

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**Wednesday 17 January 2024 at 6.02pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Fenton (Chair),
Councillors K Allcock, Dhatt, Lewis and Maycock.

Officers: Dawn Winter (Assistant Director - Libraries, Archives, Information Services), Tessa Mitchell (Business Manager – Community Safety and Resilience), Andrew Clarke (ASB Team Manager), John Swann (Democratic Services Officer) and Alex Goddard (Scrutiny Lead Officer).

1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies, Fisher, Khan, Shaeen, Webb and Younis and from Ms Brown (co-opted member).

2/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3/24 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

4/24

Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

5/24

Heritage Strategy Update

Further to Minute No. 22/23 the Board received an update on work around a strategy for heritage and culture in Sandwell.

Since the Board had originally considered the matter, national changes, including an increase in funding streams available to bid for, had led to the Council moving towards a broader Cultural Strategy.

Recently a Cultural Development Officer and Business Manager had joined the Council. This would allow the work on the Strategy to move forward, including bidding for funding and enhancing the cultural offer in Sandwell.

Members noted that Sandwell had been ranked second worst in the country for participation in cultural engagement. This meant that funders such as Arts Council England had identified the borough as a priority for funding.

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

- There was a lot of work being done at the grass roots level by a range of Council services including the Communities Team and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team. Members suggested that those teams should be involved in developing the Cultural Strategy and it was confirmed that, by commissioning a consultant to develop the Strategy there would be capacity to engage with other Council services as well as community groups.
- It was vital to engage with the public to understand what they wanted from a cultural strategy and offer.

- Making use of existing facilities and sites was important, including libraries, town halls and museums. Members also highlighted the potential for linking up work with the Sandwell Valley Masterplan.

The Board supported the approach now proposed for a Cultural Strategy for Sandwell.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board endorse the proposals for the development of a Cultural Strategy;
- (2) that the Director of Borough Economy work in partnership with the Community and Voluntary Sector and other Council services including the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team and Communities Team when developing the Cultural Strategy;
- (3) that the Director of Borough Economy ensure that the development of a Cultural Strategy is aligned with the Sandwell Valley Masterplan to further develop the Cultural portfolio of Sandwell;
- (4) that the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board include further updates on the Cultural Strategy on its future work programme.

6/24

Implementation of 3 Boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders relating to Alcohol Consumption, Dog Fouling and BBQs/Fires

The Board considered a report on the implementation of three boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs). Two of the PSPOs were renewals – one for Alcohol Consumption and one for Dog Fouling. The third was a proposed new PSPO relating to BBQs and Fires. The PSPOs were scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet in February 2024.

The PSPOs had been subject to a public consultation in line with national guidance. 230 responses had been received and they indicated support for the proposals as follows:-

- 97% supported the PSPO for alcohol consumption;
- 98% supported the PSPO for dog fouling;
- 92% supported the new PSPO element around dog owners being required to carry a suitable receptacle for their dog's waste;
- 91% supported the new PSPO element around dogs not being allowed in enclosed play or sport areas;
- 87% supported the new PSPO around BBQs and fires.

This indicated a strong public support for the three PSPOs. During the consultation the possibility of designated areas for BBQs was raised and this was being discussed with the Parks Service.

It was reported that the proposed PSPOs were also supported by the Safer Sandwell Partnership, which included representatives of West Midlands Police and West Midlands Fire Service as well as other partners.

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

- There would not be an obligation to enforce the PSPOs, but it would be an option where required. Previously the Council had employed an 'education first' approach.
- It was noted that different PSPOs would impact towns to different degrees. This was addressed through the town and borough tasking framework.
- A PSPO about begging was in place in West Bromwich. The order was in accordance with the European Court of Human Rights ruling around begging being a means of survival, as aggressive or persistent begging would still be actionable.
- A pilot around street drinking had been conducted in part of Great Bridge. This included working to educate and signpost street drinkers to appropriate services. Levels of street drinking in the vicinity had reduced.

- Training had been provided to enforcement officers around alcohol dependency so that education and enforcement could be done in a safe and sensitive manner.
- Numbers of outdoor fires was impacted by the weather, however there had been a national increase in fires and locally Sandwell Valley had experienced fires. Local Fire Service colleagues had confirmed that they were responding to more outdoor fires.
- The tasking framework in Sandwell was evidence driven and took intelligence from everywhere, including social media. There was a role for locality-based officers and ward members to identify and report issues as residents may not feel able to report themselves.

The Board supported the proposed PSPOs and thanked officers for attending the meeting.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director of Borough Economy considers the feasibility of providing fixed and fire-safe designated BBQ areas in Sandwell's green spaces and that the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board is consulted as part of the consideration.
- (2) that the following be provided to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board:-
 - (a) data of complaints received related to dog fouling both before and after the introduction of the Boroughwide PSPOs relating to dogs and dog fouling to assess the effectiveness of the PSPO introduction;
 - (b) data detailing the distribution of enforcement personnel and resources by each of the Borough's six towns.

7/24

**Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny
Action Tracker**

The Board noted the status of actions and recommendations it had made. Further updates would be reported to future meetings of the Board.

8/24

Work Programme 2023 - 24 and Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board noted its Work Programme for 2023 - 24 and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Meeting ended at 6:58pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk