

# Report to Cabinet

**7 December 2022**

<b>Subject:</b>	Improvement Plan Progress
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Leader of the Council Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
<b>Director:</b>	Managing Director Kim Bromley-Derry
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Strategic Lead – Service Improvement Kate Ashley <a href="mailto:Kate1_ashley@sandwell.gov.uk">Kate1_ashley@sandwell.gov.uk</a>  Senior Lead Officer – Service Improvement Rebecca Jenkins <a href="mailto:Rebecca_jenkins@sandwell.gov.uk">Rebecca_jenkins@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1. Recommendations

- 1.1. That progress against the Improvement Plan up to 3 November 2022 be received.
- 1.2. To receive the Improvement Plan Risk Register.
- 1.3. To receive changes to the Improvement Plan.
- 1.4. To receive any recommendations or comments made by Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, and Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board in relation to the Improvement Plan progress.
- 1.5. To recommend to Council that this report along with the September progress report and an accompanying letter be submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to form



the Council's 6 monthly update on progress against the Improvement Plan.







## 2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report provides a quarterly update on progress against the Improvement Plan agreed by Council on 7 June 2022. The Improvement Plan incorporates all recommendations from the Grant Thornton Governance Review, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and the CIPFA Financial Management Review, as well as the Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 2.2 Risk management is embedded within the council's programme management of the Improvement Plan. A risk register has been developed which underpins the council's strategic risk relating to the Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). Cabinet is asked to receive the Improvement Plan Risk Register to provide assurance that risks are being managed effectively and to provide contextual information for future decision making.
- 2.3 The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. Changes to the Improvement Plan are tracked through programme management mechanisms. Cabinet is asked to receive the changes.
- 2.4 As part of the governance and assurance arrangements for the Improvement Plan, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board review progress of the Improvement Plan and utilise the plan for work programming purposes. Both Committees are due to consider progress at their meetings in November. Any recommendations or comments they wish to make to Cabinet will be presented during the meeting for Cabinet's consideration.
- 2.5 Under the Statutory Directions, the council is required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months. The first report is due for submission by 22 December 2022. It is proposed that this report, along with the quarterly update received by Cabinet in September will form the basis of the report to the Secretary of State along with a covering letter. Council are responsible for approving the report made to the Secretary of State and Cabinet will make a recommendation to Council.



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

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

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

### 4 Context and Key Issues



## 4.1 Background

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

## 4.2 Improvement Plan Progress

- 4.2.1 Over this quarter, significant progress has been made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan. This includes the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive and a decision taken by Council in relation to moving to a 4-yearly election cycle. Both of which were key requirements of the Government's Statutory Directions.
- 4.2.2 A comprehensive monitoring tool has been developed to include both a risk rating for each main action within the Improvement Plan and a progress status rating for all actions. The Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool is included at Appendix 1. The monitoring tool provides quick reference around which actions are on track for delivery, as well as highlighting areas that may require remedial action or additional levels of assurance.
- 4.2.3 Progress against each theme of Improvement Plan is summarised within Appendix 2. This includes an overall status rating, a description of workstream progress, commentary on progress against milestones and achievements. Along with an outline of key achievements this quarter, the theme ratings and a summary of any issues is provided below.



## 4.2.4 Organisational Culture Theme

### 4.2.4.1 Achievements:

- Recruitment of a permanent Chief Executive
- Staff engagement carried out to determine the cultural values and behaviours of the council.
- Multiple training sessions delivered to Officers and Members focusing on Corporate Governance and the Officer and Member relationship. These will continue into next quarter
- Actions to respond to the Employee Engagement Survey embedded in the Improvement Plan and Directorate-level action plans
- Internal communications methods such as Director live events and all staff briefings now more established and being used to share information and reinforce key messages

4.2.4.2 Theme Status Rating Green – Progress is being made across all workstreams. Slippage is being experienced in a couple of areas that are classed as medium risk, one of which is due to the impact of the by-election held in October 2022 and rescheduling of decision making meetings.

4.2.4.3 Organisational Culture Progress Issues - Areas with slippage are:

- **Organisational Development Strategy and Plan** (action being redefined as Workforce Strategy). Action is dependent on the outcomes of the culture listening groups which will conclude in October. Dates reprofiled through change control.
- **Design and deliver Corporate Governance Training for Members:** Effective decision-making training (delay due to change of Council date due to by-election). Training will commence following November Council.

## 4.2.5 Corporate Oversight Theme

### 4.2.5.1 Achievements

- Support provider in place for the Oracle Fusion project and implementation underway



- Monitoring and oversight of the Council's improvement has become more established - second quarterly report prepared and work commenced to embed and sustain key actions into business as usual
- Quarter 1 Performance Management Report delivered, and preparations are well underway for the Q2 report.
- Corporate Transformation Approach agreed

4.2.5.2 Theme Status Rating: Green. Progress is being made across all workstreams.

4.2.5.3 One action has a red risk rating in this theme. This relates to **Performance Management Framework**. All sub-actions have been completed. The Q1 report was presented to Cabinet, Scrutiny and an all-Member Briefing during this quarter. Preparations are on track for Q2 report to be presented to Cabinet in December.

#### 4.2.6 Strategic Direction Theme

##### 4.2.6.1 Achievements

- Approval of the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Preparations for reporting to Cabinet on the Corporate Asset Management Strategy, Equality Policy, Medium Term Financial Plan and the progress of the Regeneration Strategy and Pipeline.
- Customer Journey Programme established and included within the Improvement Plan to reflect this priority focus
- Residents' Survey and consultation on the budget taken place and insight is being used to inform the Medium-Term Financial Plan and business planning.

4.2.6.2 Theme Status Rating: Red. Progress is being made, however some delays and specific issues have emerged around the EDI agenda, which along with the anticipated decision to adopt the LGA equalities framework review are impacting on the ability to deliver on the actions to the original timescales. There has also been slippage in the delivery of the development of the Commercial Strategy, although work has progressed in this area.



4.2.6.3 In relation to the EDI Agenda, there are 2 actions with a red risk rating (significant slippage/issues), and 3 with an amber risk rating (medium slippage/issues):

- **Review of council EDI decision making process** – this focused on the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Review which has now been completed. Updated EIA forms and guidance have been issued.
- **Approval of EDI strategy** - Slippage is due to the proposal to adopt the LGA Equalities Framework which requires a longer delivery time. Cabinet approved the Equalities policy in November and agreed to the adoption of the LGA Equalities Framework. Timescales for delivering the strategy have been reprofiled through October's change control.
- **Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) staff networks** – Work is ongoing. Some networks are functioning better than others. Womens' network and a Faith and Belief network are being established.
- **Continue to deliver on Equalities Commission Board priorities** - EDI legacy issues are resurfacing which is impacting on operation of staff networks and delivery on Equalities Commission Board priorities. A report on these matters is due to Leadership Team in the coming weeks, and all these actions will be included within the adoption of the LGA Equalities Framework.
- **Equality Policy approved**- The policy was approved by Cabinet in November 22. There had been a delay due to the by-election.

4.2.6.4 There has been a medium level of slippage in relation to the **Development and Implementation of the Commercial Strategy**. A Leadership Team discussion around the draft strategy took place in early November and will be presented to Cabinet in early 2023. The timescales have been agreed to be reprofiled through October's change control.

## 4.2.7 Decision Making Theme

### 4.2.7.1 Achievements

- Consultation completed, and decision taken in relation to the 4-yearly election cycle
- Key decisions taken around changes to the constitution with final changes due to be considered by Council in December.



- Scrutiny Review completed and agreement from Council to adopt changes.
- Scrutiny and Audit Committees continuing to focus on their improvement

4.2.7.2 Theme Status Rating: Green. All areas progressing with some medium slippage which are predominantly due to delays as a result of the by-election.

4.2.7.3 In relation to the **In-depth review and revision to Corporate Governance Documents** and the **Refresh of decision making-arrangements including the role of Scrutiny** there has been medium slippage caused due to delays associated with the by-election. In November, Council approved the Scheme of Delegations and the Scrutiny Review. Training in effective decision-making will commence from November linked to the Council approvals.

4.2.7.4 Slippage has also been experienced relating to the **revised Financial Regulations**. Preparations are being made to report to December Council. As the key changes to financial regulations were approved in July, the risk and impact of the slippage of the outstanding components is very low. Timescales were agreed to be reprofiled through October's change control.

4.2.7.5 The revision of the **Council Procedure Rules** has experienced significant slippage due to omission from change control in July which would have altered the delivery timetable. The Council Procedure Rules were approved by Council in November.

## 4.2.8 Procurement and Commercial Theme

### 4.2.8.1 Achievements

- Delivery of a new framework for SEND Transport that addresses concerns raised around resilience and value for money.
- Continued focus on contract management (Serco, SCT, SLT) and contract performance embedded in the Performance Management Framework for quarterly reporting.
- Approval of the Street Cleansing Recovery Plan





- Decision made around the future delivery of leisure services and a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) is in the process of being established
- Work has continued this quarter around Lion Farm and the matter is being progressed through an Expert Determination process.

4.2.8.2 Theme Status Rating: Green. Progress is being made across all workstreams

4.2.8.3 The **Lion Farm Options Agreement** is experiencing medium slippage/issues. This is due to the delivery timescales for the Expert Determination process being decided by a third party. Papers have been submitted to the external party that will conduct the expert determination and the process commenced.

4.2.8.4 The **Corporate Performance Management System** is green risk rated, but is currently experiencing a significant level of slippage. This has not progressed past soft market testing due to project management capacity. A further demonstration with another provider is taking place in November. The size and scale of system will be considered to scope of project, and project management capacity reviewed.

#### 4.2.9 Partnerships and Relationships Theme

##### 4.2.9.1 Achievements

- Delivery of the Early Help and Corporate Parenting Strategies has continued across partners.
- Work has progressed to agree the KPI suite as part of the SCT contract and Cabinet decision was taken not to invoke the contract break clause.
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been approved by partners
- Deep-dives are taking place and are informing the priorities of the SHCP Board and Integrated Care Board.
- Attendance and participation with key regional and sub-regional groups (including WMCA, ABCA, and BCLEP) has continued
- Review of VCS Grants is complete and work has commenced to develop the VCS Strategy.



- 4.2.9.2 Theme Status Rating: Amber. Progress is being made across workstreams with some slippage in relation to the SCT KPI review, and work around the transition from children's to adult's services.
- 4.2.9.3 In relation to the **Sandwell Children's Trust KPI Suite** - this is now due to be complete December 2022 for implementation in April 2023. The dates have been reprofiled due to decision not to invoke the contract break clause.
- 4.2.9.4 Slippage has occurred in the review of partnership structures relating to the **Transition from children's to adult's services**. The review and remodelling of the pathway is due to commence in November and timescales agreed to be reprofiled through October's change control

### 4.3 Statutory Recommendations

- 4.3.1 The Value for Money Governance Review made three statutory recommendations that the council has a legal obligation to respond to. These recommendations are incorporated into the single Improvement Plan and are embedded across each of the six themes.
- 4.3.2 To provide an overview of progress against these three specific recommendations, Appendix 3 extracts the key actions that respond to each of the recommendations and they are summarised below.

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

#### *Progress update:*

- Continuing to implement strategies to address the service issues highlighted in the Grant Thornton report.
- SLT – progressing the approach agreed by Cabinet in June 2022 to transfer services to a Local Authority Trading Company.



- SCT – Governance arrangements remain in place. Joint work in place with SCT in relation to corporate parenting and early help. Revised contract will commence in April 2023
- Waste Contract – Contract Monitoring framework progressing well and embedded in PMF reporting. Review of the Contract is complete.
- ERP (Oracle Fusion) – support provider in place and implementation commenced. Project Management and Governance arrangements are in place.
- Lion Farm – expert determination process has commenced. Formal document detailing the respective roles and responsibilities of Council and the developer complete.
- Regeneration Strategy and Pipeline to underpin significant regeneration in Sandwell approved by Cabinet 23 March 2022. First monitoring update due in November.

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

*Progress Update*

- The Governance Review of key documents within the council's Constitution is nearing completion. Approval in July to revised Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules, thresholds for decisions and Sale of Land and Buildings Protocol. Approval in November to revised Scheme of Delegations. Refresh of Financial Regulations will be presented to Council in December.
- Corporate Governance Training - Programme of training and development commenced in September 2022 on effective decision-making, good governance, and revised contract procedure rules
- Commercial Strategy in draft and due to be considered by Cabinet in early 2023.
- Corporate Asset Management Strategy due for Cabinet consideration in November.



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

#### *Progress Update*

- Member Development – New Member induction complete and Member Development Programme is being delivered and regularly reviewed by Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee.
- Officer Development – A consolidated programme of fundamental training for managers on Corporate Governance matters has commenced. A broader Management Development Programme will be rolled out in 2023 following the approval of the Workforce Plan.
- Organisational Culture – Outcomes of the listening exercises to be considered by Leadership Team in November.
- Meeting structures to facilitate Cabinet Member and Leadership Team cross-working in place and meeting needs.

#### **4.7 Reporting Framework, Governance and Assurance**

4.7.1 To ensure that senior officers and members have oversight of delivery, Council approved the reporting mechanism for the Improvement Plan in June 2022. This set out that progress will be monitored by Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet quarterly until all actions have been completed, or changes have been embedded into business as usual. The diagram included at Appendix 4 sets out the governance framework.

4.7.2 Two quarterly updates on progress of the Governance Improvement Plan were provided to Cabinet in April 2022 and July 2022. The first quarterly update on the Improvement Plan was considered by Cabinet in September 2022. This report forms the second quarterly update to



Cabinet on the Improvement Plan. Leadership Team have reviewed progress against the plan every month.

- 4.7.3 The Government Directions require reporting on the delivery of the Improvement Plan at six monthly intervals to the Secretary of State from the council and the Commissioners. The next report is due in December 2022 and will be considered by Council in December. Council is responsible for approving the report made to the Secretary of State, and Cabinet will make a recommendation to Council.
- 4.7.4 Member-led committees, such as the Governance & Constitution Review Committee, Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and Scrutiny Committees, are used for decision making and maintaining oversight of the actions and implementation of the Improvement Plan.
- 4.7.5 The Governance & Constitution Review Committee and cross-party Working Group have been integral to the development and review of the governance documents, ahead of decisions taken by Council in July and due in November and December this year.
- 4.7.6 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee received an introduction to the Improvement Plan and the Improvement Plan Risk Register in June 2022 and have received a quarterly progress report and the risk register in September 2022 and November 2022.
- 4.7.7 Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board has included several elements of the Improvement Plan on their work programme as well as regular reports on overall progress. The first report on overall progress was considered on 22 September 2022. The next progress report will be considered by Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board in November. Following the September report, Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board requested a 'deep dive' focus on the work under the Organisational Culture theme and engagement with the workforce. This is due to take place in early December.



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

## 4.8 External Reviews

4.8.1 External assurance continues to play a part in our improvement journey. The council has invited Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPA to monitor our progress in addressing the recommendations in their reviews. Grant Thornton and the LGA conducted their follow-up review activities over September and October 2022 and CIPFA will conduct their review in November 2022.

4.8.2 The feedback report from the LGA has been received and is included at appendix 5. The LGA have recognised the significant progress that has been made in a number of key areas to the good governance and management of the council. The LGA also stressed that the council is on a journey that will take time and there is still a long way to go to embed the improvements required.

4.8.3 Key points raised by the LGA in relation to Corporate Oversight and Strategic Direction were that:

- Much greater stability can now be seen both politically and managerially
- Cabinet and Leadership Team are working increasingly well together
- Praise for the Leaders' and Chief Executives' styles and approaches
- Staff feel much better communicated with from the corporate level
- There is an absence of a whole organisation view of the scale of the financial challenge facing the council
- External partners are seeing the council now being much better engaged
- Cabinet is building a track record of taking difficult decisions and are showing a commitment and willingness to face the further tough decisions
- The injection of additional capacity in key areas has helped to drive improvement
- There needs to be a stocktake around the level of available resource, pace and capacity going forward.



#### 4.8.4 Key points raised by the LGA in relation to Governance and Decision-Making were that:

- An inclusive process has taken place to develop the changes to the Constitution
- One of the most noticeable changes in recent months is a much-improved set of relationships between officers and elected Members.
- There is an emerging risk around the organisational responsiveness to the customer and to casework issues brought forward by Elected Members
- Members have valued the training offered through the Member Development Programme
- Scrutiny is going from strength to strength
- Mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and officers is providing for good planning and work programming across the different committees
- There is a sense of a 'maturing politics' within the council

#### 4.8.5 Key points raised by the LGA in relation to Customer Journey and Organisational Culture were that:

- There is a long way to go in the work on the customer journey and organisational culture
- The customer journey, Equalities Diversity and Inclusion, and organisational culture are major pieces of inter-related work that are fundamental to future success. They require a clear plan and sense of deliverability.

4.8.6 The findings from the Grant Thornton and the CIPFA follow-up reviews are expected to be received shortly. A further update to the Improvement Plan will take place in early 2023 once the council has had the opportunity to reflect on the findings from Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPFA as a result of their follow-up visits, along with the outcomes of the culture listening exercise and any additional recommendations from the Secretary of State.

## 4.9 Resources



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

4.9.2 Recruitment to key positions has taken place including interim corporate transformation capacity to establish programme and project management governance arrangements. Other elements of recruitment are underway. Consultants have been commissioned to support the council's work on organisational culture and resources have been deployed to support the implementation of finance improvements and the Governance review. A summary of the Q2 position on all Council reserves is provided within the Q2 budget monitoring report.

## 4.10 Risk Management

4.10.1 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.

4.10.2 The current risk register is attached as Appendix 6. The main risks are associated with:

- **Resources** – for delivery of key components of the plan including the performance management framework, asset management system implementation and culture change programme. The financial resources required have been identified and were approved by Council in June.
- **Organisational Culture** – If the organisational culture doesn't change, this will limit the improvements that can be made. A theme within the Improvement Plan focuses on organisational culture. It includes plans for a comprehensive engagement programme with





staff and members to define a collectively owned culture. We will then embed the conditions for this culture to thrive.

- **Communication** – to ensure everyone is aware of their respective roles and responsibilities. Communication is taking place through a range of methods including briefings, live events, and regular messages.
- **Constitutional Changes** – key corporate governance documents are being reviewed and the first set were approved in July with others to follow in November and December. Once approved, these policies provide an important foundation for improvement.
- **Performance Management Framework** – to ensure that we can effectively monitor progress and evidence improvement. Each theme includes an outline of how success will be evidenced. Processes for monitoring progress are in place, and processes for capturing and using evidence of improvement will be developed.
- **Historic Issues** – if there is a continued focus on and resource directed towards historic issues this will hinder improvement. The improvement plan contains actions to bring historic issues to a conclusion and embed lessons learnt.

4.10.2.1 Since the last quarterly report to Cabinet, the risk relating to Investment and Financial Resources (IP6) has reduced from a Red 12 rating to an Amber 8 rating. Appointment of interim corporate transformation capacity has taken place and this is providing capacity to establish programme and project management governance arrangements as well as moving forward key transformational activity.

## 4.11 Changes to the Improvement Plan

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

4.11.2 The Improvement Plan report to Council in June 2022 set out that changes (which may include the addition of new workstreams or



objectives, or the amendment of timescales for delivery of actions) will be tracked through programme management mechanisms and that Cabinet will retain oversight of changes through regular formal reporting.

4.11.3 The list of all changes is provided in Appendix 7. Where new actions have been added to the Improvement Plan, these are displayed within the monitoring tool with green font colour. One of the changes within the plan has been to add a workstream around the Customer Journey. At their meeting on 22 September, Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board commented on its absence from the Improvement Plan despite this being a focus of the Commissioners.

4.11.4 The changes made are summarised below.

- 3 changes made to descriptions of actions
- 42 changes made to action delivery timescales
- 1 new workstream has been added to reflect the priority of customer journey
- 6 main-actions have been added
- 29 sub-actions have been added
- 28 assurance actions have been added to ensure that an approach / action is becoming embedded in the organisation
- 8 actions were agreed as closed. They are summarised below with the rationale.

Change Ref	Action Title	Rationale for closure
81	Continue to adopt star chamber approach for Cabinet Members and Chief Officers as part of budget setting approach	Star Chambers all completed by 28th September. Approach will be used for future budget setting.
82	Ward and Casework Management	Main action to be incorporated within the new workstream focusing on customer experience
83	Deliver Member Development Programme including Finance Training Programme	This has moved into regular business of the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee. Immediate requirements have been met for the



		purposes of the IP. ES&MDC review MDP on a regular basis.
86	Actions to respond to employee survey outcomes to be identified and embedded in improvement plan	Main action to close and new main action (to monitor Employee Engagement Survey Action Plan) will be added to Corporate Oversight- IP workstream.
87	A clear and joint message from Chief Executive and Leader regarding Officer and Elected Member relationship delivered	Comms messages have taken place and training sessions held have reinforced the messages around the relationship. Approach to action has been different to how drafted. Attendance records and engagement with training help demonstrate that message has been delivered.
119	Developing a model for locality working	Closure of main action to incorporate into 'Customer Journey Programme'
131	Refresh existing arrangements for arms-length companies	Workstream closure – only arms-length company is SCT and covered with contract managementt arrangements. These are reported through PMF.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1** The Value for Money Governance Review was undertaken as part of the external auditor's role to provide assurance on the council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. As the report includes statutory recommendations the council has a legal obligation to respond appropriately.
- 5.2** The Directions issued by the Secretary of State are a statutory requirement and the council has a legal obligation to respond appropriately. Failure to do so would likely result in further intervention measures.
- 5.3** Reviewing progress against the Improvement Plan enables senior officers and members have oversight of delivery, and take corrective action, as necessary.
- 5.4** Alternative formats for reporting to the Secretary of State could be adopted, however the proposal to submit a covering letter along with the quarterly reports made to Cabinet makes use of existing reports. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities confirmed that this would be an acceptable format to them.



## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	<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>
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<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 regular reporting development and approval of this Improvement Plan will mean that the council has achieved one of the elements within the Directions within the specified timescales.</p> <p>The delivery of the Improvement Plan and achievement of the desired outcomes will meet the remainder of the Directions.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively deliver its strategic priorities and ensure it is delivering value for money for Sandwell.</p>



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



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

## 7. Appendices

1. Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool October 2022
2. Improvement Plan Theme Progress Summary October 2022
3. Statutory Recommendations Reporting October 2022
4. Improvement Plan Governance Diagram
5. LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review November 2022
6. Improvement Plan Risk Register October 2022
7. Changes to the Improvement Plan October 2022
8. Improvement Plan Progress Report to Cabinet September 2022
9. Draft Letter to Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

## 8. Background Papers

- [Sandwell Council Improvement Plan](#)
- Approval of Sandwell Council Improvement Plan [Report to Council 7 June 2022](#)
- Quarterly Monitoring Reports to Cabinet:
  - [September 2022](#)
- Improvement Plan Progress Reports:
  - To Audit and and Risk Assurance Committee
    - [November 2022](#)
    - [September 2022](#)
    - [June 2022](#)



- To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
  - November 2022 (due for publication)
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