

# Report to Cabinet

**29 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Corporate Plan 2020-2025 - Refresh 2021
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	The Leader of the Council Councillor Rajbir Singh
<b>Director:</b>	Kim Bromley-Derry Interim Chief Executive
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes (c) to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
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## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council be recommended to approve the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025 – Refresh 2021.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The approach to refreshing the Corporate Plan has been very much about building it in a collaborative way to ensure we capture and take account of key issues and concerns from a wide range of our stakeholders.
- 2.2 The resulting intelligence from the conversations with our stakeholders has informed the draft set of actions within the proposed refreshed Corporate Plan that will achieve the strategic outcomes and address the key issues affecting the borough and our organisation.



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of 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

3.1 The Corporate Plan sets out the strategic priorities for the council and details future service provision to achieve them. The Corporate Plan then informs how each directorate will spend the target budget available to them. A refresh of the detailed actions that underpin the delivery of the strategic objectives is required at this time to ensure that the Corporate Plan takes into account the impact of the pandemic on Sandwell as a whole and on the organisation.



## 4 Context and Key Issues

### Background

- 4.1 Our Corporate Plan – Big Plans for a Great Place, sets out what the Council will do to deliver Vision 2030, and Sandwell's 10 ambitions, over the period 2020 to 2025. The Corporate Plan was approved by Council on 10 March 2020.
- 4.2 Following this, the intention during the first half of 2020/21 had been to work with staff, members, partners and communities to develop delivery plans for each of the strategic priorities contained in the Corporate Plan. These delivery plans would have mapped out the detailed actions to achieve the strategic priorities.
- 4.3 However, the coronavirus pandemic reached the UK at the end of March 2020. This meant that focus of the council and its partners was diverted to the initial response and establishing longer-term support mechanisms as the pandemic has continued into 2021.
- 4.4 The pandemic has impacted on many aspects of everyday life, communities and on our economy. At the same time, businesses and other organisations were preparing for the UK's departure from the European Union. It was clear that the impact of the pandemic on Sandwell Council and the borough as a whole needed to be understood to ensure our priorities and future actions would address the needs of our communities.
- 4.5 We commenced work to understand the initial impact of Covid on our communities, on our economy and specifically on the council. This work was presented to Cabinet in detail on 23 September 2020.
- 4.6 The report set out that whilst the impact of the pandemic had been far reaching, it had exacerbated known issues affecting Sandwell rather than raise any new areas for exploration. The findings formed the basis for a series of engagement events with members, staff and partners throughout the autumn, and drove the second phase of our reset and recovery planning to develop actions to address the key issues affecting our residents.



4.7 At its meeting on 10 February 2021 Cabinet approved proposals to refresh the Corporate Plan. Within this was a comprehensive Communication and Engagement Framework. The Framework placed emphasis on rebuilding our corporate plan with our key stakeholders. We have committed to utilising the principles of co-production in our Corporate Plan refresh. Nesta define co-production as:-

*“delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are coproduced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change.”*

## The Starting Point for Conversations

4.8 Building on the impact assessment work with managers across the council and Leadership Team resulted in the creation of a set of principles to guide the refresh and embed into everything we do as a council. These principles would be used to test against our actions and decisions to ensure we are continually working towards delivering the strategic objectives of the Corporate Plan.

4.9 The principles depicted below focus on creating a fairer Sandwell, a place where no one gets left behind, where we do things with our communities and not to them, where we focus on making sure our money is spent locally and where we take our green agenda forward in all aspects of our business, and try to help our communities to do the same.



4.10 In addition to these principles a set of key challenges for the Council were developed, these challenges were derived from the impact assessment work undertaken and further intelligence from staff. This document is appended at Appendix 1. These challenges were then used as the basis of conversations with stakeholder groups to test whether there were any further issues that needed to be addressed in the refreshed Corporate Plan.

## Co-producing our Corporate Plan

4.11 The image below outlines key strands of co-production activity that have taken place:-

Members	Voluntary & Community Sector	Young People	Residents	Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet</li> <li>• Scrutiny</li> <li>• x6 Member Town Workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop supported by SCVO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• x7 School Workshops</li> <li>• SHAPE Forum</li> <li>• Care Leavers Forum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open survey to all residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CE Live Event</li> <li>• Staff Comms</li> <li>• Staff Panel</li> </ul>

4.12 All of the conversations that have taken place have sought to build on existing intelligence generated through the impact work and the challenges.

4.13 The sections below outline the approach for each stakeholder and key themes from the various strands of conversation that have taken place.

## Members

4.14 A Cabinet Workshop was held in June 2021 to discuss the proposed fairer Sandwell principles and the key challenges to be addressed through the refresh. The fairer Sandwell principles were endorsed by Cabinet Members to include in the further conversations with stakeholder groups and seek their views. Discussion at the Cabinet workshop identified the following areas that needed to be reflected in the Plan:-

- clean and green streets, including refuse collection and tackling long-standing unused land
- mental health and wellbeing support



- engagement with communities
- young people and their future prospects
- support for vulnerable people, particularly housing

4.15 A series of members workshops were run in July and August, one for each of the six towns in the borough. Discussion focused on the principles and the key challenges facing the borough. Headlines from these conversations are detailed below:-

- Universal support for principles and agreed with the challenges.
- Words are good, we have the right principles and have identified the right challenges but how will we deliver all this? Ensuring principles underpin everything and we can demonstrate we have adhered to them. Need to report back regularly, including to residents so they can see change.
- Getting the basics right. Particularly around litter, fly tipping, bins, grass cutting. Appearance of an area gives either right or wrong message.
- Digital exclusion and accessing services for those who need face to face services big issue. Particular difficulties around non-digital access and lack of access to services locally which disadvantages already disadvantaged groups and people. Getting through to the council can be difficult for residents.
- Engagement and communication with residents needs to improve considerably. We need to let people know what we are planning and doing around corporate plan and in their areas; more importantly listen to them.
- Employment/ Economy was universally supported but recognition that quality of life and living well mattered just as much. Priority was young people.

4.16 A further Cabinet Workshop was held in September 2021, focus at this session was to assess key themes from conversations against the strategic outcomes and underpinning headline actions. Members welcomed the clear narrative on how conversations had influenced the content of the Plan and the proposals to develop a Young Persons version of the Plan in autumn/winter 2021/22.



4.17 Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board will consider the strategic outcomes and draft underpinning actions at their meeting on 21 September. A report will be tabled for Cabinets consideration with any commentary or recommendations Scrutiny wishes to put forward.

## **Voluntary and Community Sector**

4.18 A virtual event was organised with the support of Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). Whilst the principles were shared together with the challenges, the focus was on collecting the experiences, views and perspectives from our partners in the voluntary and community sector.

4.19 Some 39 organisations attended the session which was led by the Director of Business Strategy and Change. The commentary from the session was rich and insightful, providing a grassroots perspective on key issues in the community, particularly from those groups that have traditionally been harder to engage with. A summary of the key points is detailed below:-

- There is a need to look at how the council engages with the voluntary sector
- Agreement with Fairer Sandwell principles but more detail needed on how these will be implemented
- Long term impact of Covid will be huge. Need to address recovery and living with on-going threat
- Tackle health inequalities
- Role of the voluntary sector needs to be recognised
- Focus on community housing
- Young people's access to jobs needs particular focus and attention



## Young People

4.20 We ran virtual workshops with seven schools across the borough. Workbooks were posted out to all schools ahead of each session to support discussion, with different versions for primary and for secondary schools. The booklets included topics such as the impact of the pandemic, what children and young people liked about their local area, what they would like to see change and their future aspirations.



4.21 Sessions were run at three primary schools and four secondary schools:-

Primary	Secondary
Christchurch	St Michaels
Grove Vale	Shirelands
St Phillips	Q3 Langley
	Q3 Tipton

4.22 Each session was led by a director and Cabinet Member or Cabinet Advisor.

4.23 The points below are the key themes from these sessions:-

- Mental health and wellbeing services need to be signposted and advertised widely, the need for these services is greater than ever
- More green spaces that are safe for young people
- Climate change is an issue for everyone, so let's work together
- We need to prepare young people for adult life with life skills sessions



- The community is what pupils liked most about Sandwell
- Pupils will move away from Sandwell to University and for more job opportunities

4.24 Following the school events the SHAPE Youth Forum were presented with commentary and key themes from the school sessions and invited to provide further feedback.

4.25 The SHAPE Forum considered the following points were the most important areas for the council to focus on from the perspective of young people:-

- Preparation for adult life
- Ensuring everyone feels safe in their community
- Facilities for young people
- Climate change

4.26 Members of the SHAPE Forum agreed to work with the council to develop a Young Persons version of the Corporate Plan and were committed to holding the council to account for delivering the actions.

4.27 The Care Leavers Forum also received a presentation on key themes from school sessions and were invited to share their perspective on key issues and challenges.

4.28 Young people present at the meeting highlighted the following key issues:-

- Living independently from a very young age is challenging - more support is needed, particularly people to talk to for advice;
- Waiting list for mental health services is excessive, often young people are struggling with issues and need more immediate support to avoid the situation escalating;
- Digital poverty is a major issue;
- There aren't enough youth facilities for young people to access - not only do facilities address social need, they also provide a place to get advice, support and signposting;



- Difficulty in securing housing because of the high level of proof required from care leavers.

4.29 The challenge provided to the council from the Care Leavers Forum was that every section of the Corporate Plan, and Directorate Business Plans, needed to consider the council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.

4.30 Members of the Care Leavers Forum felt that the proposals to develop a Young People's version of the Corporate Plan were positive and that it would be a good tool to hold the council to account for its actions.

## Residents' Survey

4.31 Capturing the views, concerns and thoughts of residents is paramount to developing a Corporate Plan that really focuses on areas that are important to residents.

4.32 The survey covered communication and information, digital inclusion, satisfaction with the council, participation and influence, council spending and priorities, neighbourhood issues and improving Sandwell.

4.33 The online survey ran from 27 July to 16 August, with a total of 1,268 responses being received.

4.34 Whilst the level of response received is encouraging and provides insight into the views of residents, it must be noted that, due to the survey being available online only, the sample is not truly representative of the demographic make-up of the borough. Key points to note about the sample include: -

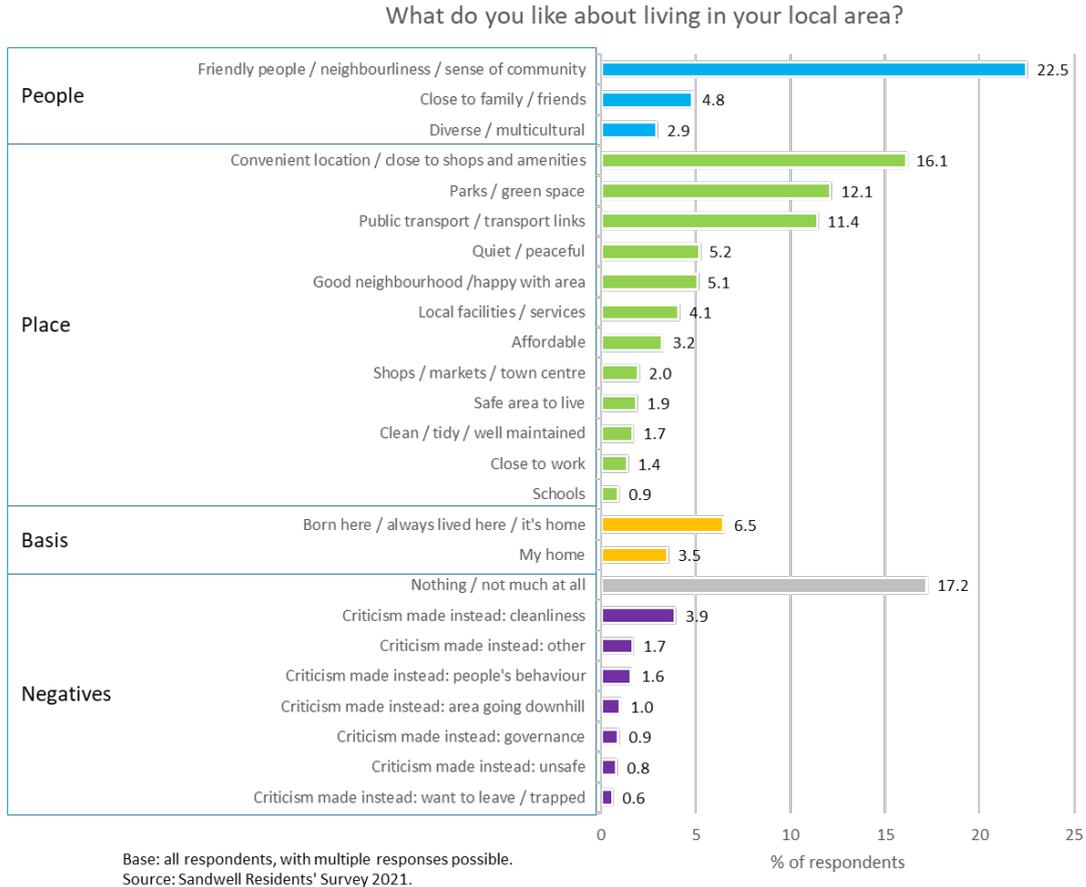
- Over-represented groups: females, 45-54; 55-64 and 65-74 ages and White British
- Under-represented groups: males, 18-24 and 25-34s and 75-plus ages, BAME and economically active
- High response from residents in Wednesbury and Oldbury; low response from residents in Smethwick and West Bromwich



- 4.35 Therefore, the results cannot be used alone to determine the future of the council or measure service performance. However, building this data into the wider intelligence gathered through our engagement work, the findings from this survey support the key issues that will direct the refresh of the Corporate Plan.
- 4.36 The survey asked, without any prompts, why people liked their local area and what they would like to see improved. The charts below highlight perceptions of those who completed the survey in relation to what they like about living in their local area and what they would like to see improved.
- 4.37 Figure 1 below shows that nearly one quarter (22.5%) of respondents felt that their local area was a friendly place with a sense of community, and over 15% of respondents said that it was a convenient location close to amenities. However, almost a fifth (18.7%) of respondents offered no view on what they liked in a survey they otherwise completed. Of those commenting on their area, 17.8% said they liked nothing about it, and many offered specific criticisms, conveying feelings of area decline and neglect.



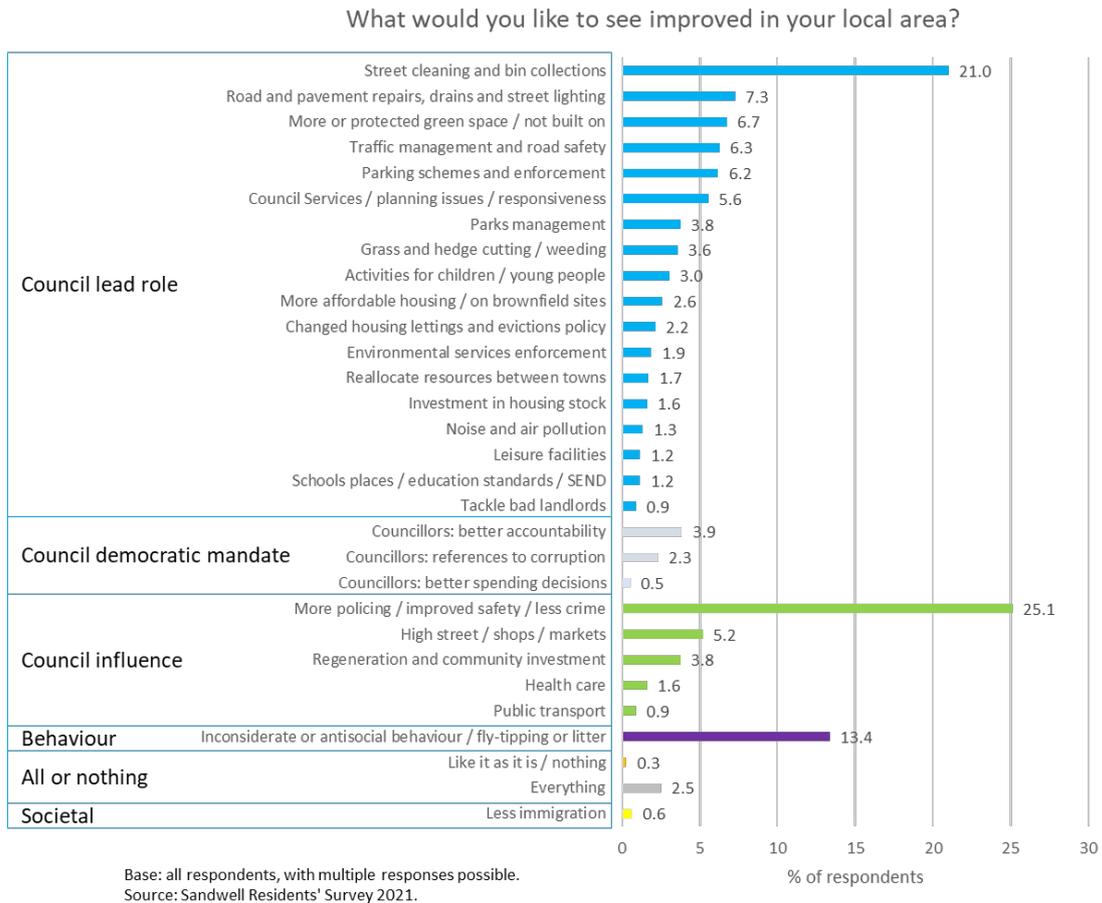
Figure 1: Residents Survey August 2021 - Living in Your Local Area



4.38 Figure 2 below shows the people-based aspects (community, family, diversity) valued and the place appeal (convenience, green space, transport). This chart analyses calls for improvement and distinguishes between issues the council leads on (including the democratic dimension) and where the council contributes or has an influence only. Street scene dominates the first category with over 20% of respondents saying improvements in street cleaning and bin collections were important to them. Policing and community safety issues were the high priorities for improvement in the second category.



Figure 2: Residents Survey August 2021 - Improvements to Local Area



4.39 Importantly, the items scoring highest in areas that residents would like to see improved (street cleaning and bin collections, more policing/improved safety/less crime and inconsiderate or antisocial behaviour) have all been strengthened within the proposed refresh of the Corporate Plan, specifically within the Strong and Resilient Communities strategic outcome. These areas have been strengthened as a result of the combined analysis of intelligence from all of the engagement activities carried out during this refresh.



## Staff

- 4.40 Leadership Team have sought to keep staff informed of the need to refresh the Corporate Plan and about the outcomes from the impact assessment work undertaken. Virtual staff conferences have taken place in July 2020, September 2020, December 2020 and April 2021.
- 4.41 The Corporate Plan has also been an item of each of the 'Team Talk' slide decks issued to managers across the council. These slides form the basis of discussion at team meetings and ensure that consistent messages are communicated.
- 4.42 All staff were invited to join a Staff Panel which was established in May 2021. The aim of the Panel was to harness the knowledge and experience of staff across the council in developing corporate strategy and policy. Whilst the Panel was established to aid the development of the Corporate Plan, it is intended that the Panel will be a longer-term platform for staff to influence plans across the council.
- 4.43 There are currently 87 staff signed up to the Staff Panel from a range of services and levels across the organisation.
- 4.44 Headline comments from the Staff Panel are:-
- Need to review and monitor regularly for success in delivering success
  - Need to be realistic in what we can promise and deliver and match resources to deliver outcomes
  - Value for money and buy local
  - Do everything efficiently and green
  - Listen to staff and give them the resources, both financial and staffing, to deliver.
  - Need to be honest and transparent in what we can do and what and how we are delivering
  - Need to engage with and work with community and make co-design and co-working everyday practice
  - Need to celebrate and share our successes with communities and employees



- Lead by example on climate change and the green agenda and build this into all our functions
- Listen to staff and our communities

## Ensuring Conversations Influence Plans

4.45 We want to be a council that listens and responds. Whilst this report only contains the headlines from each of the strands of conversation, in developing the revised actions that underpin the strategic outcomes directors were provided with the relevant individual comments in order that these could be considered and help to shape each outcome.

4.46 Conversations that have taken place have led to changes from the original iteration of the Corporate Plan. These conversations have specifically strengthened:-

- Our commitment to improving standards of cleanliness across the borough;
- Our drive to ensure that everyone feels safe in the communities they live in;
- Our commitment to whole life care and choice.

4.38 It is not intended that any of these conversations are isolated 'one offs'. Our aim is to keep the conversation going with all of our stakeholders. For example, we will return to each of the schools we visited in the autumn to tell them how their feedback has helped to shape our plan and get their help to develop a young person's version of the Corporate Plan.

## Our Reshaped Plan

4.39 Appendix 2 details the strategic outcomes together with the proposed underpinning actions. These are draft and will be developed further before being presented to Full Council on 12 October.

4.40 Included in this appendix is further detail on the influence of conversations on proposed actions within the strategic outcomes.

4.41 Following consideration by Cabinet the refreshed plan will be presented to Council on 12 October for approval.



## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Corporate Plan was originally approved by Full Council in March 2020 and was for a five-year period, this would expire in 2025. Therefore, the existing document could have remained in place without refining the actions to ensure the council’s resources are focused on responding to the impact of the pandemic on the borough or the organisation.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The Corporate Plan sets out the strategic priorities for the council as a whole and informs how the council’s resources are used to achieve them.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The Council has a statutory duty to set a balanced budget by 11 March each year prior to the start of the relevant financial year. The agreement of the refreshed Corporate Plan up to 2025, aligned to the needs of the borough and the organisation, will inform the development of the council’s medium-term financial strategy and support the delivery of a balanced budget within the required timescale.
<b>Risk:</b>	Risk implications have been considered by services during the development of the refreshed priority actions. Further detailed work on managing risks will be carried out through directorate business planning.
<b>Equality:</b>	The work carried out during 2020 to understand the impact of the pandemic on our communities has been used as evidence to inform the refresh of the Corporate Plan, this together with the conversations that have taken place over Summer 2021 provide an excellent evidence base for the refresh of the Plan.  An Equality Impact Assessment is appended to this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	This information is contained within the main body of the report and the Corporate Plan.



<b>Social Value</b>	Embedding the Fairer Sandwell Principles in all council activity will ensure that social value will be delivered. Within the One Council, One Team strategic outcome, a key action will be to develop a Social Value Policy. By embedding the Fairer Sandwell Principles in this policy, we are providing clarity for all our suppliers on what additional social value we expect to be achieved through our spend.
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## 7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Key Challenges

Appendix 2 – Strategic Outcomes

## 8. Background Papers

Report to Council 10 March 2020 – Corporate Plan – Big Plans for a Great Place for the people of Sandwell

Report to Council 2 March 2021 – Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025

Report to Cabinet 23 September 2020 – Reset and Recovery Phase One Findings

Report to Cabinet 10 February 2021 – Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025 and Budget

