and Lyng	GGA	2,546	2,221	3,039	2,767
Greets Green and Lyng	GGB	1,868	1,662	2,077	1,878
Greets Green and Lyng	GGC	1,910	1,651	2,150	1,947
Greets Green and Lyng	GGD	1,474	1,214	1,639	1,482
Greets Green and Lyng	GGE	809	739	899	813
Greets Green and Lyng	GGF	1,453	1,210	1,615	1,460
Greets Green and Lyng	GGG	936	801	1,041	941
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYA	4,038	3,584	4,136	4,018
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYB	921	863	943	916
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYC	641	626	657	638
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYD	948	913	971	943
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYE	925	901	957	930
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYF	1,033	843	1,058	1,028
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYG	1,855	1,897	1,900	1,846
Hateley Heath	HHA	1,586	1,297	1,638	1,421
Hateley Heath	HHB	924	834	954	828
Hateley Heath	HHC	1,077	766	1,112	965
Hateley Heath	HHD	1,130	1,015	1,167	1,013
Hateley Heath	HHE	1,097	849	1,133	983
Hateley Heath	HHF	2,078	1,781	2,206	1,922
Hateley Heath	HHG	2,746	2,512	2,841	2,466
Hateley Heath	HHH	1,286	1,227	1,339	1,164
Langley	LAA	2,575	1,934	2,691	2,318

Ward	Polling District	2023		2030	
		Age 18+	Electorate	Estimated final 18+ Population	Estimate Electorate
Langley	LAB	1,849	1,457	1,933	1,665
Langley	LAC	903	708	944	813
Langley	LAD	2,359	1,989	2,466	2,124
Langley	LAE	1,607	1,440	1,680	1,447
Langley	LAF	1,011	862	1,060	914
Langley	LAG	1,067	986	1,120	966
Newton	NEA	2,388	2,097	2,390	2,073
Newton	NEB	1,272	1,025	1,268	1,098
Newton	NEC	2,248	1,959	2,250	1,951
Newton	NED	1,308	1,118	1,309	1,135
Newton	NEE	3,010	2,421	3,013	2,613
Oldbury	OLA	2,736	2,271	2,909	2,524
Oldbury	OLB	2,142	2,038	2,278	1,977
Oldbury	OLC	1,391	1,119	1,481	1,286
Oldbury	OLD	2,536	1,836	2,712	2,355
Oldbury	OLE	1,767	1,517	1,883	1,634
Oldbury	OLF	1,481	1,404	1,582	1,373
Old Warley	OWA	1,674	1,465	1,657	1,557
Old Warley	OWB	665	588	658	618
Old Warley	OWC	1,505	1,436	1,482	1,392
Old Warley	OWD	1,642	1,581	1,631	1,532
Old Warley	OWE	1,881	1,717	1,867	1,754
Old Warley	OWF	767	609	764	718
Old Warley	OWG	1,061	1,065	1,056	992
Old Warley	OWH	618	588	612	575
Princes End	PEA	2,321	2,177	2,295	2,094
Princes End	PEB	2,053	2,149	2,030	1,852
Princes End	PEC	615	553	608	555
Princes End	PED	1,145	1,136	1,132	1,033
Princes End	PEE	2,199	1,634	2,175	1,984
Princes End	PEF	1,007	900	996	908
Princes End	PEG	848	728	838	765
Rowley	ROA	957	929	988	988
Rowley	ROB	1,774	1,855	1,866	1,866
Rowley	ROC	1,551	1,650	1,640	1,640
Rowley	ROD	981	1,052	1,012	1,012
Rowley	ROE	1,073	1,036	1,107	1,107
Rowley	ROF	1,891	1,828	1,951	1,951
Rowley	ROG	1,436	1,385	1,489	1,489
Smethwick	SMA	592	541	629	541
Smethwick	SMB	940	853	1,007	868
Smethwick	SMC	1,696	1,383	1,807	1,556
Smethwick	SMD	1,522	1,070	1,620	1,395

Ward	Polling District	2023		2030	
		Age 18+	Electorate	Estimated final 18+ Population	Estimate Electorate
Smethwick	SME	1,085	852	1,160	999
Smethwick	SMF	2,691	2,112	2,862	2,464
Smethwick	SMG	1,159	871	1,235	1,063
Smethwick	SMH	2,101	1,984	2,231	1,920
St Pauls	SPA	1,689	1,581	1,884	1,701
St Pauls	SPB	1,961	1,445	2,184	1,972
St Pauls	SPC	603	609	1,051	986
St Pauls	SPD	1,809	1,354	2,006	1,811
St Pauls	SPE	1,562	1,509	1,727	1,558
St Pauls	SPF	2,413	1,991	2,697	2,436
St Pauls	SPG	2,108	2,009	2,337	2,109
Soho and Victoria	SVA	1,570	1,065	1,748	1,486
Soho and Victoria	SVB	1,148	963	1,374	1,182
Soho and Victoria	SVC	2,165	1,785	2,972	2,611
Soho and Victoria	SVD	1,078	784	1,187	1,008
Soho and Victoria	SVE	984	987	1,095	931
Soho and Victoria	SVF	2,810	2,399	3,121	2,651
Soho and Victoria	SVG	1,733	1,408	1,979	1,690
Soho and Victoria	SVH	1,649	1,388	1,880	1,605
Tipton Green	TGA	1,235	1,117	1,361	1,291
Tipton Green	TGB	1,016	1,057	1,089	1,032
Tipton Green	TGC	1,772	1,717	1,899	1,799
Tipton Green	TGD	2,646	2,422	2,836	2,687
Tipton Green	TGE	2,345	1,964	2,538	2,406
Tipton Green	TGF	2,763	2,282	3,030	2,875
Tividale	TIA	1,260	1,271	1,256	1,158
Tividale	TIB	3,399	3,045	3,399	3,134
Tividale	TIC	1,775	1,643	1,769	1,631
Tividale	TID	1,981	1,728	1,974	1,820
Tividale	TIE	1,634	1,401	1,629	1,502
West Bromwich Central	WBA	2,829	2,526	3,095	2,753
West Bromwich Central	WBB	1,629	1,601	1,694	1,497
West Bromwich Central	WBC	1,475	1,388	1,542	1,363
West Bromwich Central	WBD	939	762	962	849
West Bromwich Central	WBE	485	428	502	443
West Bromwich Central	WBF	1,095	1,022	1,142	1,009
West Bromwich Central	WBG	2,270	1,750	3,169	2,894
West Bromwich Central	WBH	875	772	902	796
Wednesbury North	WNA	1,146	1,032	1,138	1,027
Wednesbury North	WNB	1,987	1,942	1,971	1,778
Wednesbury North	WNC	2,633	2,190	2,591	2,336
Wednesbury North	WND	3,009	2,823	2,967	2,675
Wednesbury North	WNE	1,542	1,196	1,526	1,377

Ward	Polling District	2023		2030	
		Age 18+	Electorate	Estimated final 18+ Population	Estimate Electorate
Wednesbury South	WSA	991	1,015	1,053	993
Wednesbury South	WSB	713	683	762	719
Wednesbury South	WSC	1,963	1,647	2,155	2,037
Wednesbury South	WSD	1,397	1,262	1,484	1,400
Wednesbury South	WSE	2,710	2,527	2,878	2,716
Wednesbury South	WSF	530	520	568	536
Wednesbury South	WSG	2,877	2,571	3,056	2,884
	Sandwell	259,693	230,408	271,636	247,060
		1,603	1,422	1,677	1,525
	Average PD Population				
	Range: High	4,038	3,584	4,136	4,018
	Range: Low	485	395	502	443

Annex D

Multi Occupancy Residential Conversions Projections 2023-2030 (Ward & Polling District Level)

Table E1 – Polling Districts additional population due to HMO developments 2024-2030 (cumulative)

Ward	Polling District	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30% (rounded)
Abbey	ABA	0	0
Abbey	ABB	0	0
Abbey	ABC	0	0
Abbey	ABD	25	17
Abbey	ABE	93	65
Abbey	ABF	-2	-2
Abbey	ABG	13	9
Blackheath	BLA	20	14
Blackheath	BLB	0	0
Blackheath	BLC	0	0
Blackheath	BLD	0	0
Blackheath	BLE	0	0
Blackheath	BLF	19	13
Blackheath	BLG	7	5
Blackheath	BLH	0	0
Bristnall	BRA	7	5
Bristnall	BRB	0	0
Bristnall	BRC	0	0
Bristnall	BRD	0	0
Bristnall	BRE	0	0
Bristnall	BRF	0	0
Bristnall	BRG	6	4
Bristnall	BRH	0	0
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHA	0	0
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHB	0	0
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHC	0	0
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHD	0	0
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHE	0	0
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHF	0	0
Charlemont with Grove Vale	CHG	0	0
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRA	0	0
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRB	0	0
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRC	0	0
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRD	0	0
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRE	7	5

Ward	Polling District	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30% (rounded)
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRF	0	0
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRG	0	0
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	CRH	0	0
Friar Park	FPA	0	0
Friar Park	FPB	0	0
Friar Park	FPC	0	0
Friar Park	FPD	0	0
Great Bridge	GBA	0	0
Great Bridge	GBB	0	0
Great Bridge	GBC	0	0
Great Bridge	GBD	46	32
Greets Green and Lyng	GGA	7	5
Greets Green and Lyng	GGB	0	0
Greets Green and Lyng	GGC	39	27
Greets Green and Lyng	GGD	0	0
Greets Green and Lyng	GGE	0	0
Greets Green and Lyng	GGF	0	0
Greets Green and Lyng	GGG	0	0
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYA	0	0
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYB	0	0
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYC	0	0
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYD	0	0
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYE	14	10
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYF	0	0
Great Barr with Yew Tree	GYG	0	0
Hateley Heath	HHA	0	0
Hateley Heath	HHB	0	0
Hateley Heath	HHC	0	0
Hateley Heath	HHD	0	0
Hateley Heath	HHE	0	0
Hateley Heath	HHF	0	0
Hateley Heath	HHG	7	5
Hateley Heath	HHH	15	11
Langley	LAA	0	0
Langley	LAB	0	0
Langley	LAC	0	0
Langley	LAD	0	0
Langley	LAE	0	0
Langley	LAF	6	4
Langley	LAG	7	5
Newton	NEA	0	0
Newton	NEB	-8	-6
Newton	NEC	0	0

Ward	Polling District	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30% (rounded)
Newton	NED	0	0
Newton	NEE	0	0
Oldbury	OLA	6	4
Oldbury	OLB	6	4
Oldbury	OLC	7	5
Oldbury	OLD	7	5
Oldbury	OLE	9	7
Oldbury	OLF	13	9
Old Warley	OWA	0	0
Old Warley	OWB	0	0
Old Warley	OWC	-11	-7
Old Warley	OWD	7	5
Old Warley	OWE	7	5
Old Warley	OWF	6	4
Old Warley	OWG	7	5
Old Warley	OWH	0	0
Princes End	PEA	0	0
Princes End	PEB	0	0
Princes End	PEC	0	0
Princes End	PED	0	0
Princes End	PEE	0	0
Princes End	PEF	0	0
Princes End	PEG	0	0
Rowley	ROA	0	0
Rowley	ROB	0	0
Rowley	ROC	0	0
Rowley	ROD	0	0
Rowley	ROE	0	0
Rowley	ROF	0	0
Rowley	ROG	11	7
Smethwick	SMA	0	0
Smethwick	SMB	13	9
Smethwick	SMC	8	6
Smethwick	SMD	6	4
Smethwick	SME	12	8
Smethwick	SMF	6	4
Smethwick	SMG	6	4
Smethwick	SMH	0	0
St Pauls	SPA	15	11
St Pauls	SPB	14	10
St Pauls	SPC	0	0
St Pauls	SPD	0	0
St Pauls	SPE	-8	-6

Ward	Polling District	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30% (rounded)
St Pauls	SPF	32	22
St Pauls	SPG	0	0
Soho and Victoria	SVA	0	0
Soho and Victoria	SVB	9	7
Soho and Victoria	SVC	13	9
Soho and Victoria	SVD	-18	-12
Soho and Victoria	SVE	0	0
Soho and Victoria	SVF	-12	-8
Soho and Victoria	SVG	71	50
Soho and Victoria	SVH	64	45
Tipton Green	TGA	0	0
Tipton Green	TGB	0	0
Tipton Green	TGC	0	0
Tipton Green	TGD	0	0
Tipton Green	TGE	0	0
Tipton Green	TGF	0	0
Tividale	TIA	0	0
Tividale	TIB	15	11
Tividale	TIC	0	0
Tividale	TID	0	0
Tividale	TIE	0	0
West Bromwich Central	WBA	0	0
West Bromwich Central	WBB	12	8
West Bromwich Central	WBC	22	16
West Bromwich Central	WBD	-14	-10
West Bromwich Central	WBE	0	0
West Bromwich Central	WBF	12	8
West Bromwich Central	WBG	20	14
West Bromwich Central	WBH	-6	-4
Wednesbury North	WNA	6	4
Wednesbury North	WNB	6	4
Wednesbury North	WNC	-21	-15
Wednesbury North	WND	-16	-11
Wednesbury North	WNE	0	0
Wednesbury South	WSA	0	0
Wednesbury South	WSB	7	5
Wednesbury South	WSC	11	7
Wednesbury South	WSD	0	0
Wednesbury South	WSE	0	0
Wednesbury South	WSF	7	5
Wednesbury South	WSG	0	0
Sandwell		691	483

Source: SFM

Annex E

Residential Development Projections 2023-2030

Table E1 shows the forecast residential pipeline by ward from 2024 to 2030, based on housing supply data from Sandwell's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The forecast is made up of residential schemes, which are under construction, sites with planning permission where work has not yet started as well as additional sites that have the potential to accommodate residential development over the next 7 years (sites expected to deliver in excess of 10 units only).

Table E1: Residential pipeline housing schemes – estimated additional population (Aged 18 plus) by 2030

Ward	Estimated additional population due to developments by 2030	Estimated additional population due to developments by 2030 (minus 30%) (rounded)
Abbey	0	0
Blackheath	0	0
Bristnall	40	28
Charlemont with Grove Vale	28	19
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	0	0
Friar Park	212	148
Great Barr with Yew Tree	0	0
Great Bridge	154	108
Greets Green and Lyng	291	204
Hateley Heath	85	60
Langley	0	0
Newton	0	0
Old Warley	0	0
Oldbury	20	14
Princes End	0	0
Rowley	107	75
Smethwick	0	0
Soho and Victoria	917	642
St Pauls	546	383
Tipton Green	188	132
Tividale	0	0
Wednesbury North	0	0
Wednesbury South	89	62
West Bromwich Central	1,390	973
Sandwell	4,067	2,847

Residential and Mixed Use, Housing Allocations

Sites and Housing Unit Capacity

Draft Sandwell Local Plan (Site Completion Dates upto 2030)

SLP Planned Adoption Date: 2025



Data Source: Draft Sandwell Plan, Sandwell MBC, Strategic Planning & Transportation
 Source: Research Sandwell, Public Health Intelligence Team

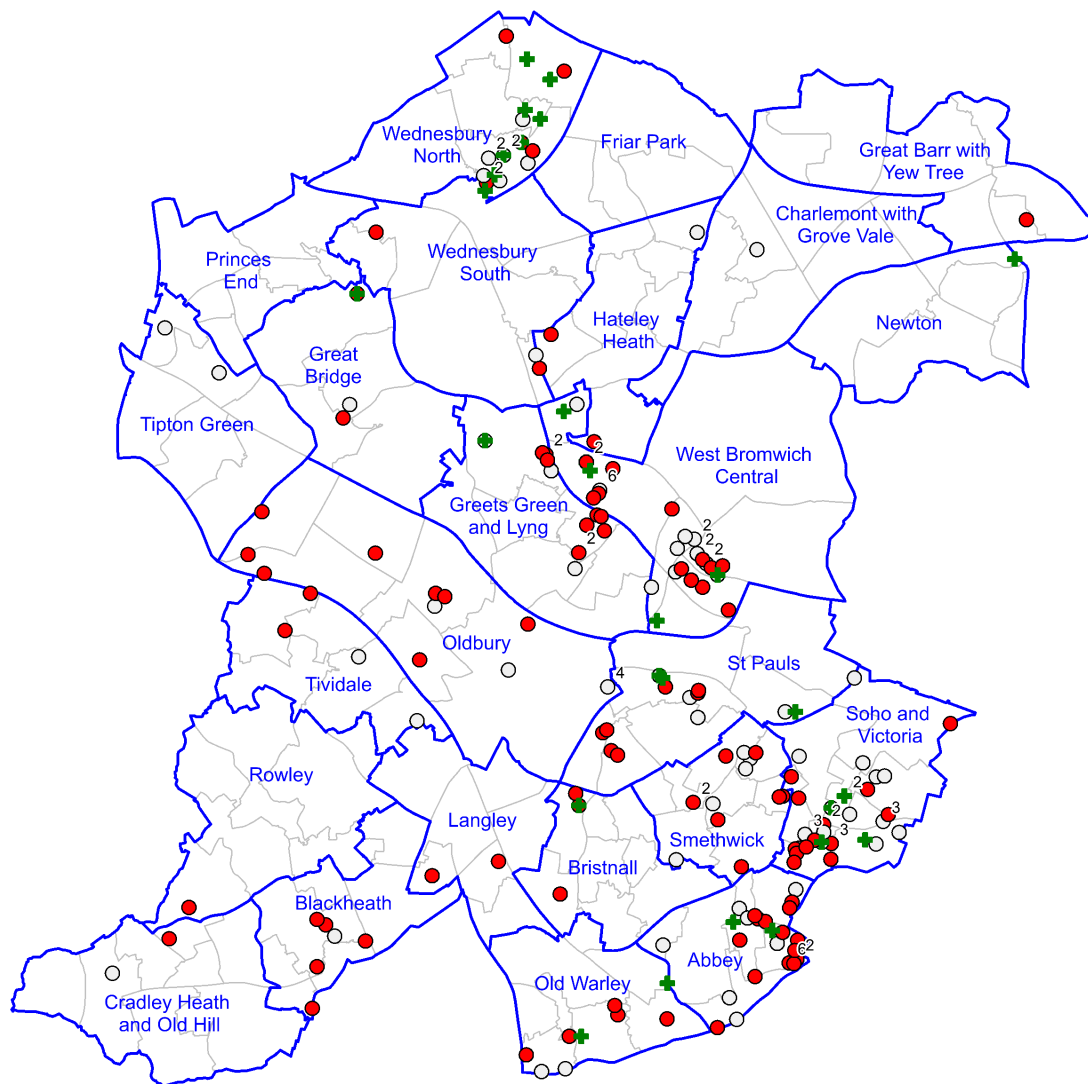
Sandwell Wards Boundaries
 Polling District Boundaries

Draft Sandwell Local Plan
 Residential Use Allocation Site
 Mixed Use Allocation Site
 Figures next to Allocation Sites are the capacity for residential homes on each site

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Registered Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Sandwell: Public HMO Register

Comparison between the Register: April 2018 and January 2024



HMOs Plotted by postcode centroid.
Multiple properties in an individual
postcode indicated by number in brackets

Public HMO Register - Property Locations
Changes between Apr 2018 and Jan 2024

- New HMO
- Existing HMO
- + Removed HMO
- Sandwell Ward Boundaries
- Polling District Boundaries

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Source: Research Sandwell, Public Health Intelligence Team
Data Source: Private Rented Sector and Housing Standards
Team, Sandwell MBC

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Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

***Electorate & Population Data Projections
2023-2030***

March 2024

Ward MYE Not Rebased
 Projections based on Modelled MYE - All Ages

WARD - Calculation - With Applied Percentage Increases

Ward	Base Figures: Ward MYE (Not Rebased) (With Boosted Figures)			Using previously projected figures		Linear Projections							Variant from Ward Avg 2018		Variant from Ward Avg 2030		Estimated additional population due to developments by 2030			Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030			2030 final pop		Finalised Variant from Polling District Avg 2030								
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Variant	%	Variant	%	Population from developments minus 30%	HMO's minus 30%	2030 final pop	Variant	%											
Abbey	12,954	13,081	13,116	13,138	13,225	13,283	13,343	13,403	13,463	13,523	13,583	13,643	13,703	-1,087	7.7%	-1,177	7.9%	0	128	90	13,793	-1,265	8.4%										
Blackheath	12,808	12,715	12,651	12,549	12,502	12,412	12,334	12,257	12,179	12,101	12,023	11,946	11,868	-1,233	8.8%	-3,011	20.2%	0	46	32	11,900	-3,158	21.0%										
Bristnall	12,676	12,765	12,728	12,645	12,650	12,641	12,624	12,607	12,590	12,572	12,555	12,538	12,521	-1,365	9.7%	-2,359	15.9%	53	37	13	9	12,567	-2,491	16.5%									
Charlemont with Grove Vale	12,770	12,885	12,744	12,807	12,863	12,847	12,857	12,868	12,879	12,890	12,901	12,912	12,923	-1,271	9.1%	-1,956	13.1%	37	26	0	0	12,949	-2,109	14.0%									
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	14,390	14,485	14,459	14,410	14,440	14,444	14,447	14,449	14,452	14,454	14,457	14,459	14,462	349	2.5%	-418	2.8%	0	7	5	14,467	-591	3.9%										
Friar Park	13,079	13,189	13,215	13,106	13,119	13,141	13,141	13,141	13,141	13,140	13,140	13,140	13,140	-962	6.9%	-1,740	11.7%	283	198	0	0	13,338	-1,720	11.4%									
Great Barr with Yew Tree	13,224	13,294	13,376	13,310	13,357	13,397	13,425	13,453	13,481	13,510	13,538	13,566	13,594	-817	5.8%	-1,285	8.6%	0	14	10	13,604	-1,454	9.7%										
Great Bridge	13,891	14,048	14,043	14,014	14,072	14,112	14,145	14,177	14,210	14,243	14,276	14,309	14,341	-150	1.1%	-538	3.6%	206	144	46	32	14,518	-540	3.6%									
Greets Green and Lyng	14,008	14,260	14,464	14,675	14,939	15,152	15,380	15,607	15,835	16,063	16,290	16,518	16,745	-33	0.2%	1,866	12.5%	388	272	46	32	17,049	1,991	13.2%									
Hateley Heath	15,664	15,817	15,824	15,867	15,976	16,032	16,100	16,167	16,234	16,302	16,369	16,437	16,504	1,623	11.6%	1,625	10.9%	114	80	22	16	16,599	1,541	10.2%									
Langley	14,243	14,475	14,483	14,568	14,702	14,798	14,899	15,000	15,102	15,203	15,304	15,405	15,507	202	1.4%	627	4.2%	0	13	9	15,516	458	3.0%										
Newton	13,020	12,954	12,924	12,891	12,901	12,848	12,818	12,787	12,757	12,727	12,697	12,667	12,637	-1,021	7.3%	-2,243	15.1%	0	-8	-6	12,631	-2,427	16.1%										
Old Warley	12,660	12,695	12,718	12,630	12,641	12,637	12,627	12,617	12,606	12,596	12,585	12,575	12,564	-1,381	9.8%	-2,315	15.6%	0	16	11	12,576	-2,482	16.5%										
Oldbury	15,613	15,721	15,802	15,932	16,098	16,188	16,306	16,424	16,543	16,661	16,779	16,897	17,016	1,572	11.2%	2,136	14.4%	26	18	48	33	17,068	2,010	13.3%									
Princes End	13,927	14,024	14,058	13,977	14,009	14,034	14,046	14,057	14,069	14,081	14,092	14,104	14,116	-114	0.8%	-764	5.1%	0	0	0	0	14,116	-942	6.3%									
Roxley	12,448	12,549	12,607	12,626	12,722	12,778	12,840	12,903	12,965	13,028	13,090	13,153	13,215	-1,593	11.3%	-1,664	11.2%	143	100	11	7	13,322	-1,736	11.5%									
Smethwick	15,528	15,791	15,878	15,908	16,040	16,171	16,285	16,399	16,513	16,627	16,741	16,854	16,968	1,488	10.6%	2,089	14.0%	0	50	35	17,004	1,946	12.9%										
Soho and Victoria	17,751	18,112	18,433	18,590	18,889	19,181	19,457	19,732	20,008	20,283	20,559	20,834	21,109	3,710	26.4%	6,230	41.9%	1224	857	128	90	22,056	6,998	46.5%									
St Pauls	15,921	16,298	16,478	16,621	16,867	17,101	17,323	17,544	17,766	17,987	18,209	18,430	18,652	1,880	13.4%	3,772	25.4%	729	511	53	37	19,199	4,141	27.5%									
Tipton Green	14,884	14,979	15,130	15,256	15,444	15,558	15,698	15,837	15,977	16,117	16,257	16,396	16,536	843	6.0%	1,657	11.1%	251	176	0	0	16,712	1,654	11.0%									
Tividale	13,346	13,386	13,456	13,429	13,492	13,522	13,556	13,589	13,622	13,656	13,689	13,723	13,756	-695	4.9%	-1,123	7.6%	0	15	11	13,767	-1,291	8.6%										
Wednesbury North	13,649	13,695	13,671	13,617	13,637	13,623	13,613	13,603	13,593	13,583	13,573	13,563	13,553	-392	2.8%	-1,327	8.9%	0	-26	-18	13,535	-1,523	10.1%										
Wednesbury South	13,738	13,976	14,093	14,167	14,328	14,471	14,609	14,746	14,883	15,020	15,157	15,294	15,431	-302	2.2%	551	3.7%	119	83	25	17	15,531	473	3.1%									
West Bromwich Central	14,788	15,001	15,086	15,160	15,298	15,420	15,538	15,656	15,774	15,892	16,010	16,127	16,245	748	5.3%	1,366	9.2%	1855	1299	46	32	17,576	2,518	16.7%									
Total	336,977	340,198	341,436	341,895	344,210	345,792	347,408	349,025	350,641	352,257	353,874	355,490	357,106					5428	3800	691	483	361389											
Average	14,041	14,175	14,227	14,246	14,342	14,408	14,475	14,543	14,610	14,677	14,745	14,812	14,879								15,058												
Range																																	
High	17,751	18,112	18,433	18,590	18,889	19,181	19,457	19,732	20,008	20,283	20,559	20,834	21,109								22,056												
Low	12,448	12,549	12,607	12,549	12,502	12,412	12,334	12,257	12,179	12,101	12,023	11,946	11,868								11,900												
											Change 2018 to 2030		20,129		6.0%													Change 2018 to 2030		24,412		7.2%	

Polling Disticts - Calculation - from Calculated Ward Figures - Proportioned through LLPG Residential Properties in each Polling District compared to relevant Ward

Polling District	Ward	Base Figures: Ward MYE (Not Rebased) (With Boosted Figures)			Using previously projected figures		Linear Projections													Variant from Polling District Avg 2016		Variant from Polling District Avg 2030		Estimated additional population due to developments by 2027		Population from developments minus 30%		Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2027		HMO's minus 30%		2030 final pop		Finalised Variant from Polling District Avg 2030	
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Variant	%	Variant	%	Population	%	Population	%	Variant	%	Variant	%	Variant	%							
ABA	Abbey	1,026	1,036	1,039	1,040	1,047	1,052	1,056	1,061	1,066	1,071	1,075	1,080	1,085	-1,054	50.7%	-1,119	50.8%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,085	-1,146	51.4%	0	0	1,085	-1,146	51.4%			
ABB	Abbey	1,839	1,857	1,862	1,865	1,878	1,886	1,894	1,903	1,911	1,920	1,929	1,937	1,946	-241	11.6%	-259	11.7%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,946	-285	12.8%	0	0	1,946	-285	12.8%			
ABC	Abbey	1,361	1,375	1,378	1,381	1,390	1,396	1,402	1,409	1,415	1,421	1,427	1,434	1,440	-719	34.6%	-764	34.7%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,440	-791	35.4%	0	0	1,440	-791	35.4%			
ABD	Abbey	3,002	3,032	3,040	3,045	3,065	3,079	3,093	3,106	3,120	3,134	3,148	3,162	3,176	922	44.3%	972	44.1%	25	17	25	17	3,193	962	43.1%	93	65	2,738	508	22.8%					
ABE	Abbey	2,527	2,552	2,559	2,563	2,580	2,591	2,603	2,614	2,626	2,638	2,650	2,661	2,673	447	21.5%	469	21.3%	0	93	0	93	0	0	2,738	508	22.8%	-2	-2	1,998	-233	10.4%			
ABF	Abbey	1,891	1,909	1,914	1,917	1,930	1,939	1,947	1,956	1,965	1,974	1,983	1,992	2,000	-190	9.1%	-205	9.3%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,998	-233	10.4%	0	0	1,998	-233	10.4%			
ABG	Abbey	1,308	1,321	1,324	1,326	1,335	1,341	1,347	1,353	1,359	1,365	1,371	1,377	1,383	-772	37.1%	-821	37.2%	0	13	0	13	0	0	1,392	-838	37.6%	0	0	1,392	-838	37.6%			
BIA	Blackheath	3,393	3,369	3,352	3,325	3,312	3,288	3,268	3,247	3,227	3,206	3,186	3,165	3,144	1,313	63.1%	940	42.6%	20	14	20	14	3,158	927	41.6%	0	0	3,158	927	41.6%					
BLB	Blackheath	704	698	695	689	687	682	677	673	669	665	660	656	652	-1,377	66.2%	-1,552	70.4%	0	0	0	0	0	0	652	-1,579	70.8%	0	0	652	-1,579	70.8%			
BLC	Blackheath	699	694	690	685	682	677	673	669	665	660	656	652	648	-1,381	66.4%	-1,557	70.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	648	-1,583	71.0%	0	0	648	-1,583	71.0%			
BID	Blackheath	2,159	2,143	2,132	2,115	2,107	2,092	2,079	2,066	2,053	2,040	2,027	2,013	2,000	79	3.8%	-204	9.3%	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,000	-230	10.3%	0	0	2,000	-230	10.3%			
BIF	Blackheath	2,803	2,782	2,768	2,746	2,736	2,716	2,699	2,682	2,665	2,648	2,631	2,614	2,597	722	34.7%	392	17.8%	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,597	366	16.4%	0	0	2,597	366	16.4%			
BLF	Blackheath	1,216	1,207	1,201	1,192	1,187	1,179	1,171	1,164	1,156	1,149	1,142	1,134	1,127	-864	41.5%	-1,077	48.9%	0	19	13	13	0	0	1,140	-1,091	48.9%	0	0	1,140	-1,091	48.9%			
BIG	Blackheath	823	817	813	806	803	798	793	788	783	778	773	768	763	-1,257	60.4%	-1,442	65.4%	0	7	5	5	0	0	768	-1,463	65.8%	0	0	768	-1,463	65.8%			
BLH	Blackheath	1,012	1,004	999	991	987	980	974	968	962	956	950	943	937	-1,069	51.4%	-1,267	57.5%	0	0	0	0	0	0	937	-1,293	58.0%	0	0	937	-1,293	58.0%			
BRB	Brinsford	1,621	1,632	1,628	1,617	1,618	1,616	1,614	1,612	1,610	1,608	1,605	1,603	1,601	-459	22.1%	-603	27.4%	0	7	5	5	0	0	1,606	-625	28.0%	0	0	1,606	-625	28.0%			
BRB	Brinsford	935	941	939	933	933	932	931	930	928	927	926	925	923	-1,145	55.1%	-1,281	58.1%	53	37	0	0	0	0	960	-1,270	56.9%	0	0	960	-1,270	56.9%			
BRC	Brinsford	1,593	1,604	1,600	1,589	1,590	1,589	1,587	1,585	1,582	1,580	1,578	1,576	1,574	-487	23.4%	-631	28.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,574	-657	29.5%	0	0	1,574	-657	29.5%			
BRD	Brinsford	872	878	876	870	870	870	868	867	866	865	864	863	861	-1,208	58.1%	-1,343	60.9%	0	0	0	0	0	0	861	-1,369	61.4%	0	0	861	-1,369	61.4%			
BRE	Brinsford	2,656	2,675	2,667	2,650	2,651	2,640	2,645	2,642	2,638	2,635	2,631	2,627	2,624	576	27.7%	419	19.2%	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,624	398	17.6%	0	0	2,624	398	17.6%			
BRF	Brinsford	1,759	1,766	1,766	1,754	1,756	1,754	1,752	1,750	1,749	1,747	1,746	1,744	1,743	-321	15.4%	-467	21.9%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,738	-493	22.7%	0	0	1,738	-493	22.7%			
BRG	Brinsford	1,749	1,761	1,756	1,745	1,745	1,744	1,742	1,740	1,737	1,735	1,732	1,730	1,728	-331	15.9%	-477	21.6%	0	6	4	4	0	0	1,732	-499	22.4%	0	0	1,732	-499	22.4%			
BRH	Brinsford	1,490	1,501	1,496	1,487	1,487	1,486	1,484	1,482	1,480	1,478	1,476	1,474	1,472	-590	28.4%	-732	33.2%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,472	-759	34.0%	0	0	1,472	-759	34.0%			
CHA	Charlton with Grove Vale	3,564	3,596	3,557	3,575	3,590	3,586	3,589	3,592	3,595	3,598	3,601	3,604	3,607	1,484	71.4%	1,403	63.6%	37	26	0	0	0	0	3,633	1,402	62.9%	0	0	3,633	1,402	62.9%			
CHB	Charlton with Grove Vale	3,415	3,445	3,408	3,425	3,440	3,435	3,438	3,441	3,444	3,447	3,450	3,453	3,456	1,335	64.2%	1,251	56.8%	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,456	1,225	54.9%	0	0	3,456	1,225	54.9%			
CHC	Charlton with Grove Vale	879	887	877	882	886	884	885	886	887	887	888	889	890	-1,201	57.7%	-1,315	59.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	890	-1,341	60.1%	0	0	890	-1,341	60.1%			
CHD	Charlton with Grove Vale	1,205	1,216	1,202	1,208	1,214	1,212	1,213	1,214	1,215	1,216	1,217	1,218	1,219	-875	42.1%	-985	44.7%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,219	-1,012	45.3%	0	0	1,219	-1,012	45.3%			
CHE	Charlton with Grove Vale	1,286	1,297	1,283	1,293	1,295	1,293	1,294	1,295	1,297	1,298	1,299	1,301	1,301	-795	38.2%	-903	41.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,301	-930	41.7%	0	0	1,301	-930	41.7%			
CHF	Charlton with Grove Vale	981	990	979	984	989	987	988	989	990	991	991	992	993	-1,099	52.8%	-1,211	54.9%	0	0	0	0	0	0	993	-1,238	55.5%	0	0	993	-1,238	55.5%			
CHG	Charlton with Grove Vale	1,440	1,453	1,437	1,444	1,451	1,449	1,450	1,451	1,452	1,454	1,455	1,456	1,457	-640	30.8%	-747	33.9%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,457	-774	34.7%	0	0	1,457	-774	34.7%			
CRA	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,876	1,888	1,885	1,879	1,882	1,883	1,883	1,884	1,884	1,884	1,885	1,885	1,885	-204	9.8%	-319	14.5%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,885	-345	15.5%	0	0	1,885	-345	15.5%			
CRB	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,059	1,066	1,064	1,061	1,063	1,063	1,063	1,064	1,064	1,064	1,064	1,064	1,064	-1,021	49.1%	-1,140	51.7%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,064	-1,166	52.3%	0	0	1,064	-1,166	52.3%			
CRD	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,760	1,792	1,788	1,782	1,786	1,787	1,787	1,787	1,788	1,788	1,788	1,788	1,789	-300	14.4%	-416	18.9%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,789	-442	19.8%	0	0	1,789	-442	19.8%			
CRC	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,603	1,614	1,613	1,609	1,611	1,609	1,609	1,610	1,610	1,610	1,610	1,610	1,610	-477	22.0%	-593	26.9%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,611	-620	27.8%	0	0	1,611	-620	27.8%			
CRE	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,457	1,466	1,464	1,462	1,464	1,462	1,463	1,463	1,463	1,463	1,463	1,464	1,464	-623	30.0%	-740	33.6%	0	7	5	5	0	0	1,469	-762	34.2%	0	0	1,469	-762	34.2%			
CRF	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,033	1,040	1,038	1,034	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,038	1,038	1,038	1,038	-1,047	50.3%	-1,166	52.9%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,038	-1,193	53.5%	0	0	1,038	-1,193	53.5%			
CRG	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	2,778	2,796	2,791	2,782	2,787	2,788	2,789	2,789	2,790	2,790	2,791	2,791	2,792	698	33.3%	587	26.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,792	561	25.1%	0	0	2,792	561	25.1%			

Table with columns for various categories (OLA, OLB, OLC, etc.) and rows for numerous locations (Osbury, Old Warley, etc.). Each row contains multiple numerical values and some cells contain small integers (e.g., 6, 4, 26, 18, etc.). The table concludes with a summary section containing 'Total', 'Average', 'Range', 'High', and 'Low' rows.

Summary table with 5 rows: Total, Average, Range, High, and Low. It contains numerical values for each row, including a large 'Total' value of 361,389 and a 'High' value of 5,299.

Polling Districts MYE Not Rebased
Projections based on Modelled MYE - Aged 18 Plus

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Polling Districts - Calculation - from Ward Figures above - Proportioned through LLPG Residential Properties in each Polling District compared to relevant Ward

Polling District	Ward	Base Figures: Ward MYE (Not Rebased) (With Boosted Figures)			Using previously projected figures		Linear Projections							Variant from Polling District Avg 2016		Variant from Polling District Avg 2030		Estimated additional population due to developments by 2027	Population from developments minus 90%	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2027	HMO's minus 30%	2030 final pop	Finalised Variant from Polling District Avg 2030		
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Variant	%	Variant						%	Variant	%
ABA	Abbeey	789	799	801	804	809	814	819	823	828	832	837	841	846	-773	49.5%	-810	48.9%	0	0	0	0	846	-831	49.6%
ABB	Abbeey	1,414	1,433	1,436	1,442	1,451	1,460	1,468	1,476	1,484	1,492	1,500	1,509	1,517	-147	9.4%	-140	8.4%	0	0	0	0	1,517	-160	9.5%
ABC	Abbeey	1,047	1,061	1,063	1,067	1,074	1,080	1,086	1,092	1,098	1,105	1,111	1,117	1,123	-515	33.0%	-534	32.2%	0	0	0	0	1,123	-554	33.0%
ABD	Abbeey	2,309	2,339	2,344	2,354	2,368	2,383	2,396	2,409	2,423	2,436	2,449	2,463	2,476	747	47.8%	820	49.5%	0	25	17	2,493	816	48.7%	
ABE	Abbeey	1,943	1,969	1,972	1,981	1,993	2,005	2,017	2,028	2,039	2,050	2,061	2,073	2,084	382	24.4%	428	25.8%	0	93	65	2,149	472	28.2%	
ABF	Abbeey	1,454	1,473	1,476	1,482	1,491	1,500	1,509	1,517	1,525	1,534	1,542	1,551	1,559	-108	6.9%	-97	5.9%	0	-2	-2	1,557	-139	7.1%	
ABG	Abbeey	1,006	1,019	1,021	1,025	1,032	1,038	1,044	1,049	1,055	1,061	1,067	1,073	1,078	-556	35.6%	-578	34.9%	0	0	13	9	1,087	-589	35.1%
BIA	Blackheath	2,647	2,625	2,623	2,612	2,604	2,591	2,581	2,570	2,559	2,548	2,537	2,526	2,515	1,085	69.5%	859	51.9%	0	20	14	2,529	852	50.8%	
BLB	Blackheath	549	546	544	542	540	537	535	533	530	528	526	524	521	-1,013	64.9%	-1,135	68.5%	0	0	0	0	521	-1,155	68.9%
BLC	Blackheath	545	543	540	538	536	534	531	529	527	525	523	520	518	-1,017	65.1%	-1,138	68.7%	0	0	0	0	518	-1,159	69.1%
BLD	Blackheath	1,684	1,676	1,668	1,662	1,656	1,649	1,642	1,635	1,628	1,621	1,614	1,607	1,600	122	7.8%	-56	3.4%	0	0	0	0	1,600	-77	4.6%
BLE	Blackheath	2,186	2,176	2,166	2,157	2,150	2,140	2,131	2,122	2,113	2,104	2,095	2,086	2,077	624	40.0%	421	25.4%	0	0	0	0	2,077	401	23.9%
BLF	Blackheath	949	944	940	936	933	929	925	921	917	913	909	905	901	-613	39.3%	-755	45.6%	0	19	13	915	-762	45.5%	
BLG	Blackheath	642	639	636	634	632	629	626	623	621	618	615	613	610	-920	58.9%	-1,046	63.2%	0	7	5	615	-1,062	63.3%	
BLH	Blackheath	789	785	782	779	776	773	769	765	763	760	756	753	750	-773	49.5%	-906	54.7%	0	0	0	0	750	-927	55.3%
BRA	Brixton	1,232	1,243	1,237	1,232	1,231	1,231	1,229	1,228	1,227	1,225	1,224	1,223	1,221	-330	21.1%	-435	26.3%	0	7	5	1,226	-451	26.9%	
BRB	Brixton	711	717	713	710	710	710	709	708	707	707	706	705	704	-851	54.5%	-952	57.5%	40	28	0	0	732	-945	56.3%
BRC	Brixton	1,211	1,221	1,216	1,211	1,210	1,210	1,208	1,207	1,206	1,204	1,203	1,202	1,200	-351	22.5%	-456	27.5%	0	0	0	0	1,200	-476	28.4%
BRD	Brixton	663	669	665	663	662	662	661	661	660	659	658	658	657	-899	57.6%	-999	60.3%	0	0	0	0	657	-1,020	60.8%
BRE	Brixton	2,019	2,036	2,027	2,018	2,017	2,017	2,015	2,012	2,010	2,008	2,006	2,003	2,001	457	29.3%	345	20.8%	0	0	0	0	2,001	324	19.3%
BRF	Brixton	1,337	1,349	1,342	1,337	1,336	1,336	1,334	1,333	1,331	1,330	1,328	1,327	1,325	-225	14.4%	-331	20.0%	0	0	0	0	1,325	-351	21.0%
BRG	Brixton	1,329	1,341	1,335	1,329	1,328	1,328	1,327	1,325	1,324	1,322	1,321	1,319	1,318	-232	14.9%	-339	20.4%	0	6	4	1,322	-355	21.2%	
BRH	Brixton	1,133	1,142	1,137	1,132	1,131	1,131	1,130	1,129	1,128	1,126	1,125	1,124	1,123	-429	27.5%	-534	32.2%	0	0	0	0	1,123	-554	33.0%
CHA	Charmouth with Grove Vale	2,828	2,842	2,802	2,817	2,819	2,809	2,805	2,800	2,796	2,792	2,787	2,783	2,779	1,266	81.1%	1,123	67.8%	28	19	0	0	2,798	1,122	66.9%
CHB	Charmouth with Grove Vale	2,709	2,723	2,684	2,698	2,701	2,691	2,682	2,683	2,679	2,674	2,670	2,666	2,662	1,148	73.5%	1,006	60.7%	0	0	0	0	2,662	985	58.8%
CHC	Charmouth with Grove Vale	698	701	691	695	695	693	692	691	690	689	688	687	685	-864	55.3%	-971	58.6%	0	0	0	0	685	-991	59.1%
CHD	Charmouth with Grove Vale	956	961	947	952	953	949	948	946	945	944	942	940	939	-606	38.8%	-717	43.3%	0	0	0	0	939	-737	44.0%
CHE	Charmouth with Grove Vale	1,020	1,025	1,010	1,016	1,017	1,013	1,011	1,010	1,008	1,007	1,005	1,004	1,002	-542	34.7%	-654	39.5%	0	0	0	0	1,002	-675	40.2%
CHF	Charmouth with Grove Vale	779	783	777	776	776	773	771	770	767	767	766	765	763	-783	50.1%	-891	53.8%	0	0	0	0	765	-912	54.4%
CHG	Charmouth with Grove Vale	1,143	1,148	1,132	1,138	1,139	1,135	1,133	1,131	1,130	1,128	1,126	1,124	1,123	-419	26.8%	-534	32.2%	0	0	0	0	1,123	-554	33.0%
CRA	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,442	1,450	1,446	1,446	1,447	1,448	1,448	1,449	1,450	1,450	1,451	1,452	1,452	-120	7.7%	-204	12.3%	0	0	0	0	1,452	-225	13.4%
CRB	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	814	819	817	816	817	817	818	818	818	819	819	819	820	-748	47.8%	-836	50.5%	0	0	0	0	820	-857	51.1%
CRC	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,368	1,376	1,372	1,371	1,373	1,374	1,374	1,375	1,376	1,376	1,376	1,377	1,378	-193	12.4%	-279	16.8%	0	0	0	0	1,378	-299	17.8%
CRO	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,232	1,239	1,236	1,232	1,237	1,232	1,238	1,239	1,240	1,239	1,240	1,241	1,241	-239	21.1%	-416	25.1%	0	0	0	0	1,241	-436	26.0%
CRE	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,120	1,126	1,123	1,122	1,124	1,124	1,125	1,125	1,126	1,126	1,127	1,127	1,127	-442	28.3%	-529	31.9%	0	7	5	1,132	-544	32.5%	
CRF	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	794	798	796	796	797	797	798	798	798	798	799	799	800	-768	49.2%	-857	51.7%	0	0	0	0	800	-877	52.3%
CRG	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	2,135	2,147	2,141	2,141	2,143	2,144	2,145	2,146	2,147	2,147	2,148	2,149	2,150	574	36.7%	494	29.8%	0	0	0	0	2,150	473	28.2%
CRH	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	2,156	2,167	2,162	2,161	2,163	2,164	2,165	2,166	2,167	2,168	2,169	2,169	2,170	594	38.0%	514	31.0%	0	0	0	0	2,170	494	29.4%
FPA	Friar Park	3,451	3,480	3,471	3,443	3,434	3,435	3,428	3,421	3,413	3,406	3,399	3,392	3,385	1,890	121.0%	1,729	104.4%	159	111	0	0	3,496	1,819	106.5%
FPB	Friar Park	3,070	3,095	3,087	3,062	3,055	3,055	3,049	3,042	3,036	3,030	3,023	3,017	3,011	1,508	96.6%	1,355	81.8%	8	5	0	0	3,016	1,340	79.9%
FPC	Friar Park	1,206	1,216	1,213	1,203	1,200	1,200	1,198	1,196	1,193	1,191	1,188	1,186	1,183	-355	22.8%	-473	28.6%	0	0	0	0	1,183	-494	29.4%
FPD	Friar Park	1,832	1,847	1,842	1,827	1,823	1,823	1,819	1,815	1,812	1,808	1,804	1,800	1,797	270	17.3%	140	8.5%	46	32	0	0	1,829	152	9.1%
GBA	Great Bridge	3,487	3,530	3,523	3,526	3,538	3,550	3,560	3,570	3,580	3,589	3,599	3,609	3,619	1,925	123.3%	1,963	118.5%	4	3	0	0	3,621	1,945	116.0%
GBB	Great Bridge	2,517	2,548	2,543	2,545	2,554	2,563	2,570	2,577	2,584	2,591	2,598	2,605	2,612	955	61.2%	956	57.7%	32	22	0	0	2,635	958	57.1%
GBC	Great Bridge	2,578	2,610	2,604	2,607	2,616	2,625	2,632	2,639	2,647	2,654	2,661	2,668	2,676	1,017	65.1%	1,019	61.6%	119	83	0	0	2,759	1,082	64.5%
GBD	Great Bridge	1,968	1,992	1,988	1,990	1,997	2,004	2,009	2,015	2,020	2,026	2,031	2,037	2,042	406	26.0%	386	23.3%	0	46	32	2,074	397	23.7%	
GGA	Greets Green and L yng	2,341	2,385	2,423	2,463	2,506	2,546	2,586	2,627	2,668	2,708	2,749	2,790	2,830	779	49.9%	1,174	70.9%	291	7	5	0	3,039	1,362	81.2%
GGB	Greets Green and L yng	1,718	1,750	1,778	1,807	1,839	1,868	1,898	1,928	1,957	1,987	2,017	2,047	2,077	156	10.0%	421	25.4%	0	0	0	0	2,077	400	23.9%
GGC	Greets Green and L yng	1,756	1,789	1,818	1,847	1,880	1,910	1,940	1,971	2,001	2,032	2,062	2,093	2,123	194	12.5%	467	28.2%	0	39	27	2,150	473	28.2%	
GGD	Greets Green and L yng	1,356	1,382	1,404	1,426	1,451	1,474	1,498	1,522	1,545	1,569	1,592	1,616	1,639	-206	13.2%	-17	1.0%	0	0	0	0	1,639	-37	2.2%
GGE	Greets Green and L yng	744	758	770	782	796	809	822	835	848	860	873	886	899	-818	52.4%	-957	45.7%	0	0	0	0	899	-778	46.4%
GGF	Greets Green and L yng	1,336	1,361	1,383	1,405	1,430	1,453	1,476	1,499	1,522	1,545	1,569	1,59												

NEE	Newton	3,010	3,011	3,003	3,008	3,013	3,010	3,011	3,011	3,011	3,012	3,012	3,013	3,013	1,448	92.7%	1,357	81.9%	0	0	0	0	3,013	1,336	79.7%
OLA	Olbury	2,618	2,640	2,657	2,687	2,715	2,736	2,760	2,784	2,808	2,832	2,856	2,880	2,905	1,056	67.6%	1,248	75.4%	0	0	0	0	2,909	1,232	73.5%
OIB	Olbury	2,050	2,067	2,080	2,104	2,126	2,142	2,161	2,180	2,199	2,218	2,236	2,255	2,274	488	31.3%	618	37.3%	0	0	6	4	2,278	602	35.9%
OIC	Olbury	1,331	1,342	1,350	1,366	1,380	1,391	1,403	1,415	1,427	1,440	1,452	1,464	1,476	-231	-14.8%	-180	-10.9%	0	0	7	5	1,481	-196	-11.7%
OLD	Olbury	2,427	2,447	2,463	2,491	2,517	2,536	2,559	2,581	2,604	2,626	2,648	2,671	2,693	86	5.2%	55	3.0%	0	0	0	0	2,712	-1,035	-61.2%
OIE	Olbury	1,691	1,705	1,716	1,736	1,754	1,767	1,783	1,798	1,814	1,830	1,845	1,861	1,876	130	8.3%	220	13.3%	0	0	9	7	1,883	206	12.3%
OLF	Olbury	1,418	1,429	1,439	1,455	1,470	1,481	1,494	1,507	1,520	1,533	1,547	1,560	1,573	-144	-9.2%	-84	-5.0%	0	0	13	9	1,582	-95	-5.7%
OWA	Old Warley	1,684	1,685	1,684	1,677	1,676	1,674	1,672	1,669	1,666	1,662	1,660	1,657	1,657	123	7.8%	1	0.1%	0	0	0	0	1,657	-20	-1.2%
OWB	Old Warley	669	669	669	666	666	665	664	663	662	661	660	659	658	-893	-57.2%	-998	-60.3%	0	0	0	0	658	-1,019	-60.8%
OWC	Old Warley	1,514	1,514	1,513	1,507	1,506	1,505	1,502	1,500	1,498	1,496	1,494	1,492	1,489	-48	-3.1%	-167	-10.1%	0	-11	-7	0	1,482	-195	-11.6%
OWD	Old Warley	1,552	1,553	1,552	1,546	1,544	1,542	1,540	1,538	1,536	1,534	1,531	1,528	1,526	1,643	10.7%	1,209	80.4%	0	0	0	0	1,541	-46	-2.7%
OWE	Old Warley	1,892	1,893	1,892	1,884	1,883	1,881	1,878	1,875	1,873	1,870	1,867	1,865	1,862	331	21.2%	300	12.4%	0	0	0	0	1,867	190	11.3%
OWF	Old Warley	772	772	768	767	768	767	766	765	764	763	762	761	759	-790	-50.6%	-807	-54.1%	0	0	6	4	764	-913	-54.5%
OWG	Old Warley	1,068	1,068	1,068	1,063	1,063	1,061	1,060	1,058	1,057	1,055	1,054	1,052	1,051	-494	-31.6%	-605	-36.6%	0	0	7	5	1,056	-621	-37.0%
OWH	Old Warley	622	622	622	619	619	618	617	616	615	614	613	612	612	-940	-62.0%	-1,044	-63.0%	0	0	0	0	612	-1,065	-63.5%
PEA	Princes End	2,334	2,341	2,339	2,326	2,323	2,321	2,318	2,314	2,310	2,306	2,303	2,299	2,295	772	49.4%	639	38.6%	0	0	0	0	2,295	618	36.9%
PEB	Princes End	2,064	2,070	2,069	2,057	2,054	2,053	2,050	2,046	2,043	2,040	2,036	2,033	2,030	502	32.1%	374	22.6%	0	0	0	0	2,030	353	21.0%
PEC	Princes End	618	620	619	616	615	615	614	613	612	611	610	609	608	-944	-60.4%	-1,048	-63.3%	0	0	0	0	608	-1,069	-63.7%
PED	Princes End	1,151	1,155	1,154	1,147	1,145	1,145	1,143	1,141	1,139	1,137	1,136	1,134	1,132	-411	-26.3%	-524	-31.7%	0	0	0	0	1,132	-545	-32.5%
PEE	Princes End	2,211	2,218	2,216	2,204	2,201	2,199	2,196	2,192	2,189	2,185	2,182	2,178	2,175	649	41.6%	518	31.3%	0	0	0	0	2,175	498	29.7%
PEF	Princes End	1,012	1,016	1,015	1,009	1,008	1,007	1,005	1,004	1,002	1,000	999	997	996	-549	-35.2%	-661	-39.9%	0	0	0	0	996	-681	-40.6%
PEG	Princes End	852	855	854	850	848	848	847	845	844	843	841	840	838	-709	-45.4%	-818	-49.4%	0	0	0	0	838	-838	-50.0%
ROA	Rowley	934	942	945	948	953	957	962	966	970	975	979	983	988	-628	-40.2%	-668	-40.4%	0	0	0	0	988	-689	-41.1%
ROB	Rowley	1,730	1,750	1,751	1,774	1,751	1,774	1,752	1,790	1,806	1,814	1,790	1,806	1,814	1,790	10.8%	174	10.5%	51	3.6	0	0	1,800	190	11.3%
ROC	Rowley	1,513	1,526	1,531	1,534	1,534	1,551	1,558	1,564	1,573	1,580	1,587	1,594	1,601	-48	-3.1%	-55	-3.3%	55	39	0	0	1,640	-37	-2.2%
ROD	Rowley	957	965	968	971	977	981	986	990	994	999	1,003	1,008	1,012	-605	-38.7%	-644	-38.9%	0	0	0	0	1,012	-664	-39.6%
ROE	Rowley	1,047	1,055	1,059	1,062	1,068	1,073	1,078	1,083	1,087	1,092	1,097	1,102	1,107	-515	-33.0%	-549	-33.2%	0	0	0	0	1,107	-570	-34.0%
ROF	Rowley	1,845	1,860	1,866	1,872	1,882	1,891	1,899	1,908	1,917	1,925	1,934	1,943	1,951	283	18.1%	295	17.8%	0	0	0	0	1,951	274	16.4%
ROG	Rowley	1,401	1,413	1,417	1,421	1,429	1,436	1,443	1,449	1,456	1,462	1,469	1,475	1,482	-161	-10.3%	-174	-10.5%	0	0	11	7	1,489	-188	-11.2%
SMA	Smithwick	564	573	579	581	586	592	598	603	608	613	619	624	629	-998	-63.9%	-1,027	-62.0%	0	0	0	0	629	-1,048	-62.5%
SMB	Smithwick	895	909	919	922	930	940	948	956	965	973	981	989	998	-667	-42.7%	-658	-39.7%	0	0	13	9	1,007	-670	-40.0%
SMC	Smithwick	1,615	1,640	1,659	1,664	1,678	1,696	1,711	1,726	1,741	1,756	1,771	1,786	1,801	53	3.4%	145	8.8%	0	0	8	6	1,807	130	7.8%
SMD	Smithwick	1,449	1,471	1,488	1,493	1,505	1,522	1,535	1,548	1,562	1,575	1,589	1,602	1,616	-113	-7.2%	-41	-2.4%	0	0	6	4	1,620	-57	-3.4%
SME	Smithwick	1,033	1,049	1,061	1,064	1,073	1,085	1,094	1,104	1,113	1,123	1,133	1,142	1,152	-529	-33.9%	-504	-30.5%	0	0	12	8	1,160	-517	-30.8%
SMF	Smithwick	2,562	2,603	2,632	2,640	2,663	2,691	2,715	2,739	2,763	2,787	2,810	2,834	2,858	1,001	64.1%	1,202	72.6%	0	0	6	4	2,862	1,185	70.7%
SMG	Smithwick	1,104	1,121	1,134	1,137	1,147	1,159	1,170	1,180	1,190	1,200	1,210	1,221	1,231	-458	-29.3%	-425	-25.7%	0	0	6	4	1,236	-442	-26.3%
SMH	Smithwick	2,000	2,032	2,055	2,061	2,079	2,101	2,120	2,138	2,157	2,175	2,194	2,213	2,231	439	28.1%	575	34.7%	0	0	0	0	2,231	554	33.1%
SPA	St Pauls	1,550	1,592	1,617	1,634	1,659	1,689	1,715	1,742	1,768	1,794	1,820	1,847	1,873	-12	0.8%	217	13.1%	0	0	11	11	1,884	207	12.3%
SPB	St Pauls	1,799	1,847	1,877	1,897	1,926	1,961	1,991	2,022	2,052	2,083	2,113	2,144	2,174	237	15.2%	518	31.3%	0	0	14	10	2,184	507	30.2%
SPC	St Pauls	553	568	578	583	593	603	612	622	631	641	650	659	669	-1,008	-64.6%	-987	-59.6%	546	383	0	0	1,051	-625	-37.3%
SPD	St Pauls	1,660	1,705	1,733	1,750	1,778	1,809	1,837	1,866	1,894	1,922	1,950	1,978	2,006	98	6.3%	350	21.1%	0	0	0	0	2,006	329	19.6%
SPE	St Pauls	1,433	1,472	1,496	1,511	1,535	1,562	1,587	1,611	1,635	1,659	1,684	1,708	1,732	-129	-8.2%	76	4.6%	0	0	-8	-6	1,727	50	3.0%
SPF	St Pauls	2,213	2,273	2,310	2,334	2,370	2,413	2,450	2,487	2,525	2,562	2,600	2,637	2,675	651	41.7%	1,019	61.5%	0	0	32	22	2,697	1,020	60.8%
SPG	St Pauls	2,198	2,208	2,218	2,198	2,188	2,168	2,148	2,128	2,108	2,088	2,068	2,048	2,028	372	23.8%	681	41.1%	0	0	0	0	2,337	660	39.4%
SVA	Soho and Victoria	1,440	1,471	1,499	1,518	1,543	1,570	1,596	1,621	1,647	1,672	1,698	1,723	1,748	-122	-7.8%	92	5.6%	0	0	0	0	1,748	72	4.3%
SVB	Soho and Victoria	1,052	1,075	1,095	1,109	1,128	1,148	1,167	1,185	1,204	1,222	1,241	1,260	1,278	-509	-32.6%	-378	-22.8%	127	89	9	7	1,374	-303	-18.1%
SVC	Soho and Victoria	1,985	2,028	2,066	2,092	2,128	2,165	2,200	2,235	2,270	2,305	2,340	2,375	2,410	423	27.1%	754	45.5%	790	553	13	9	2,972	1,295	77.3%
SVD	Soho and Victoria	988	1,009	1,028	1,041	1,059	1,078	1,095	1,112	1,130	1,147	1,165	1,182	1,200	-574	-36.7%	-456	-27.6%	0	0	-18	-12	1,187	-489	-29.2%
SVE	Soho and Victoria	902	921	939	951	967	984	1,000	1,016	1,031	1,047	1,063	1,079	1,095	-660	-42.3%	-561	-33.9%	0	0	0	0	1,095	-582	-34.7%
SVF	Soho and Victoria	2,576	2,632	2,682	2,716	2,762	2,810	2,856	2,901	2,947	2,992	3,038	3,083	3,129	1,014	65.0%	1,473	88.9%	0	0	-12	-8	3,121	1,444	86.1%
SVG	Soho and Victoria	1,588	1,623	1,653	1,674	1,703	1,723	1,751	1,779	1,807	1,835	1,863	1,891	1,919	-27	-1.7%	273	16.5%	0	0	71	50	1,979	302	18.0%
SVH	Soho and Victoria	1,511	1,544	1,573	1,593	1,620	1,649	1,675	1,702	1,729	1,755	1,782	1,809	1,836	-50	-3.2%	179	10.8%	0	0	64	45	1,880	204	12.1%
TGA	Tipton Green	1,174	1,183	1,195	1,209	1,224	1,235	1,247	1,260	1,273	1,285	1,298	1,311	1,323	-388	-24.9%	-333	-20.1%	53	37	0	0	1,361	-316	-18.8%
TGB	Tipton Green	966	974	983	995	1,007	1,016	1,027	1,037	1,047	1,058	1,068	1,079	1,0											

Calculated Electorate for Ward
Projections based on Modelled MYE 18 Plus Population

WARD - Calculation - With Applied Percentage Increases																										
Ward	Actual Electorate Numbers						Calculated: Proportioned MYE Linear Projections						Variant from Ward Avg 2016		Variant from Ward Avg 2030		Finalised Variant from Ward Avg 2030									
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Variant	%	Variant	%	Estimated additional population due to developments by 2030	Population from developments minus 30%	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2030	HMO's minus 30%	2030 final project	Variance	%		
Abbey	8,229	8,667	8,665	8,428	8,408	8,311	8,831	8,881	8,930	8,979	9,028	9,077	9,126	-986	10.7%	-1,030	10.1%	0	0	128	90	9,216	-1,079	10.5%		
Blackheath	9,106	9,335	9,325	9,236	9,185	9,178	9,152	9,113	9,075	9,036	8,998	8,959	8,920	-109	1.2%	-1,235	12.2%	0	46	32	46	8,952	-1,342	13.0%		
Bristnall	8,872	9,174	9,207	9,137	9,005	8,875	9,106	9,096	9,086	9,076	9,066	9,056	9,046	-343	3.7%	-1,110	10.9%	40	28	13	9	9,082	-1,212	11.8%		
Charlemont with Grove Vale	9,159	9,450	9,485	9,419	9,369	9,235	9,430	9,416	9,401	9,387	9,373	9,358	9,344	-56	0.6%	-812	8.0%	28	19	0	0	9,363	-931	9.0%		
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	9,862	10,364	10,419	10,360	10,424	10,433	10,339	10,344	10,348	10,352	10,356	10,360	10,364	647	7.0%	209	2.1%	0	7	0	5	10,369	75	0.7%		
Friar Park	8,635	8,989	9,039	8,946	8,840	8,729	8,863	8,845	8,827	8,809	8,790	8,772	8,754	-580	6.3%	-1,402	13.8%	212	148	0	0	8,902	-1,392	13.5%		
Great Barr with Yew Tree	9,589	9,921	9,978	9,931	9,810	9,627	10,101	10,136	10,170	10,205	10,240	10,275	10,310	374	4.1%	154	1.5%	0	14	10	10	10,320	25	0.2%		
Great Bridge	9,321	9,746	9,840	9,795	9,844	9,752	9,895	9,922	9,950	9,977	10,004	10,032	10,059	106	1.1%	-97	1.0%	154	108	46	32	10,199	-95	0.9%		
Greets Green and Lyng	8,747	9,251	9,374	9,489	9,485	9,498	10,099	10,258	10,417	10,575	10,734	10,893	11,052	-468	5.1%	897	8.8%	291	204	46	32	11,288	993	9.7%		
Hateley Heath	9,713	10,105	10,279	10,280	10,262	10,281	10,397	10,446	10,494	10,542	10,591	10,639	10,688	498	5.4%	532	5.2%	85	60	22	16	10,763	469	4.6%		
Langley	9,060	9,521	9,598	9,532	9,498	9,376	9,859	9,922	9,986	10,049	10,112	10,175	10,238	-155	1.7%	83	0.8%	0	13	9	9	10,247	-47	0.5%		
Newton	8,535	8,827	8,863	8,816	8,639	8,620	8,870	8,871	8,872	8,873	8,874	8,875	8,876	-680	7.4%	-1,279	12.6%	0	-8	-6	-6	8,870	-1,424	13.8%		
Old Warley	8,963	9,291	9,245	9,212	9,176	9,049	9,205	9,192	9,179	9,165	9,152	9,139	9,126	-252	2.7%	-1,030	10.1%	0	16	11	11	9,137	-1,157	11.2%		
Oldbury	9,219	10,034	10,220	10,210	10,092	10,185	10,548	10,640	10,732	10,824	10,917	11,009	11,101	4	0.0%	946	9.3%	20	14	48	33	11,149	854	8.3%		
Princes End	9,035	9,364	9,513	9,464	9,361	9,277	9,279	9,264	9,249	9,234	9,219	9,204	9,189	-180	2.0%	-966	9.5%	0	0	0	0	9,189	-1,105	10.7%		
Rowley	9,331	9,766	9,863	9,755	9,766	9,735	9,707	9,751	9,795	9,839	9,883	9,927	9,971	116	1.3%	-184	1.8%	107	75	11	7	10,053	-241	2.3%		
Smethwick	9,231	9,769	9,926	9,817	9,875	9,666	10,233	10,323	10,413	10,502	10,592	10,681	10,771	16	0.2%	616	6.1%	0	50	35	35	10,806	512	5.0%		
Soho and Victoria	9,525	10,518	10,743	10,790	10,906	10,779	11,347	11,527	11,708	11,889	12,070	12,251	12,432	310	3.4%	2,277	22.4%	917	642	128	90	13,164	2,869	27.9%		
St Pauls	9,606	10,461	10,524	10,479	10,550	10,498	11,131	11,301	11,471	11,642	11,812	11,982	12,152	391	4.2%	1,997	19.7%	546	383	53	37	12,572	2,278	22.1%		
Tipton Green	10,162	10,754	10,855	10,735	10,626	10,559	11,271	11,385	11,500	11,614	11,728	11,843	11,957	947	10.3%	1,802	17.7%	188	132	0	0	12,089	1,795	17.4%		
Trivdale	9,015	9,293	9,346	9,194	9,212	9,088	9,261	9,256	9,252	9,248	9,243	9,239	9,235	-200	2.2%	-921	9.1%	0	15	11	11	9,245	-1,049	10.2%		
Wednesbury North	9,009	9,389	9,435	9,328	9,243	9,183	9,293	9,279	9,266	9,252	9,238	9,225	9,211	-206	2.2%	-944	9.3%	0	-26	-18	-18	9,193	-1,101	10.7%		
Wednesbury South	9,714	10,208	10,247	10,262	10,138	10,225	10,646	10,739	10,833	10,927	11,020	11,114	11,207	499	5.4%	1,052	10.4%	89	62	25	17	11,287	992	9.6%		
West Bromwich Central	9,525	10,080	10,275	10,194	10,227	10,249	10,294	10,345	10,396	10,447	10,498	10,549	10,599	310	3.4%	444	4.4%	1390	973	46	32	11,604	1,310	12.7%		
Total	221,163	232,277	234,264	232,809	231,941	230,408	237,157	238,252	239,348	240,443	241,539	242,634	243,730						4067	2847	691	483	247060			
Average	9,215	9,678	9,761	9,700	9,664	9,600	9,882	9,927	9,973	10,018	10,064	10,110	10,155										10,294			
Range																										
High	10,162	10,754	10,855	10,790	10,906	10,779	11,347	11,527	11,708	11,889	12,070	12,251	12,432										13,164			
Low	8,229	8,667	8,665	8,428	8,408	8,311	8,831	8,845	8,827	8,809	8,790	8,772	8,754										8,870			
													Change 2018 to 2030				Change 2018 to 2030						25,897		11.7%	
													22,567		10.2%											

Calculated Electorate for Polling Districts
 Projections based on Modelled MYE 18 Plus Population

Polling Districts - Calculation - from Calculated Ward Figures - Proportioned through LPG Residential Properties in each Polling District compared to relevant Ward		Actual Electorate Numbers											Calculated: Proportioned MYE Linear Projections						Variant from Polling District Avg 2016		Variant from Polling District Avg 2030		Finalised Variant from Polling District Avg 2030					
Polling District	Ward	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Variant	%	Variant	%	Estimated additional population due to developments by 2027	Population from developments minus 30%	Estimated additional population due to HMO's developments by 2027	HMO's minus 30%	2030 final project	Variance	%			
ABA	Abbey	761	764	770	764	749	755	699	703	707	711	715	719	723	-604	44.3%	-782	52.0%	0	0	0	0	723	-802	52.6%			
ABB	Abbey	1,393	1,448	1,442	1,415	1,396	1,383	1,254	1,251	1,268	1,275	1,282	1,289	1,296	28	2.0%	-209	13.9%	0	0	0	0	1,296	-229	15.0%			
ABC	Abbey	791	844	834	773	790	798	928	933	938	944	940	954	959	-574	42.1%	-545	36.3%	0	0	0	0	959	-566	37.1%			
ABD	Abbey	1,648	1,774	1,800	1,746	1,758	1,692	2,047	2,058	2,070	2,081	2,092	2,104	2,115	283	2.0%	111	40.6%	0	0	25	17	2,132	607	39.8%			
AEB	Abbey	1,420	1,511	1,507	1,461	1,463	1,447	1,723	1,732	1,742	1,751	1,761	1,771	1,780	55	4.0%	176	18.3%	0	0	-9	-65	1,845	320	21.0%			
AFB	Abbey	1,214	1,280	1,274	1,248	1,238	1,227	1,289	1,296	1,303	1,310	1,318	1,325	1,332	-151	11.1%	-273	11.5%	0	0	23	2	1,330	-195	12.8%			
ABG	Abbey	1,002	1,046	1,038	1,021	1,014	1,014	892	897	901	906	911	916	921	-363	26.6%	-589	38.8%	0	0	13	9	930	-595	39.0%			
ALA	Blackheath	2,423	2,471	2,491	2,428	2,436	2,424	2,425	2,414	2,404	2,394	2,384	2,374	2,363	1,058	77.5%	-859	57.1%	0	0	20	14	2,377	852	55.9%			
BLB	Blackheath	553	563	551	545	547	549	503	501	498	496	494	492	490	-812	59.5%	-1,015	67.4%	0	0	0	0	490	-1,035	67.9%			
BLC	Blackheath	369	385	388	376	369	395	499	497	495	493	491	489	487	-996	73.0%	-1,018	67.6%	0	0	0	0	487	-1,038	68.1%			
BID	Blackheath	1,774	1,781	1,762	1,740	1,726	1,735	1,543	1,536	1,530	1,523	1,517	1,510	1,504	409	29.9%	-1	0.1%	0	0	0	0	1,504	-21	1.4%			
BLE	Blackheath	1,861	1,908	1,908	1,905	1,887	1,862	2,003	1,994	1,986	1,977	1,969	1,960	1,952	496	36.3%	-47	29.7%	0	0	0	0	1,952	427	28.0%			
BLF	Blackheath	778	817	815	826	817	814	869	865	862	858	854	851	847	-587	43.0%	-657	43.7%	0	0	19	13	860	-665	43.6%			
BRA	Blackheath	543	588	594	599	584	579	588	586	583	581	578	576	573	-822	60.2%	-931	61.9%	0	0	7	5	578	-947	62.1%			
BLH	Blackheath	805	822	816	817	819	820	723	720	717	714	711	708	705	-560	41.0%	-800	53.2%	0	0	0	0	705	-821	53.8%			
BRG	Brinsford	1,045	1,083	1,061	1,055	1,023	1,002	1,164	1,163	1,162	1,161	1,159	1,158	1,157	-320	23.5%	-348	23.1%	0	0	7	5	1,162	-363	23.8%			
BRB	Brinsford	668	678	682	678	668	660	672	671	670	669	669	668	667	-697	51.1%	-837	55.7%	40	28	0	0	695	-830	54.4%			
BRC	Brinsford	1,208	1,236	1,241	1,238	1,205	1,194	1,145	1,143	1,142	1,141	1,140	1,138	1,137	-157	11.5%	-388	24.4%	0	0	0	0	1,137	-388	25.4%			
BRD	Brinsford	643	690	696	695	709	683	626	626	625	624	624	623	622	-722	52.9%	-882	58.6%	0	0	0	0	622	-903	59.2%			
BRE	Brinsford	1,832	1,910	1,930	1,921	1,863	1,852	1,908	1,906	1,904	1,902	1,900	1,898	1,896	467	34.2%	-391	26.0%	0	0	0	0	1,896	371	24.3%			
BRF	Brinsford	1,226	1,254	1,247	1,261	1,292	1,247	1,264	1,262	1,261	1,260	1,258	1,257	1,255	-139	10.2%	-249	16.6%	0	0	0	0	1,255	-270	17.7%			
BRG	Brinsford	1,245	1,279	1,210	1,275	1,252	1,238	1,257	1,255	1,254	1,252	1,251	1,250	1,248	-120	8.8%	-256	17.0%	0	0	0	4	1,252	-273	17.9%			
BRH	Brinsford	1,005	1,044	1,040	1,014	993	999	1,071	1,069	1,068	1,067	1,066	1,065	1,063	-360	26.4%	-441	29.3%	0	0	0	0	1,063	-462	30.3%			
CHA	Charlemont with Grove Vale	2,877	2,951	2,966	2,936	2,946	2,912	2,632	2,628	2,624	2,620	2,616	2,612	2,608	1,512	110.7%	1,104	73.4%	28	19	0	0	2,627	1,102	72.3%			
CHB	Charlemont with Grove Vale	1,783	1,888	1,881	1,901	1,874	1,819	2,522	2,518	2,514	2,510	2,506	2,502	2,499	418	30.6%	994	66.1%	0	0	0	0	2,499	973	63.8%			
CHC	Charlemont with Grove Vale	736	735	748	726	718	698	649	648	647	646	645	644	643	-629	46.1%	-631	57.2%	0	0	0	0	643	-882	57.8%			
CHD	Charlemont with Grove Vale	1,050	1,080	1,081	1,055	1,050	1,041	890	888	887	886	884	883	882	-315	23.1%	-623	43.4%	0	0	0	0	882	-644	42.2%			
CHE	Charlemont with Grove Vale	1,013	1,041	1,051	1,039	1,040	1,045	949	948	946	945	944	943	941	-352	25.8%	-564	37.5%	0	0	0	0	941	-584	38.3%			
CHF	Charlemont with Grove Vale	708	725	729	721	707	702	725	724	723	721	720	719	718	-657	48.1%	-786	52.3%	0	0	0	0	718	-807	52.9%			
CHG	Charlemont with Grove Vale	992	1,030	1,029	1,041	1,034	1,018	1,063	1,062	1,060	1,059	1,057	1,055	1,054	-373	27.3%	-451	30.0%	0	0	0	0	1,054	-471	30.9%			
CRA	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,045	1,081	1,089	1,114	1,220	1,234	1,348	1,348	1,349	1,350	1,351	1,351	1,351	-320	23.5%	-153	10.2%	0	0	0	0	1,351	-174	11.4%			
CRB	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	511	588	597	614	596	594	761	761	762	762	762	763	763	-854	62.6%	-742	49.3%	0	0	0	0	763	-762	50.0%			
CRD	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,201	1,230	1,234	1,221	1,211	1,201	1,279	1,279	1,280	1,280	1,281	1,281	1,282	-164	12.6%	-223	14.8%	0	0	0	0	1,282	-243	15.9%			
CRG	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	961	1,050	1,041	1,021	981	989	1,152	1,152	1,153	1,153	1,154	1,154	1,155	-404	29.6%	-450	23.3%	0	0	0	0	1,155	-370	24.3%			
CRF	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	1,027	1,065	1,063	1,049	1,060	1,061	1,047	1,047	1,048	1,048	1,048	1,049	1,049	-338	24.8%	-455	30.9%	0	0	0	0	1,054	-471	30.9%			
CRH	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	718	765	753	751	763	756	742	743	743	743	743	744	744	-647	47.4%	-760	50.5%	0	0	0	0	744	-781	51.2%			
CRG	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	2,236	2,317	2,326	2,330	2,382	2,340	1,996	1,997	1,998	1,998	1,999	2,000	2,001	871	63.8%	496	33.0%	0	0	0	0	2,001	476	31.2%			
CRH	Cradley Heath and Old Hill	2,163	2,268	2,296	2,260	2,211	2,238	2,015	2,016	2,016	2,017	2,018	2,019	2,020	798	58.4%	515	34.2%	0	0	0	0	2,020	495	32.4%			
FPA	Fair Park	3,193	3,295	3,297	3,263	3,252	3,202	3,194	3,187	3,180	3,174	3,167	3,161	3,157	1,828	133.9%	1,656	110.1%	159	111	0	0	3,272	1,746	114.5%			
FPC	Fair Park	2,775	2,912	2,950	2,941	2,893	2,877	2,846	2,840	2,835	2,829	2,823	2,817	2,811	1,410	103.3%	1,307	86.8%	8	5	0	0	2,817	1,292	84.7%			
FPB	Fair Park	1,107	1,154	1,150	1,132	1,113	1,098	1,119	1,116	1,114	1,112	1,109	1,107	1,105	-258	18.9%	-400	26.6%	0	0	0	0	1,105	-430	27.6%			
FPD	Fair Park	1,560	1,628	1,642	1,610	1,582	1,552	1,698	1,695	1,691	1,688	1,684	1,681	1,677	195	14.3%	173	11.5%	46	32	0	0	1,709	184	12.1%			
GBA	Great Bridge	3,307	3,448	3,491	3,437	3,436	3,363	3,271	3,280	3,289	3,298	3,307	3,316	3,325	1,942	142.2%	1,820	121.0%	4	3	0	0	3,327	1,802	118.2%			
GBB	Great Bridge	2,355	2,437	2,466	2,463	2,432	2,444	2,361	2,367	2,374	2,380	2,387	2,393	2,400	990	72.0%	895	59.5%	32	22	0	0	2,422	897	58.8%			
GBC	Great Bridge	1,734	1,876	1,889	1,911	1,924	1,956	2,418	2,425	2,431	2,438	2,445	2,451	2,458	369	27.0%	934	63.4%	119	83	0	0	2,541	1,016	66.6%			
GBD	Great Bridge	1,925	1,985	1,994	1,984	2,052	1,989	1,846	1,851	1,856	1,861	1,866	1,871	1,876	560	41.0%	372	24.7%	0	0	46	32	1,908	383	25.1%			
GGA	Greets Green and Lung	1,875	1,965	2,023	2,103	2,154	2,221	2,338	2,375	2,412	2,448	2,485	2,522	2,559	510	37.3%	1,054	70.1%	291	204	7	5	2,767	1,242	81.3%			
GBB	Greets Green and Lung	1,555	1,634	1,640	1,672	1,648	1,662	1,716	1,743	1,770	1,797	1,824	1,851	1,878	190	13.9%	373	24.8%	0	0	0	0	1,878	353	23.1%			
GCC	Greets Green and Lung	1,542	1,631	1,645	1,658	1,667	1,651	1,754	1,782	1,809	1,837	1,864	1,892	1,920	177	13.0%	415	27.6%	0	0	39	27	1,947	421	27.6%			
GDD	Greets Green and Lung	1,107	1,191	1,216	1,226	1,233	1,214	1,354	1,376	1,397	1,418	1,440	1,461	1,482	-258	18.9%	-22	1.5%	0	0	0	0	1,482	-43	2.8%			
GGE	Greets Green and Lung	701	755	757	763	752	739	743	755	766	778	790	801	813	-664	48.7%	-692	46.0%	0	0	0	0	813	-712	46.7%			
GGF	Greets Green and Lung	1,175	1,250	1,266	1,244	1,210	1,210	1,334	1,355	1,376	1,397	1,418	1,439	1,460	-190	13.9%	-4											

OIA	Otisbury	2,059	2,243	2,280	2,250	2,228	2,271	2,394	2,415	2,436	2,457	2,478	2,499	2,520	694	50.8%	1,015	67.5%	0	0	6	4	2,524	999	65.5%
OLB	Otisbury	1,924	2,072	2,075	2,042	2,024	2,038	1,874	1,891	1,907	1,924	1,940	1,956	1,973	559	40.9%	428	31.1%	0	0	6	4	1,977	452	29.6%
OLC	Otisbury	1,058	1,136	1,143	1,136	1,128	1,119	1,217	1,227	1,238	1,249	1,259	1,270	1,281	-307	-22.5%	-244	-14.9%	0	0	7	5	1,286	-239	-15.7%
OLD	Otisbury	1,548	1,712	1,759	1,782	1,791	1,836	2,220	2,239	2,258	2,278	2,297	2,317	2,336	183	13.4%	832	55.3%	20	14	7	5	2,355	830	54.4%
OLE	Otisbury	1,342	1,460	1,514	1,548	1,549	1,599	1,547	1,560	1,574	1,587	1,601	1,614	1,628	-387	-28.3%	-344	-25.0%	0	0	9	4	1,634	109	7.2%
OLF	Otisbury	1,288	1,411	1,445	1,452	1,442	1,404	1,296	1,308	1,319	1,330	1,342	1,353	1,364	-77	-5.7%	-140	-9.3%	0	0	13	9	1,373	-152	-10.0%
OWA	Old Warley	1,467	1,490	1,505	1,496	1,488	1,465	1,570	1,568	1,566	1,564	1,561	1,559	1,557	102	7.5%	52	3.5%	0	0	0	0	1,557	32	2.1%
OWB	Old Warley	576	598	598	603	596	588	624	623	622	621	620	619	618	-789	-57.8%	-886	-58.9%	0	0	0	0	618	-907	-59.5%
OWC	Old Warley	1,438	1,495	1,468	1,463	1,459	1,436	1,411	1,409	1,407	1,405	1,403	1,401	1,399	73	5.3%	-105	-7.0%	0	0	-11	-7	1,392	-133	-8.7%
OWD	Old Warley	1,541	1,592	1,598	1,601	1,600	1,581	1,541	1,538	1,536	1,534	1,532	1,530	1,527	176	12.9%	23	1.5%	0	0	7	-5	1,532	7	0.5%
OWE	Old Warley	1,712	1,867	1,764	1,739	1,733	1,717	1,764	1,762	1,758	1,757	1,754	1,751	1,749	387	25.4%	644	45.8%	0	0	0	0	1,754	229	15.0%
OWF	Old Warley	597	628	628	613	629	609	720	719	718	717	716	714	713	-768	-55.3%	-791	-52.6%	0	0	6	4	718	-808	-53.0%
OWG	Old Warley	1,060	1,112	1,104	1,099	1,076	1,065	996	994	993	991	990	988	987	-305	-22.4%	-517	-34.4%	0	0	7	5	992	-533	-35.0%
OWH	Old Warley	572	589	580	598	597	588	580	579	578	577	577	576	575	-793	-58.1%	-930	-61.8%	0	0	0	0	575	-950	-62.3%
PEA	Princes End	2,039	2,129	2,138	2,152	2,149	2,177	2,114	2,111	2,107	2,104	2,101	2,097	2,094	674	49.4%	498	39.2%	0	0	0	0	2,094	569	37.3%
PEB	Princes End	2,196	2,221	2,205	2,193	2,188	2,149	1,870	1,867	1,864	1,861	1,858	1,855	1,852	831	60.9%	347	23.1%	0	0	0	0	1,852	327	21.4%
PEC	Princes End	487	544	549	564	547	553	560	559	558	557	556	555	555	-878	-64.3%	-950	-63.1%	0	0	0	0	555	-971	-63.6%
PEE	Princes End	1,140	1,162	1,193	1,179	1,152	1,136	1,043	1,041	1,039	1,038	1,036	1,034	1,033	-225	-16.5%	-472	-31.4%	0	0	0	0	1,033	-463	-32.3%
PEF	Princes End	1,516	1,605	1,709	1,704	1,692	1,634	2,003	2,000	1,997	1,994	1,990	1,987	1,984	151	11.0%	479	31.9%	0	0	0	0	1,984	459	30.1%
PEG	Princes End	926	955	957	923	909	900	917	916	914	913	911	910	908	-439	-32.2%	-596	-39.6%	0	0	0	0	908	-617	-40.4%
POA	Rowley	731	748	762	749	724	728	772	771	770	769	767	766	765	-634	-46.5%	-740	-49.2%	0	0	0	0	765	-760	-49.8%
POB	Rowley	925	960	943	941	954	929	962	966	970	975	979	983	988	-440	-32.2%	-517	-34.3%	0	0	0	0	988	-537	-35.2%
ROB	Rowley	1,841	1,881	1,907	1,865	1,860	1,855	1,782	1,790	1,798	1,806	1,814	1,822	1,830	476	34.9%	326	21.7%	51	36	0	0	1,866	341	22.4%
ROC	Rowley	1,638	1,711	1,691	1,656	1,654	1,650	1,579	1,580	1,580	1,579	1,580	1,579	1,581	529	38.0%	456	34.8%	55	39	0	0	1,611	115	7.5%
ROD	Rowley	979	1,036	1,061	1,065	1,047	1,052	986	990	994	999	1,003	1,008	1,012	-386	-28.3%	-459	-32.7%	0	0	0	0	1,012	-513	-33.0%
ROE	Rowley	1,028	1,072	1,069	1,066	1,049	1,036	1,078	1,083	1,087	1,092	1,097	1,102	1,107	-337	-24.7%	-398	-26.4%	0	0	0	0	1,107	-418	-27.4%
ROF	Rowley	1,613	1,760	1,770	1,770	1,798	1,828	1,899	1,908	1,917	1,925	1,934	1,943	1,951	248	18.2%	447	29.7%	0	0	0	0	1,951	426	27.9%
ROG	Rowley	1,307	1,386	1,422	1,392	1,404	1,385	1,443	1,449	1,456	1,462	1,469	1,475	1,482	-58	-4.3%	-23	-1.5%	0	0	11	7	1,489	-36	-2.4%
SMA	Smethwick	513	544	544	545	543	541	514	519	523	528	532	537	541	-852	-62.4%	-963	-64.0%	0	0	0	0	541	-984	-64.5%
SMB	Smethwick	818	867	888	870	863	853	816	823	830	837	845	852	859	-547	-40.1%	-646	-42.9%	0	0	13	9	868	-657	-43.1%
SMC	Smethwick	1,387	1,492	1,507	1,468	1,450	1,383	1,473	1,486	1,499	1,511	1,524	1,537	1,550	22	1.6%	46	3.0%	0	0	8	6	1,556	31	2.0%
SMD	Smethwick	983	1,038	1,062	1,047	1,098	1,070	1,321	1,333	1,344	1,356	1,367	1,379	1,390	-382	-28.0%	-411	-27.6%	0	0	6	4	1,395	-131	-8.6%
SME	Smethwick	800	861	856	859	867	852	942	950	958	966	975	983	991	-565	-41.4%	-513	-34.1%	0	0	12	8	999	-526	-34.5%
SMF	Smethwick	1,984	2,082	2,134	2,158	2,160	2,122	2,337	2,357	2,378	2,398	2,419	2,439	2,460	619	45.3%	955	63.5%	0	0	6	4	2,464	939	61.5%
SMG	Smethwick	881	918	936	912	902	871	1,006	1,015	1,024	1,033	1,042	1,051	1,059	-484	-35.5%	-445	-29.6%	0	0	6	4	1,063	-462	-30.3%
SMH	Smethwick	1,865	1,967	1,999	1,978	1,992	1,984	1,824	1,840	1,856	1,872	1,888	1,904	1,920	500	36.6%	416	27.6%	0	0	0	0	1,920	395	25.9%
SNA	St Pauls	1,456	1,525	1,557	1,579	1,599	1,581	1,548	1,572	1,595	1,619	1,643	1,667	1,690	91	6.7%	186	12.3%	0	0	15	11	1,701	176	11.3%
SNB	St Pauls	1,325	1,442	1,429	1,425	1,434	1,445	1,797	1,824	1,852	1,879	1,907	1,934	1,962	-40	-2.9%	457	30.4%	0	0	14	10	1,972	447	28.9%
SNP	St Pauls	555	594	596	590	595	609	553	561	570	578	587	595	604	-810	-59.3%	-901	-59.9%	546	383	0	0	986	-539	-35.3%
SPD	St Pauls	1,256	1,345	1,350	1,313	1,332	1,354	1,658	1,684	1,709	1,734	1,760	1,785	1,811	-109	-8.0%	306	20.3%	0	0	0	0	1,811	285	18.7%
SPE	St Pauls	1,221	1,417	1,463	1,454	1,508	1,509	1,432	1,454	1,476	1,498	1,519	1,541	1,563	-144	-10.6%	-59	-3.9%	0	0	-8	-6	1,558	33	2.1%
SPG	St Pauls	1,801	2,000	2,016	2,024	1,994	1,991	2,211	2,245	2,279	2,313	2,346	2,380	2,414	436	31.9%	910	60.5%	0	0	32	22	2,436	911	59.7%
SPH	St Pauls	1,992	2,138	2,113	2,094	2,088	2,009	1,932	1,961	1,991	2,020	2,050	2,079	2,109	627	45.9%	604	40.2%	0	0	0	0	2,109	584	38.3%
SVA	Soho and Victoria	943	940	984	1,044	1,054	1,065	1,356	1,378	1,400	1,421	1,443	1,465	1,486	-522	-38.3%	-518	-32.9%	0	0	0	0	1,486	-39	-2.5%
SVB	Soho and Victoria	757	912	957	956	974	963	992	1,007	1,023	1,039	1,055	1,071	1,086	-608	-44.6%	-418	-27.8%	127	89	9	7	1,182	-343	-22.5%
SVC	Soho and Victoria	1,589	1,756	1,806	1,798	1,825	1,785	1,870	1,900	1,930	1,959	1,989	2,019	2,049	224	16.4%	544	36.2%	790	553	13	9	2,611	1,086	71.2%
SVD	Soho and Victoria	696	768	788	783	781	784	931	946	960	975	990	1,005	1,020	-669	-49.0%	-485	-32.2%	0	0	-18	-12	1,008	-518	-33.9%
SVE	Soho and Victoria	890	975	1,000	1,006	1,035	987	850	863	877	890	904	917	931	-475	-34.8%	-574	-38.1%	0	0	0	0	931	-594	-39.0%
SVF	Soho and Victoria	2,182	2,392	2,419	2,389	2,434	2,399	2,427	2,466	2,505	2,544	2,582	2,621	2,660	817	59.8%	1,155	76.8%	0	0	-12	-8	2,651	1,126	73.9%
SVG	Soho and Victoria	1,308	1,412	1,412	1,403	1,372	1,408	1,497	1,521	1,544	1,568	1,592	1,616	1,640	-57	-4.2%	195	9.0%	0	0	0	0	1,690	165	10.8%
SVH	Soho and Victoria	1,350	1,363	1,367	1,411	1,421	1,388	1,469	1,447	1,469	1,492	1,515	1,538	1,560	-105	-7.7%	56	3.7%	0	0	54	45	1,605	80	5.3%
TGA	Tipton Green	1,054	1,095	1,123	1,125	1,103	1,117	1,182	1,194	1,206	1,218	1,230	1,242	1,254	-311	-22.8%	-251	-16.7%	53	37	0	0	1,291	-234	-15.3%
TGB	Tipton Green	1,034	1,078	1,086	1,079	1,062	1,057	973	982	1,002	1,012	1,022	1,032	1,042	-331	-24.3%	-473	-31.4%	0	0	0	0	1,032	-493	-32.3%
TGC	Tipton Green	1,645	1,768	1,791	1,756	1,732	1,717	1,696	1,713	1,730	1,747	1,764	1,782	1,799	280	20.5%	194	19.6%	0	0	0	0	1,799	274	17.9%
TGD	Tipton Green	2,202	2,398	2,420	2,450	2,435	2,422																		

Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Pay Policy 2024 & Gender Pay Gap Reporting
Director:	James McLaughlin – Assistant Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Victoria Lee - Assistant Director, Human Resources victoria_lee@sandwell.gov.uk David Briggs, HR policy and Workforce Analytics Manager david_briggs@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations



- 1.1 That in advance of publishing prior to 31 March 2024, the Pay Policy Statement 2024 be approved.
- 1.2 That in advance of publishing prior to 30 March 2024, the Gender Pay Gap data be approved.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Each year the Council is required by the Localism Act 2011, to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement setting out its policies relating to: the remuneration of their chief officers, the remuneration of their lowest-paid employees, and the relationship between the pay of chief officers and that of other employees.
- 2.2 Each year the Council is also required by the Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, to prepare and publish its Gender Pay Gap data.
- 2.3 These provisions form part of a range of transparency obligations placed upon local authorities.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Strong resilient communities - 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
	A strong and inclusive economy - Our workforce is skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.

4 Context and Key Issues

Pay Policy Statement

- 4.1 The Localism Act determined that the Statement must cover a range of the authority's policies relating to the pay of Chief Officers including: -
- The level and elements of remuneration for each officer (including salary, bonuses, performance-related pay and benefits in kind);
 - remuneration of chief officers on recruitment;
 - increases and additions to remuneration and
 - the approach to the payment of chief officers on their ceasing to hold office or to being employed by the authority.
- 4.2 Section 40 of the Localism Act requires the Council to have regard to supplementary guidance in the exercise of its functions under pay accountability provisions, which the Council acknowledges and follows.
- 4.3 The median Full Time Equivalent (FTE) salary has continued to increase over the last 12 months from £30,151 to £32,076 per annum, or by 6.4%. The increase the previous year was 5.2%.
- 4.4 It should also be noted that when comparing pay ratios between the lowest paid FTE employee and the Chief Executive's pay and between the median FTE earnings and the Chief Executive's pay, that these ratios have increased over the last 12 months from 1:8 to 1:9 and from 1:5 to 1:6 respectively. This is due to the Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Committee (COTCC) approving a reasonable and appropriately benchmarked salary range for the Chief Executive,



effective 2022. Otherwise, pay level ratios within the Council will remain the same as last year.

- 4.5 The Pay Policy Statement for the Council for 2024, covering the period 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024 is attached for approval, prior to publishing.

Gender Pay Gap Reporting

- 4.6 The Council is required to publish the following statistics on its public-facing web site, and report the same, to the government online:
- The mean gender pay gap
 - The median gender pay gap
 - The proportion of male and female employees in each pay quartile
 - A narrative to supplement the data
- 4.7 The gender pay gap is an equality measure that shows the difference in average earnings between men and women, expressed as a percentage of male earnings.
- 4.8 The legislation details that employees at 'Maintained Schools' must be treated as if employed by the governing body, therefore the Council must exclude schools from its gender pay gap reporting.
- 4.9 Sandwell Council's 'mean' Gender Pay Gap figure for 2024 has increased from 0.6% to 2.5% over the last 12 months.
- 4.10 It should be noted that the first 'mean' Gender Pay Gap figure, published in 2018, was 8.4%. It was agreed that the Council would use this figure as an initial baseline to enable the monitoring of progress.
- 4.11 By way of a benchmark, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) recently published the results of its annual survey of the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom. The mean Gender Pay Gap figure as at 1 April 2023 was 7.7%.
- 4.12 In addition, it should be noted that the median Gender Pay Gap figure has also increased in the last year from 3.3% to 6.8%.



4.13 These figures will be included in the EDI Workforce action plan, which is designed to address the disparity identified in the report.

4.14 The following table shows the progress that we have made since Sandwell Council first published its Gender Pay Gap in 2018.

Year	Mean GPG	Median GPG
2017-18	8.4%	12.6%
2018-19	7.1%	12.6%
2019-20	6.4%	14.4%
2020-21	5.1%	12.1%
2021-22	3.4%	10.4%
2022-23	0.6%	3.3%
2023-24	2.5%	6.8%

4.15 The causes of any gender pay gap remain complex and overlapping and there is not one single over-riding reason why a gender pay gap exists. For the purposes of this report however, the following three points are worthy of note:

4.16 In October 2017, Cabinet agreed for the Council to start paying the hourly rate set and promoted by the Living Wage Foundation, as a minimum, to all its internal employees. By paying the Foundation Living Wage, Sandwell is honouring a long-term commitment to improve the lives of employees at the lower end of the pay scale and has voluntarily taken a stand to ensure employees earn a wage which is sufficient to live on. The Council's decision to pay this hourly rate has been applied consistently ever since, to all Council and school based (non-teaching) employees. Reporting has identified that 74% of those employees receiving this wage are female.

4.17 Each April, and in accordance with their terms and conditions of employment, employees receive a pay increment until they reach the top of their respective grade. Analysis has identified that in pay bands B to J 570 (39%) male and 882 (61%) female employees are not currently at the top of their grades. Therefore, incremental progression is still available for more female employees than male employees. In summary, over time, female employees pay will further reflect the male position which in turn will close the gender pay gap.



4.18 There has been an improvement over the last 5 years in the number of female employees employed in more senior roles.

Grade	Gender	Director	Service Manager	Band J	Band I	Band H	Band G	All grades
2023/24	Male	4	14	19	41	86	155	1612
	Female	5	17	26	39	108	176	2315
2022/23	Male	4	14	24	37	85	153	1659
	Female	6	18	14	50	105	183	2318
2021/22	Male	4	14	26	32	91	144	1713
	Female	4	18	14	47	98	168	2367
2020/21	Male	6	17	23	34	85	149	1731
	Female	6	15	13	44	96	174	2413
2019/20	Male	6	21	27	33	89	152	1739
	Female	4	14	16	35	92	167	2381

4.19 A supporting narrative to explain and compliment the Council's gender pay gap data will be developed and published.

4.20 All calculations have been made in line with the regulations set out in the gender pay gap reporting legislation.

Consultation

4.21 There are no specific consultation requirements to be carried out with Customers or Stakeholders as a result of the contents of this report.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 In accordance with the requirement of the Localism Act 2011, and the Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, the Council is required to publish the pay policy statement prior to 31 March 2024 and its gender pay gap data prior to 30 March 2024.

5.2 There are not any alternative courses of action available that would otherwise satisfy these requirements.



6 Implications

Resources:	<p>There are no specific resource implications arising from the contents of this report.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>Personal data relating to chief officers' pay will appear in the public domain.</p> <p>The Council will be acting illegally if it does not comply with the requirement to publish a Pay Policy Statement as soon as is reasonably practical after it's approved and, in any event, by the end of March in each year.</p> <p>The Council must publish a report setting out its gender pay gap data relating to all its employees by the end of March each year.</p> <p>Section 40 of the Localism Act requires authorities to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State in the exercise of their functions under pay accountability provisions.</p>
Risk:	<p>Publication of these statistics are part of the range of obligations placed upon local authorities to be open and transparent.</p> <p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision/project.</p> <p>Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that there are no significant risks associated with the decisions being sought that need to be reported.</p>
Equality:	<p>An initial screening was undertaken in January 2012 when the first annual pay policy statement was being developed. It was agreed at this time that the subject of the statement did not meet the criteria for undertaking a full EIA.</p> <p>An initial screening was carried out in January 2018 on Gender Pay Gap reporting, when the first set of</p>



	data was produced. It was agreed at this time that a full EIA was not required.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no specific health and wellbeing implications arising from the contents of this report.
Climate Change:	There are no specific climate change implications arising from the contents of this report.
Corporate Parenting	There are no corporate parenting implications arising from the contents of this report

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 - Pay Policy Statement 2024

8. Background Papers

8.1 Section 38, 40 and 43 of the Localism Act 2011

8.2 Supplementary Guidance provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government

8.3 Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017.



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SANDWELL MBC

PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024

Introduction and Purpose

Under section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972, Sandwell Council has the “power to appoint officers on such reasonable terms and conditions as authority thinks fit.” This Pay Policy Statement (the ‘statement’) sets out the Council’s approach to pay policy in accordance with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011 and Supplementary Guidance provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The purpose of the statement is to provide transparency with regard to the Council’s approach to setting the pay of its employees by identifying:

- the methods by which salaries of all employees are determined;
- the detail and level of remuneration of its most senior staff i.e. ‘chief officers’, as defined by the relevant legislation;
- the Committee or Panel responsible for ensuring the provisions set out in this statement are applied consistently throughout the Council and recommending any amendments to the full Council.

Once approved by the full Council, this policy statement will come into immediate effect and will be subject to review on a minimum of an annual basis in accordance with the relevant legislation prevailing at that time.

This statement covers the period 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024.

Legislative framework

In determining the pay and remuneration of all of its employees, the Council will comply with all relevant employment legislation. This includes the Equality Act 2010, Part Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000, The Agency Workers Regulations 2010 and where relevant, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006. With regard to the Equal Pay requirements contained within the Equality Act, the Council ensures there is no pay discrimination within its pay structures and that all pay differentials can be objectively justified through the use of equality-proofed Job Evaluation mechanisms which directly relate salaries to the requirements, demands and responsibilities of each role.

Pay Structure

The Council has adopted and applies the Local Government Single Status Job Evaluation Scheme and uses the nationally negotiated pay spine as the basis for its local grading structure. This determines the salaries of the vast majority of the Council's non-teaching workforce. Since April 2009, there have been eight "cost-of-living" increases in the national pay spine. These were effective on 1 April 2013, 1 January 2015, and then on 1 April each year thereafter, up to and including 1 April 2023.

The current salaries of Chief Officers were determined following an independent evaluation of their duties and responsibilities in 2010 and reviewed for Corporate Services in 2014. Chief Officers earning less than £100,000 per year received a cost-of-living salary increase on 1 January 2015, and all Chief Officers received a 1% pay rise on 1 April 2016 and 1 April 2017, a 2% pay rise on 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019, a 2.75% pay rise on 1 April 2020, a 1.75% pay rise on 1 April 2021, a £1,925 pay rise on 1 April 2022 and a 3.5% pay rise in 1 April 2023.

All other pay-related allowances are the subject of either nationally or locally negotiated rates, having been determined from time-to-time in accordance with collective bargaining machinery and/or as determined by council policy.

In determining its grading structure and setting remuneration levels for all posts, the Council takes account of the need to ensure value-for-money in respect of the use of public expenditure, balanced against the need to recruit and retain employees who are able to meet the requirements of providing high quality services to the community, delivered effectively and efficiently and at times at which those services are required.

New appointments should normally be made at the minimum of the relevant grade, although this can be varied, where necessary, to secure the best candidate.

Employees of the local authority's schools and those on teachers' terms and conditions of service who are not attached to a school, do not fall within the scope of this policy.

Senior Management Remuneration

For the purposes of this statement, senior management means 'chief officers' as defined within s43 of the Localism Act. The posts falling within the statutory definition, together with details of their basic salaries as at 31 January 2024 are set out below;

a) Chief Executive (one post)

The annual salary of the post designated as the Chief Executive falls within a range of three incremental points between £191,475 rising to a maximum of £201,825. This amount is inclusive of Returning Officer duties.

b) Executive Directors (three posts, all currently vacant pending appointment/commencement)

The annual salary of Executive Director posts falls within a range of three incremental points between £125,000 rising to a maximum of £135,000.

c) Assistant Chief Executive (one post)

The annual salary of the post designated as the Assistant Chief Executive falls within a range of three incremental points between £94,000 rising to a maximum of £99,000.

d) Directors (seven posts at 31 January 2024; six at 1 February 2024)

The annual salaries of Directors posts fall within a range of six incremental points between £101,889 rising to a maximum of £118,485.

Salaries specified above are inclusive of a travel allowance.

Recruitment of Chief Officers

The Council's policy and procedures with regard to the recruitment and appointment of chief officers is set out within the Officer Employment Procedure Rules under Part 4 of the Constitution. The determination of the remuneration to be offered to any newly appointed chief officer will be in accordance with the pay structure and relevant policies in place at the time of recruitment.

When making appointments, the Council will follow the spirit of Supplementary Guidance issued by the Secretary of State, should circumstances dictate.

Additions to Salaries of Chief Officers

With the exception of progression through the incremental scale of the relevant grade being subject to an annual assessment of performance, the level of remuneration is fixed.

Payments on Termination of Chief Officers

The Council's approach to discretionary payments on termination of employment of chief officers, prior to reaching normal retirement age, is set out within its Pensions Policy Statement in accordance with Regulations 5 and 6 of the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) Regulations 2006 and Regulation 31 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Membership, Contribution and Benefits) Regulations 2013.

In appropriate circumstances, any other payments falling outside the provisions, or the relevant periods of contractual notice shall be dealt with by the Committee established by the Council to deal with Chief Officers' Terms and Conditions of Employment.

When making payments to Chief Officers on their termination, the Council will follow the spirit of Supplementary Guidance issued by the Secretary of State, should particular circumstances dictate.

Publication

Upon approval by the full Council, this statement will be published on the Council's Website. (www.sandwell.gov.uk). In addition, for chief officers, the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts will include a note setting out the total amount of:-

- salary, fees or allowances paid to or receivable by the person in the current and previous year;
- any bonuses so paid or receivable by the person in the current and previous year;
- any sums payable by way of expenses allowance that are chargeable to UK income tax;
- any compensation for loss of employment and any other payments connected with termination;
- any benefits received that do not fall within the above.

Lowest Paid Employees

The lowest paid persons employed under a contract of employment with the Council are employed on full time (37 hours per week) equivalent salaries in

accordance with the minimum Spinal Column Point currently in use within the Council's grading structure.

In the period 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023 the minimum annual full-time salary was £20,258. In the period 1 April 2023 to 31 January 2024, the minimum annual full-time salary was £22,366.

The relationship between the rate of pay for the lowest paid and chief officers is determined by the processes used for determining pay and grading structures as set out earlier in this Pay Policy Statement.

The statutory guidance under the Localism Act recommends the use of pay multiples as a means of measuring the relationship between pay rates across the workforce and that of senior managers, as included within the Hutton 'Review of Fair Pay in the Public Sector' (2010). The Hutton report was asked by Government to explore the case for a fixed limit on dispersion of pay through a requirement that no public-sector manager can earn more than 20 times the lowest paid person in the organisation.

The report concluded that the relationship to median earnings was a more relevant measure and the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Data Transparency recommends the publication of the ratio between highest paid salary and the median average salary of the whole of the authority's workforce.

On 31 January 2024, the median Full Time Equivalent (FTE) salary was £32,074.

The pay level ratios within the Council as at 31 January	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
a) between the lowest paid FTE employee and the Chief Executive's pay	1:9	1:8	1:8	1:8	1:8	1:9	1:9	1:10
b) between the lowest paid FTE employee and median Chief Officers' pay	1:5	1:6	1:6	1:6	1:6	1:6	1:7	1:7
c) between the median FTE earnings and the Chief Executive's pay	1:6	1:5	1:5	1:5	1:6	1:6	1:5	1:5
d) between the median FTE earnings and median Chief Officers' pay	1:4	1:4	1:4	1:4	1:4	1:4	1:4	1:4

Ratios have been rounded to the nearest whole figure.

As part of its overall and ongoing monitoring of alignment with external pay markets, both within and outside the sector, the Council will use available benchmark information as appropriate.

Accountability and Decision Making

In accordance with Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Council's Constitution, the Council's executive is responsible for making recommendations and/or determining issues relating to the Council's Corporate Pay, Terms and Conditions and Grading Structure and severance arrangements in relation to employees of the Council, with the exception of posts which are defined as Chief Officer posts in accordance with Sections 2 (6), (7) and (8) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

The Council each year will establish a committee responsible for determining matters in relation to the employment, remuneration and terms and conditions of employment of the Head of the Paid Service and Chief Officers of the Council as defined in Sections 2 (6), (7) and (8) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Designation of Statutory Chief Officer – Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer/Senior Information Risk Owner
Director:	Mike Jones – Monitoring Officer, Assistant Director Legal & Assurance
Contact Officer:	Mike Jones Mike_Jones1@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations







- 1.1 For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that Full Council confirm the designation of Alex Thompson, designate Executive Director - Finance and Transformation, as:-
- (a) the Council's Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer with effect from 7 May 2024;
 - (b) the Council's Senior Information Risk Owner with effect from 7 May 2024.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report seeks Full Council confirmation of the designation of Alex Thompson, designate Executive Director – Finance and Transformation, to the statutory Chief Officer post of Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer and Senior Information Risk Owner.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

		The designation of statutory Chief Officers forms part of the Council's wider governance frameworks which underpin the delivery of all Council plans and policies.
		
		

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 On Monday 29 January 2024, the Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Committee interviewed candidates for the post of Executive - Finance and Transformation.
- 4.2 Following an extensive assessment and interview process, Alex Thompson was appointed to the role of Executive Director Finance and Transformation. The scope of responsibilities of this post covers the statutory role of Chief Finance Officer, more commonly referred to as Section 151 officer, as defined at s.151 Local Government Act 1972.
- 4.2 The designation as Chief Finance Officer/Section 151 Officer remains subject to Full Council confirmation. This report therefore seeks Full Council approval to confirm the designation of Alex Thompson, Executive Director Finance and Transformation, as Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer. Council on 24 October 2023 also gave approval to the designation of the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation as the Senior Information Risk Owner.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 There is no alternative option. The Council has a statutory obligation to designate an individual as Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer as required by s.151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and to Senior Information Risk Owner.



6 Implications

Resources:	There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. Provision is already included within the Council's budget for this post.
Legal and Governance:	Designation to the statutory Chief Officer role of Chief Finance Officer/Section 151 Officer is a requirement of s.151 of the Local Government Act 1972. Failure to make a designation mean the Council is not complying with relevant statutory obligations and that these functions will not be capable of lawful discharge. The Council is also required to designate a Senior Information Risk Owner.
Risk:	There are no direct implications arising from this report.
Equality:	
Health and Wellbeing:	
Social Value	
Climate Change	
Corporate Parenting	

7. Appendices

None.

8. Background Papers

Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Committee Agenda Papers – 29 January 2024

Minutes of the Council – 24 October 2023



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Report to Council

19 March 2024

Subject:	Interim changes to Scheme of Delegation
Director:	Mike Jones, Monitoring Officer & Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance
Contact Officer:	<p>Mike Jones Mike_jones1@sandwell.gov.uk</p> <p>Vanessa Maher-Smith Vanessa_mahersmith@sandwell.gov.uk</p>

1 Recommendations







- 1.1 For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that Full Council approves the interim changes to the Scheme of Delegation pending a full review of the Scheme of Delegation in line with the new Strategic Leadership Team structure.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Full Council approved the most recent iteration of the Scheme of Delegation on 8 November 2022. Since that time, the Strategic Leadership Team has changed, and a restructure is currently in progress with an implementation date of 1 April 2024.
- 2.2 Pending the implementation, it is necessary to make changes to the Scheme of Delegation to ensure continuity of service provision and clear allocation of decision-making responsibilities.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people The Scheme of Delegation is a key document and allows the council to make decisions at appropriate levels to provide services to residents and deliver all objectives of the corporate plan.</p>
	<p>People live well and age well The Scheme of Delegation is a key document and allows the council to make decisions at appropriate levels to provide services to residents and deliver all objectives of the corporate plan.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities The Scheme of Delegation is a key document and allows the council to make decisions at appropriate levels to provide services to residents and deliver all objectives of the corporate plan.</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods The Scheme of Delegation is a key document and allows the council to make decisions at appropriate levels to provide services to residents and deliver all objectives of the corporate plan.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy The Scheme of Delegation is a key document and allows the council to make decisions at appropriate levels to provide services to residents and deliver all objectives of the corporate plan.</p>
	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell The Scheme of Delegation is a key document and allows the council to make decisions at appropriate levels to provide services to residents and deliver all objectives of the corporate plan.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Scheme of Delegation currently provides that:

Any post specifically referred to in the Scheme of Delegations shall be deemed to include any successor post, or a post which includes within the job description, elements relevant to any particular delegation, which were also present in the earlier post and shall include anyone acting up or seconded. Any power contained within



this Scheme in anticipation of any reorganisation may be exercised in accordance with the preceding Scheme to the date of that reorganisation.

- 4.1 To provide clarity and assurance on arrangements for the discharge of functions. Appendix 1 sets out the interim changes to the Scheme of Delegation.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Due to changes to the Strategic Leadership Team Structure, it is necessary to make changes to the Scheme of Delegation to ensure continuity of service provision and clear allocation of decision-making responsibilities.

6 Implications

Resources:	None, the amendments reflect the current staffing arrangements.
Legal and Governance:	The Council must have an accurate Scheme of Delegation to ensure that Officers have the authority and power to make decisions to ensure the continuity of services and deliver the corporate plan.
Risk:	By not having an accurate Scheme of Delegation, the council risks decisions being made that are ultra vires, and therefore open to Judicial Review.
Equality:	There are no equality implications.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no health and wellbeing implications.
Social Value:	There are no social value implications.
Climate Change:	There are no climate change implications.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no corporate parenting implications.

7 Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Interim Changes to Scheme of Delegation.



7. Background Papers

8.1 Scheme of Delegation:

<https://sandwell.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s19272/22e%20Part%203%20Scheme%20of%20Delegations%20to%20Officers.pdf.pdf>



Appendix 1

Interim Changes to Scheme of Delegation

Full Council approved the most recent iteration of the Scheme of Delegation on 8th November 2022. Since that time, the Strategic Leadership Team has changed and a restructure is currently in progress with an implementation date of 1st April 2024. This document should be read in conjunction with the Scheme of Delegation.

Pending the implementation, it is necessary to make changes to the Scheme of Delegation to ensure continuity of services. The Scheme of Delegation provides that:

2.18 Any post specifically referred to in the Scheme of Delegations shall be deemed to include any successor post, or a post which includes within the job description, elements relevant to any particular delegation, which were also present in the earlier post and shall include anyone acting up or seconded. Any power contained within this Scheme in anticipation of any reorganisation may be exercised in accordance with the preceding Scheme to the date of that reorganisation.

To provide clarity and assurance on arrangements for the discharge of functions, Appendix 1 sets out the interim changes to the Scheme of Delegation.

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
E2: OFFICER DELEGATED DECISION MAKING – GENERAL				
2.15	The Scheme of Delegation is maintained by the Director Law and Governance and shall be available on the Council's internet and intranet pages.	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	
2.16	Officers shall notify the Director of Law and Governance of any changes in legislation, legal duties and obligations that may impact upon or require changes to the Scheme of Delegations.	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	
2.17	The Director Law and Governance shall have the power to amend the Scheme of Delegations to reflect legislative changes, re-organisations, changes in job titles and vacancies, minor errors or omissions and other administrative requirements where said changes result in re-distributing existing	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	delegations and not the creation of new ones.			
2.20	All matters of interpretation of this document will be determined by the Director Law and Governance .	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	
2.21	Advice on procedures and matters to be taken into account in exercising officer delegated powers, is set out in guidance on decision-making issued by the Director Law and Governance .	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
E4. DELEGATIONS TO CHIEF OFFICERS				
4.4	Chief Executive and the Director of Regeneration and Growth and Director of Housing	Chief Executive, Executive Director for Place	Chief Executive, Assistant Director – Property, Strategic Assets and Land Assistant Director Spatial Planning and Growth Interim Director Housing	
4.4.1	<p>The Chief Executive, the Director of Regeneration and Growth and Director of Housing have the following additional powers to make decisions in relation to:</p> <p>i) The acquisition and disposal of leasehold interests for rent (including the granting and surrendering of any rights over such land and property) provided that any rental does not exceed £200,000 per annum and is consistent with the Protocol for the Disposal of Council Owned Land and Buildings. This should be in consultation with Director of Finance;</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>ii) The acquisition and disposal of freehold and leasehold interests at a premium, provided that the premium does not exceed £500,000 and is consistent with the Protocol for the Disposal of Council Owned Land and Buildings. This should be in consultation with the Director Finance</p> <p>iii) The management of all of the Council's land and properties, including the authorising and payment of discretionary contributions towards trade/loss and or removal expenses and all payments due under an approved Compulsory Purchase Order;</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
<p>4.6</p> <p>4.6.1 – 4.6.5</p>	<p>Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Director of Law and Governance – Birmingham International Airport.</p> <p>The Chief Executive and Director of Finance be authorised severally, in conjunction with the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Council, to take such action as may be required for the purpose of implementing any decision of the Cabinet in relation to the sale or purchase of shares in Birmingham Airport Holdings Ltd, or Birmingham International Airport Ltd.</p> <p>The Chief Executive, or in their absence, be appointed Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair or Vice Chair of the Joint Committee, be authorised to discharge all functions in relation to Birmingham Airport Holdings Limited, as provided for at Clause 5.4 of the Birmingham Airport Districts Side Agreement, and to sign and attest the fixing of the common seal of the Council to any documents in connection therewith, in consultation with the Council's Director of Law and Governance and Director of Finance, where appropriate and reasonably</p>	<p>Chief Executive, Executive Director Finance and Transformation, Assistant Director Legal and Assurance</p>	<p>Chief Executive, Executive Director Finance and Transformation</p> <p>Interim Director Finance</p> <p>, Assistant Director Legal and Assurance</p>	

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>	<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
<p>practicable</p> <p>The Chief Executive and Director of Law and Governance is authorised severally to sign, witness the seal or execute on behalf of the Council any document including any legal agreement, written resolution, notice, form or proxy, consent to short notice or other document or to attend any meeting of shareholders as representatives of the Council as may be required for the purpose of any decision in relation to the sale or purchase of shares in Birmingham Airport Holdings Limited or Birmingham International Airport Limited.</p> <p>The Director of Law and Governance is authorised, in consultation with the Leader, or in their absence or inability to act, the Deputy Leader of the Council, to determine any request from Birmingham Airport Holdings Limited for the consent of the Council to any proposal affecting Birmingham International Airport and to sign and attest the fixing of the Common Seal of the Council to any documents in connection therewith;</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>The Director of Law and Governance is authorised to consider and determine any applications for consent from Birmingham Airport Holdings Limited to enter into easements and wayleave agreements with third party utility companies for the supply of gas water, electricity, communication cabling and foul and surface water drainage in the circumstances that such a proposal affects Birmingham International Airport and to sign and attest the fixing of the Common Seal of the Council to any documents in connection therewith.</p>			
<p>4.7 4.7.1 – 4.7.4</p>	<p>Emergency Planning/Business Continuity</p> <p>Chief Officers and Statutory Officers (or deputising officers) are empowered to authorise all necessary actions in relation to emergencies and business disruptions as designated under the Council’s Emergency Plan when activated.</p>	<p>Chief Executive, Executive Director Finance and Transformation, Assistant Director</p>	<p>Chief Executive, Interim Director of Finance, Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance, Director Adult Social Care,</p>	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022	Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
<p>In the event of the Emergency Plan being activated, and following action taken, the Chief Officer must notify the Interim Director of Finance and Chief Executive in writing of the circumstances and estimated financial impact and report formally to the relevant Cabinet Member or, for non-executive matters, to the next available meeting of the relevant committee.</p> <p>Where it is considered necessary or appropriate the Chief Executive or the Director of Law and Governance shall convene a meeting of the Council's Emergency Committee (Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions – Constitutional Committees) to consider the Council's further response in the event of an emergency or business disruption.</p> <p>The principles of decision-making set out in Article 13 (Decision Making) and Part 3s and 4 of the Constitution will apply.</p>	<p>Legal and Assurance, Director Adult Social Care, Director Children's Services.</p>	<p>Director Children's Services.</p>	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
E5. CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND HEAD OF PAID SERVICE				
5.3.2	that the Chief Executive, or designated Director, before making a decision shall consult with the Director of Law and Governance and the Interim Director of Finance or their nominated deputies	Chief Executive, Executive Director Finance and Transformation, Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance	Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Assistant Director, Legal and Assurance	
5.3.3	Each Director (in their service area) and Director Law and Governance (all areas) may each exercise the powers of the Chief Executive in the event of their incapacity, absence or unavailability.	Chief Executive, Executive Directors	Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive, Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
E6. DIRECTOR OF FINANCE				
6.8	Write offs			
6.8.1	To write off any individual debt(s) (including any associated court costs and bailiffs' fees) up to the value of £25,000 per individual or organisation, which is considered to be uneconomical to collect or is irrecoverable. All individual debts above this amount shall be done in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, and Director of Law and Governance .	Executive Director Finance and Transformation, Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance	Interim Director of Finance, Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance	
E7. Director of Law and Governance				
7.1	Unless otherwise stated or delegated in the Constitution or confirmed by the Leader of the Council (in respect of executive functions), the Director, Law and Governance , has responsibility for	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022	Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	and is authorised to undertake/exercise/discharge all responsibilities, duties, powers in connection with the effective administration/delivery of all executive and non-executive functions falling within the Law and Governance Directorate, including:		
7.1.1	<p>Law and Governance</p> <p>i) To give effect to a decision of the Council (including decisions taken by a Council committee in accordance with its terms of reference or by a Director in accordance with this scheme of delegation).</p> <p>ii) To institute, defend or participate in any legal proceedings or settle (up to the value of £250,000 excluding legal costs and disbursements), if appropriate, any actual or threatened legal proceedings in any case where such action is necessary to give effect to decisions of the Council or in any case where the Director Law and Governance considers that such action is necessary to safeguard and protect the Council's</p>		
	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>interests. Decisions above this financial threshold will be made by the Interim Director of Finance and/or the Chief Executive in consultation with the Director Law and Governance and Leader of the Council or relevant Cabinet Member.</p> <p>iii) Legal advice and related support services.</p>			
	<p>7.1.1 Registration Services</p> <p>i) To appoint a Proper Officer under Registration Service Act 1953 to carry out functions under the Act, including births, marriages, deaths, and exercising powers under a local registration scheme.</p> <p>ii) The Proper Officer will have responsibilities under the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 which govern the process for the approval of premises for the solemnization of marriages and the</p>	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Registration Services	

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<p>formation of civil partnerships.</p> <p>iii) To appoint a Registrar for burials and cremation for the purposes of Cremation Regulations 2008 and Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977.</p> <p>iv) The Director of Law and Governance is authorised in applying fees and charges to take into account individual circumstances and make flexible commercial fee related decisions to ensure the charges are appropriate whilst also seeking opportunities to maximize income.</p> <p>v) To provide service to support the Council's role as the relevant authority for the Black Country Coroners Services.</p> <p>vi) Bereavement Services (Cemeteries, Crematoria, closed churchyards including the authority's role as burial and cremation authority)</p> <p>vii) Citizenship Ceremonies.</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
7.1.2	<p>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</p> <p>i) The Director of Law and Governance is the Lead Officer for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Agenda.</p> <p>ii) The Director of Law and Governance has responsibility for and is authorised to undertake all necessary action in connection with the effective administration/delivery of the Council's EDI Agenda.</p>	Assistant Chief Executive	Assistant Chief Executive	
7.1.2	<p>Monitoring Officer</p> <p>i) The Director Law and Governance is the Monitoring Officer for the Council. The Monitoring Officer is a statutory appointment and provides advice to protect and safeguard the Council. The functions are summarised in Article 12 and the Protocol on the Discharge of the Functions of the</p>	Executive Director – Finance and Transformation	Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>ii) Monitoring Officer. Supporting the corporate governance of the council, particularly in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting, supporting and monitoring the council's policies and procedures for managing and access to information including data protection laws; • To administer the Members' Allowance Scheme; • The power to make, amend or revoke byelaws; • To report to the Council or the Cabinet in any case where the Ombudsman, after investigation, has reported that any proposal, decision or omission by the Council or any Committee, Sub- Committee or Joint Committee of the authority, the Cabinet or any member or officer of the authority has given rise to maladministration or injustice; • To determine whether the disclosure 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>	<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>	
	<p>of information by the authority in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To investigate any proposal, decision or omission by the Council or any Committee, Sub-Committee or Joint Committee of the authority, the Cabinet or any member or officer of the authority which he/she has reason to believe may have given rise to or is likely to or would give rise to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Illegality; ii) Maladministration; iii) failure to observe the Members' Code of Conduct. • To secure the lawfulness and fairness of decision-making, including advising on whether a decision or proposed decision is an executive or non-executive decision, and whether it is 			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>contrary to or not in accordance with the authority's approved budget and policy framework;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for co-ordinating Ombudsman matters and whistleblowing functions of the Authority; • Appointment as Proper Officer for the Data Protection Act 2018, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2001; • To consult regularly with the Chief Executive, the Chief Finance Officer, Assistant Chief Executive and the Chief Internal Auditor to identify areas where the probity of the authority can be improved or better protected, and to take appropriate actions. 			
7.1.4	<p>Democracy Services</p> <p>i) Democracy Services including</p>	Assistant Chief Executive	Assistant Chief Executive	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>support to elected members in their responsibilities, particularly in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members; • The Mayor; • Councillors via group support offices; • The full Council meeting; • Cabinet; • Committees, Boards, Panels, other fora appointed by full Council; • Overview & Scrutiny; • Training and development of councillors. <p>ii) To make any necessary appointments to fill casual vacancies that may arise on Committees, boards and outside bodies carrying out or relating to non- executive functions, in consultation with the relevant political group leader, where the need to make the appointment is considered necessary for business efficacy by the Director of Law and Governance before the</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>next meeting of Council.</p> <p>iii) To make arrangements for appeals against exclusion of pupils from maintained Schools;</p> <p>iv) To make arrangements for appeals regarding school admissions;</p> <p>v) To make arrangements for appeals by governing bodies, under s87 School Standards and Framework Act 1998</p>			
7.1.5	<p>Information Governance:</p> <p>i) Executive Director Finance and Transformation Director of Law and Governance shall be the Council's Senior Information Risk Owner.</p> <p>ii) The Director of Law and Governance is authorised to designate an officer of the Council to be the Data Protection Officer</p>	Executive Director, Finance and Transformation	Executive Director Finance and Transformation Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022	Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes	
	pursuant to the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR			
E11. DIRECTOR, REGENERATION AND GROWTH				
	<p>Unless otherwise stated or delegated in the Constitution or confirmed by the Leader of the Council (in respect of executive functions), the Director, Regeneration and Growth, has responsibility for and is authorised to undertake/exercise/discharge all responsibilities, duties, powers in connection with the effective administration/delivery of all executive and non-executive functions of regeneration and growth, including the following:</p> <p>11.1.1 International and domestic inward economic investment including tourism and the visitor economy.</p> <p>11.1.2 Economic growth, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development programmes; 	Executive Director – Place	<p>Assistant Director – Property, Strategic Assets and Land</p> <p>Assistant Director Spatial Planning and Growth</p> <p>Assistant Director - Development Planning and Building Consultancy</p>	

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use planning; • Housing development. <p>11.1.3 Transport & Connectivity including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Council’s transport strategies and programmes; • The authority’s strategic traffic management role and network planning; • Street naming and numbering; • Design of minor and major transport and highways projects; • The making of agreements for the execution of highways works under S278 Highways Act 1980; • Powers and duties relating to rights of way (including closures) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, Highways Act, Town and Country 			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>Planning Act or Clean Neighbourhoods Act;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Quality via the Clean Air Zone. <p>11.1.4 Local Land Charges functions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of the Local Land Charges Register; • Responsibility for processing local authority searches; • Management of the planning service; • Building conservation and urban design; • Obtaining of information as to interests in land. <p>11.1.5 Property Services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council land use and property; • Operational Property Management; 			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset Management; • Facilities Management; • Valuations and Acquisitions; • Property Sales; • Property Strategy Delivery; • Investment Estate & Property Management; • Property Asset Management and Income; • Strategic Investment Property Management; • Property Development; • Security Services. <p>11.1.6 Compulsory Purchase Orders.</p> <p>11.1.7 Disposal of Assets as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Growth and WMCA, 			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>with Ward Members as appropriate and with the Director of Finance and s151 Officer, declaring assets between £100,000 and £500,000 in value surplus;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with the Director of Finance and s151 officer, approving the disposal of assets between £100,000 and £500,000; • In consultation with the Cabinet Member and with Ward Members as appropriate, declaring assets up to £100,000 surplus; • Approving the disposal of assets up to £100,000 in value; • Overseeing the negotiation of property transactions; • Approving the details of transactions in accordance with delegations put in place by Cabinet; <p>11.1.8 Building Control;</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>11.1.9 To undertake the functions of the local planning authority including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with any applications for planning permission and other related applications; • Enforcement action (both Planning and Building Control) and the ability to investigate/ issue notices/take prosecution/direct action; • Development of the Council’s planning and transport policies; <p>11.1.10 Power to create footpaths and bridleways;</p> <p>11.1.11 Power to stop up footpaths and bridleways;</p> <p>11.1.12 Power to divert footpaths and bridleways;</p> <p>11.1.13 Powers relating to the preservation of trees;</p> <p>11.1.14 Powers relating to the protection of important</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	hedgerows; 11.1.15 The control of pollution or the management of air quality; 11.1.16 To obtain information about interests in land; 11.1.17 To obtain particulars of persons interested in land; 11.1.18 To make agreements for the execution of highways works.			
E13. DIRECTOR OF BOROUGH ECONOMY				
13.1	Unless otherwise stated or delegated in the Constitution or confirmed by the Leader of the Council (in respect of executive functions), the Director of Borough Economy , has responsibility for and is authorised to undertake/exercise/discharge all responsibilities, duties, powers in connection with the	Executive Director – Place	Assistant Director, Borough Economy Public Protection and Community Safety	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022	Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes	
	<p>effective administration/delivery of all executive and non-executive functions of borough economy, including the following :</p> <p>13.1.1 Regulation and Enforcement, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Health Service, Trading Standards Service, Regional Investigation team, the Licensing Services, the Environmental Enforcement; • Enforcement activities, including the authorisation of proceedings and defending proceedings on behalf of the council in relation to civil and criminal matters in respect of these services and other services as appropriate. <p>13.1.2 Licensing functions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functions of a licensing authority including 		<p>Assistant Director Green Spaces, Green Services, Events</p> <p>Assistant Director – Libraries, Archives, Information Services</p> <p>Assistant Director - Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy</p>	

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<p>(but not restricted to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The administration of licenses for entertainment, gambling and the sale of alcohol; ○ Taxi and Private Hire; ○ Miscellaneous licensing functions. <p>13.1.3 Environmental Health including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food hygiene and safety; ● Health and safety at work; ● Monitoring and control of infectious diseases; ● Private water supply monitoring; and ● Animal health and welfare enforcement. <p>13.1.4 Trading Standards including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Appointing the Chief Inspector for Weights and Measures and their deputy; ● Tackling rogue traders; 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product safety; • Misleading claims, scams and illegal trading practices; • Underage sales; • Illegal advertising. <p>13.1.5 Public Health Protection and Control of Statutory Nuisance including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fly tipping, commercial and household Duty of Care and rubbish accumulations; • Domestic, commercial and industrial noise, fumes and odours; • To serve an abatement notice in respect of a statutory nuisance; • To pass a resolution that Schedule 2 of the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993 should apply in the authority's area; 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inspect the authority’s area to detect any statutory nuisance; • To investigate any complaint about the existence of a statutory nuisance; • Air quality management; and • Other forms of pollution harmful to public health. <p>13.1.6 To authorise action and exercise powers in relation to the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014;</p> <p>13.1.7 Setting, supporting and monitoring the council’s policy on Community Safety including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCTV; • Safer communities, including Modern Day Slavery; • Domestic abuse; 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent and Counter-terrorism; • To discharge local authority approvals for S35 Dispersal Orders and other statutory instruments relating to local community safety; • To Host the Community Safety Partnership and produce a Community Safety Strategy including reducing reoffending and serious violence strategies. <p>13.1.8 Waste Strategy and Services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste collection; • Waste disposal; • Recycling; • Waste Policy and Enforcement. <p>13.1.9 Cleaner Neighbourhoods including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street cleansing; 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pest control; • Litter bin provision and maintenance; • Provision and cleaning of public conveniences; • Graffiti removal; • Dog control and dog warden service; • Enforcement. <p>13.1.10 Arts, Culture and Sports, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museums and galleries; • Arts; • Sporting events. <p>13.1.11 Leisure Services, including facilities;</p> <p>13.1.12 Community sports provision;</p> <p>13.1.13 Library provision;</p> <p>13.1.14 Parks and Allotments including:</p>			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation, management and enhancement of green spaces; • Creation, management and enhancement of related visitor attractions and facilities; • Public rights of way and provision and maintenance of footpaths and bridleways; • Woodland and tree management; • Provision of educational events and programmes; • Grass cutting and grounds maintenance; • Management of designated conservation sites. <p>13.1.15 To discharge the Council's statutory</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	<p>obligations in relation to the operation of the Community Right to Bid for Assets of Community Value and the Community Right to Challenge;</p> <p>13.1.16 Compulsory Purchase Orders;</p> <p>13.1.17 All Highways and Infrastructure and related functions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of highways; • The making of agreements for the execution of highways works under S38 Highways Act 1980; • The making of agreements for the execution of highways works under S278 Highways Act 1980; • Powers and duties relating to rights of way (including closures) under the Road traffic Act and Traffic 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<p>Regulation Act;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authority’s role as a highways, traffic and streetworks authorities; • Maintenance of highway assets of roads, bridges, retaining walls, street lighting and associated infrastructure; • Design and delivery of major and minor highway schemes; • The making of agreements for the execution of highways works under S278 Highways Act 1980; • Powers and duties relating to rights of way (including closures) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, Highways Act, Town and Country Planning Act or Clean Neighbourhoods Act; • Powers relating to the removal of things so deposited on highways as to be a nuisance; 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty to keep a definitive map and statement under review; • Duty to reclassify roads used as public paths; • Power to make limestone pavement order; • Discharging statutory duties with respect to the delivery of operational parking functions, including Civil Parking Enforcement; • Flood and water management including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discharging duties as Lead Local Flood Authority and other duties and responsibilities associated with the Flood Water Management Act; • Land drainage activities; • The delivery and maintenance of flood alleviation schemes; 			

<p>Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022</p>		<p>Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible</p>	<p>Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation</p>	<p>Source/Notes</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood response. <p>13.1.18 The council's borough-wide resilience and emergency planning functions;</p> <p>13.1.19 Neighbourhood Management;</p> <p>13.1.20 Any function relating to contaminated land;</p> <p>13.1.21 Event management, subject to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events above 500 people with community impact must be in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member; • Events above 5,000 people (one day) must have approval from the relevant Cabinet Member; • Events above 5,000 people (multiple days) must have approval from Cabinet. 			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
E14. DIRECTOR - BUSINESS STRATEGY AND CHANGE				
14.1	Unless otherwise stated or delegated in the Constitution or confirmed by the Leader of the Council (in respect of executive functions), the Director, Business Strategy and Change , has responsibility for and is authorised to undertake/exercise/discharge all responsibilities, duties, powers in connection with the effective administration/delivery of all executive and non-executive functions of business strategy and change, including the following:	As set out below		
14.1.1	Human Resources i) Setting, supporting and monitoring the council's policies and procedures for managing human resources and effective organisational development (including	Assistant Chief Executive	Assistant Chief Executive	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022	Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes	
	<p>Occupational Health and Wellbeing, and Health and Safety);</p> <p>ii) Recruitment of staff and to determine terms and conditions of employment;</p> <p>iii) To undertake the payroll function for all Council employees and associated bodies;</p> <p>iv) To make arrangements to consider and determine employee appeals in relation to grievances, grading and dismissal;</p> <p>v) To implement standing orders in relation to officer employment;</p> <p>vi) Unless otherwise delegated to the Interim Director of Finance, discharge functions</p>			

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
	relating to local government pensions.			
14.1.2	<p>Information and Communications Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Enabling effective ICT support, hardware, software, and necessary ICT infrastructure to ensure compliance with relevant ICT security standards including requisite connectivity to business applications and information that reside either on-premise or Cloud hosted; ii) Delivering the Council's Information and Communications Technology Digital Strategy (or equivalent). 	Executive Director Finance and Transformation	Executive Director Finance and Transformation	

Current Delegation as set out in the Scheme of Delegation dated December 2022		Executive Director that will ultimately be responsible	Interim Arrangement for Delegation Replacement Post Holder for delegation	Source/Notes
14.1.3	<p>Customer Services and Business Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Delivery of the Council's Customer Access Strategy; ii) The Council's corporate customer services and business support functions including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The telephone contact centre and front-facing customer service; • Digital access including the council's website and e-services; • Customer feedback. iii) Communications and Corporate Affairs; iv) Corporate Transformation; v) Corporate Strategy and Performance. 	<p>Assistant Chief Executive</p> <p>Executive Director Finance & Transformation</p>	<p>Assistant Chief Executive</p>	

Sandwell MBC

Constitution

List of Statutory and Proper Officers

Statutory Officers

1 List of Statutory Officers

- 1.1 The table sets out the posts holding statutory offices on behalf of the Council. An officer will hold the statutory office during any period of employment in the post, either as an employee or on a temporary, acting up or interim basis.
- 1.2 The Statutory Officers may appoint deputies, if allowed by law, but cannot delegate their statutory responsibilities.
- 1.3 The Monitoring Officer is delegated authority to amend the list of Statutory Officers to remove and replace redundant posts or provisions or to change appointments.

Statutory Office	Post holding the statutory office
Head of Paid Service (Section 4 – Local Government & Housing Act 1989)	Chief Executive
Monitoring Officer (Section 5 – Local Government & Housing Act 1989)	Assistant Director, Legal and Assurance
Chief Finance Officer (s.151 Local Government Act 1972)	Executive Director, Finance and Transformation
Electoral Registration Officer Returning Officer / Assistant Returning Officer (ss.8,28 and 35 Representation of the People Act 1983)	Chief Executive

<p>Director of Children’s Services (s.18 Children Act 2004)</p>	<p>Director, Children and Education</p>
<p>Director of Adult Social Services (s.6 Local Authority Social Services Act 1970)</p>	<p>Director of Adult Services</p>
<p>Director of Public Health (s73A National Health Service Act 2006)</p>	<p>Director of Public Health</p>
<p>Scrutiny Officer (s9FB Local Government Act 2000 as amended)</p>	<p>Democratic and Member Services Manager</p>
<p>Data Protection Officer (Article 37-39 General Data Protection Regulation 2018, s.69 Data Protection Act 1998)</p>	<p>Legal Services Manager – Governance & Regulatory</p>
<p>Qualified person for the purposes of section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>

Appointment of Proper Officers

1 List of Proper Officers

- 1.1 The officers set out in the table below are appointed to be the Council's Proper Officer for the stated legislative provisions.
- 1.2 The appointed Deputy Proper Officer is given in brackets. The Deputy Proper Officer is appointed to act where the Proper Officer is absent and/or unable to act for any reason.
- 1.3 In absence of the appointment of a Proper Officer in this Constitution:
- 1.3.1 the Monitoring Officer will be the Council's Proper Officer and has power to delegate this power, until an appointment is made by Full Council; and
- 1.3.2 The Deputy Monitoring Officer will be the Council's Deputy Proper Officer.
- 1.4 The Monitoring Officer is delegated authority to amend the list of Proper Officers to remove and replace redundant posts or provisions or to change appointments.

Local Government Act 1972

Section	Function	Proper Officer
83(1)-(4)	Officer to whom persons elected as councillors shall make declaration of acceptance of office.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance (Chief Executive)
84	Officer to whom councillors may give written notice or resignation.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance (Chief Executive)
88(2)	Officer who may convene a Council meeting to fill a vacancy in the office of Mayor.	Chief Executive

89(1)(b)	Officer who may receive notice in writing of a casual vacancy in the office of councillor from two local Government electors.	Chief Executive (Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance)
100	All references to proper officer in connection with the access to information provisions of the Local Government Act.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance
115	Officer to whom all officers shall pay monies received by them and due to the local authority.	Executive Director, Finance and Transformation
146(1)	Officer authorised to produce a statutory declaration specifying securities and verifying name change of authority.	Executive Director, Finance and Transformation
225(1)	Officer with whom documents may be deposited pursuant to law to make notes or endorsements and give acknowledgements or receipts.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance
229(4) and (5)	Officer who shall certify that a document is a photographic copy of a document in the custody of the Council.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance
Section 233 LGA 1972	Receive documents required to be served on the Council.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance
234(1)	Officer who may authenticate documents.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

238	Officer who may endorse a copy of a byelaw.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance
Sch.12, Part 1, para 4(1A)	Officer who may sign a summons to Council meetings and may receive notice from a member of address to which a summons to a meeting is to be sent.	Chief Executive (Assistant Chief Executive)

Local Government Act 1974

Section	Function	Proper Officer
30 (5)	Officer responsible for arranging publication in newspapers of notice of Local Commissioner's report on investigation of a complaint.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976

Section	Description	Proper Officer
41	Officer responsible for certifying copies of resolutions, minutes and other documents.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984 and the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1988

Section	Description	Proper Officer
	All references to the Proper Officer.	Director of Public Health

Weights & Measures Act 1985

Section	Description	Proper Officer
Section 72	Functions of Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures.	Assistant Director, Borough Economy Public Protection and Community Safety

Local Government Finance Act 1988

Section	Description	Proper Officer
114 and 114A	Officer responsible for making a report under this section to the authority concerning unlawful expenditure and the Council's budget.	Executive Director, Finance and Transformation (deputy appointed by the Executive Director, Finance and Transformation)

Local Government & Housing Act 1989

Section	Description	Proper Officer
Section 2 LGHA 1989	Deposit of list of "politically restricted posts" under LGHA 1989.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

Non-Domestic (Collection and Enforcement) (Local Lists) Regulations 1989

Section	Description	Proper Officer
Reg 23	Certification of the Local Non-Domestic List.	Executive Director, Finance and Transformation

Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990

Section	Description	Proper Officer
8 (1) and (5), 9 and 10, 13, 14	<p>Officer to whom:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. notice is delivered about the constitution of a political group, or the change of name of a political group2. notice is delivered about a Councillor's membership of, or cessation of membership of, a political group3. the wishes of a political group are expressed <p>Officer responsible for notifying a political group about allocations and vacations of seats</p>	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2000

Section	Description	Proper Officer
Paras 5 and 6 of Part II of Schedule 1	Officer to receive notification of proposed appointment of certain officers, notifying executive members of that proposed appointment and for receiving and notifying of objections to the proposed appointment from executive members, if any. (as set out in the Employment Procedure Rules)	Chief Executive (Assistant Chief Executive)

Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009

Section	Description	Proper Officer
	All references to the responsible officer	Director, Adult Social Care

Local Authorities (Referendums)(Petitions)(England) Regulations 2011

Section	Description	Proper Officer
Reg 4	Officer who publishes the number that is equal to 5 per cent of the number of local government electors for the authority's area.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance
Regs 11,13,14	To be the Proper Officer for the receipt and validation of petitions.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

Local Authorities (Conduct of Referendums) (England) Regulations 2011

Section	Description	Proper Officer
	All references to the Proper Officer.	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Section	Description	Proper Officer
	All references to the Proper Officer	Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance

Registration Service Act 1953

Section	Description	Proper Officer
	All references to the Proper Officer / registration officer	Assistant Director Registration Services

Title of Motion: Inclusion of Co-operative Housing models in the Sandwell Local Plan.

Proposer: Councillor Luke John Davies, Seconder: Councillor Pete Hughes.

“Council notes that a housing co-operative is a group of people who manage and control the housing in which they live, with each person who is a member of the housing co- operative having an equal say in decision-making.

Council further notes that there are currently over 900 housing co-operatives in the UK involving over 196,500 homes.

Council acknowledges that those co-operative housing models as a rule produce high-quality housing at lower rents than most private rented models, as well as fostering a strong sense of community values.

Council further notes that co-operative housing is already referred to in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and it is therefore considered an appropriate form of social housing.

Council also notes that including a specific reference to co-operative housing models in the local plan will give this option a further degree of prominence.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to -

1. Consider the development and adoption of a Co-operative Housing Policy; and
2. Consider the inclusion of a reference to co-operative housing models in the draft Local Plan in the section currently related to self-build and custom-build housing.”

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Title of Motion: Inclusive personal protective equipment (PPE)

Proposer: Councillor Suzanne Hartwell Seconder: Councillor Nicky Hinchliff

Council notes that most Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is designed for men and fails to consider diverse end users. Inclusive PPE considers the user's Protected Characteristics (i.e. gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy, disability, and ethnic minorities)

Council further notes that finding PPE that fits can be an ongoing struggle for many females. Whilst legally companies and contractors must provide PPE, there is no rule about the PPE needing to fit correctly. Female-specific PPE, whilst good quality, can currently be 2-3 times the cost.

Council notes that British Standard BS EN ISO 20471 is the standard for high-visibility protective clothing. The ratio required for background material to fluorescent reflective material required on garments for certain vocations becomes impossible to produce. The legal requirement is that fluorescent strips:

"Must encircle the torso, sleeves, and trouser legs with at least 40% of fluorescent material present on the front of the garment. The reflective strips must be 50mm wide and the space between the 2 reflective strips must be at least 50 mm."

Council notes with concern that wearers may be left with no choice but to wear PPE which is compliant but too big or non-compliant but fits and incurring additional costs to make alterations. This causes additional safety concerns to females for just doing their job.

Council further notes and recognises widespread inequalities in the provision of PPE across minority groups in STEM industries, noting that many women face a range of health and safety effects caused by ill-fitting PPE, with a significant percentage not receiving women's specific PPE from their employers (59.6%).

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to -

1. Take steps to ensure Inclusive PPE is available as required in all areas of the Council business;
2. Encourages local businesses to provide inclusive PPE; and
3. Write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care setting out the terms of this motion and calling on Government to add the requirement for inclusive PPE Regulations 1992, to the guidance on all forms of PPE.

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Title of motion: Modern Slavery and Sandwell Council.

Proposer: Cllr Amrita Dunn, Seconder: Cllr Scott Chapman

Council recognises progress made across the West Midlands to eradicate modern slavery but acknowledges that there are approximately over 4,000 survivors of Modern Slavery in the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

Council notes and welcomes its previous decision to adopt a Modern Slavery Statement.

Council further acknowledges and reaffirms the importance of vigilance for all Sandwell Council elected members and employees when dealing with supplier contracts with high-risk sectors being care, construction, agriculture, and hospitality.

Council therefore reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that Sandwell is Slavery Free and, recognising the importance of partnership work in the fight against Modern Slavery, resolves to –

1. Request the Leader and Cabinet review and update the current ‘Slavery Free Sandwell Strategy Plan’ with achievable goals which will enable regular assessment of progress and scrutiny of areas which may require improvement.
2. Request the Chief Executive convene a West Midlands Anti-Slavery Summit - inviting all the local authorities in the West Midlands Combined Authority region, the Mayor of the West Midlands, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and our region’s Members of Parliament, as well as relevant charitable organisations like the Black Country Women’s Aid where partners can share best practices as well as improve collaboration among regional partners.
3. Implement annual modern slavery and human trafficking training for all elected members and council employees.
4. Continue to engage all stakeholders, including elected members, council employees, and contracted partners through regular awareness campaigns and reports on our Modern Slavery strategy being delivered to Council regularly and reaffirms the principle of ensuring that all members of this authority are clear in knowing it is our duty to highlight concerns to ensure the Council can fulfil its role as a First Responder Organisation to refer potential victims.

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Title of Motion: Ban on Pavement Parking

Proposer: Councillor Jay Anandou Seconder: Councillor Laured Kalari

“Council notes with concern the impacts of pavement parking across our communities, restricting pavements and increasing hazards for pedestrians – particularly parents and children, visually impaired and disabled residents.

Council further notes that Government through the Department for Transport undertook a consultation on proposed restrictions during 2020 but that the results of that consultation were never published and as yet have not been acted upon.

Council acknowledges campaigns by organisations such as Living Streets, Guide Dogs for the Blind and British Parking Association continue to call for nationwide bans on pavement parking.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways to write to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Transport setting out the terms of this motion and requesting an update on progress toward implementing restrictions.”

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