

# Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Thursday, 31 March 2022 at 5.45 pm  
at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

**Present:** Councillors Mabena (Chair), Ashman, Fisher, K Singh and V Smith

**Also present:** Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager – Housing Management), Tessa Mitchell (Business Manager – Community Safety and Resilience), Andrew Clarke – (Community Safety and Resilience) and Matt Powis (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

## 47/21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Gavan (Vice-Chair), Gill and Randhawa.

## 48/21 Minutes

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.



## **49/21**      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

## **50/21**      **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

## **51/21**      **Garage Rents**

The Service Manager for Housing Management advised the Board that in December 2021, the Cabinet had approved an increase in rental charges for garages sites for both non-tenant and Council tenants.

Council owned garages were held within the Council's General Fund property portfolio, therefore any rental charge increases would impact the Council's general fund budget. It was noted that the proposed increase would generate income of approximately £398k.

Charges for Council tenants would increase to £11.00 per week while non-tenants would be charged £13.20 per week. Whilst both charges represented an increase of over £4.00 per week, rentals in Sandwell were significantly cheaper than other neighbouring Local Authorities.

Current garage tenants had been formally notified in February 2022 regarding the changes in rent. Since the notification, 26 tenants had submitted notices of intention to terminate their garage tenancies. However, over the same period, the Council allocated 14 new garage tenancies.

Prior to the rental increase, a review was carried out on the Council's garage stock which identified the following:

Status of Garage	Number of Garages
Demolition or Disposal	154
Lock Change Required	129
Minor Repair Work Required	267
Significant Repair Work Required	95
Ready to Let – No Demand	75
Ready to Let – Demand	144

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

- repair costs for restoring garages were calculated on an individual basis. Some garage properties were identified as beyond repair and would be too uneconomical to restore to let.
- there were concerns that a large proportion of the garages stock required repair or demolition. Whilst over 2218 residents were on the waiting list for garages in the Borough.
- the Board highlighted concerns from local residents regarding the lack of repairs to garages historically. The Council had committed to carrying out inspections and had pledged to complete necessary repair work on the appropriate garages.
- over 56% of the stock was let by private residents or Council tenants renting more than one garage. Allocations were on a first come first served basis with additional garage renters required to pay a higher fee resulting from VAT charges on second and subsequent garages.
- increases in garage rents were required as part of the savings to the Council's General Fund for 2022/23. If rental increases did not go ahead, then alternative savings would need to be identified from other services.
- there was a consensus that any future saving proposals in respect of garage rents be considered at the Board prior to Cabinet approval.

Members thanked officers for their attendance.

The Board received an overview of the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy, which incorporated all ASB policy management from across the Council into a single document.

The draft refresh of the policy had been co-produced with partner organisations such as West Midlands Police. Public consultation had yet to commence on the policy, which would be required prior to consideration by the Cabinet.

The Council was obligated to establish an ASB policy which worked for all residents and communities in the Borough. Members heard that different aspects of ASB were dealt with by different services across the Council. As part of the Council's 'One Council, One Team' approach, the policy streamlined and matched up service responsibilities to ensure ASB issues were appropriately handled by the correct team. The adoption of a hub based approach allowed communities to be empowered to understand and find the right approach for dealing with various types of ASB faced by communities in the Borough.

The policy worked in tandem with the ASB Portal which was introduced in 2018, which directly engages with complaints and directly triages queries to the correct service areas.

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

- the revised policy did not incorporate procedural changes in anti-social behaviour management.
- the refresh of the policy had been co-produced with partner organisations such as West Midlands Police, various council departments who handled ASB and service users.
- reporting issues such as nuisance bikes and noise would be easier and clearer for residents. Data collocated from the ASB Portal would enable mapping work to be carried out in each area in the Borough which would assist in targeting specific support in areas which required extra assistance in tackling ASB.
- the Council maintained good partnership working with housing associations to try and reduce the level of ASB faced by tenants and local communities.

- the Council achieved it's first successful prosecutions in relation to Community Protection Notices (CPNs) as a direct result of the work by the ASB service.

Members thanked officers for their attendance.

**45/21**

### **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.

**46/21**

### **Work Programme 2021-22**

The Board noted the work programme for the remainder of the current municipal year.

Meeting ended at 6.51 pm

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