

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2019 - 2021



**Good governance and scrutiny is at the heart of what we do.**

It is about how the council ensures that it is doing things right, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable way.

## Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

One Council One Team - a modern council, one where our organisational structure, business systems, process and people and cultural working practices are fully aligned to deliver our strategic outcomes.



## Children's Services & Education Scrutiny Board



Best start in life for children and young people

## Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board



People live well and age well

## Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board



A Strong Inclusive Economy and a connected and accessible Sandwell

## Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board



Strong Resilient Communities and Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods



# Contents

1. Introduction by Chair
2. Foreword
3. Introduction to Scrutiny
4. Scrutiny Activity Spotlight 2019-21
5. How does Scrutiny make a difference?
6. What difference have we made?
  -  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 Inclusive Economy
  -  A Connected and Accessible Sandwell
7. Work Programme 2021-22 - Looking forward
8. Appendix 1 - Summary of Topics Considered 2019-2021



## Introduction



Cllr Luke Giles –  
Chair of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board



Cllr Elaine Giles  
Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board



Cllr Paul Moore  
Chair of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board



Cllr Laura Rollins  
Chair of Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board



Former Cllr Liam Preece  
Vice Chair of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board





I am pleased to present this report describing the work of Scrutiny during 2019 – 2021. It includes a wide range of information about the work elected members have undertaken and the impact this has had.

Scrutiny continues to play a vital role in Sandwell by holding decision makers to account; developing and reviewing policy and monitoring the performance of key services.

Over the past year, all Scrutiny Boards have welcomed the opportunity to work closely with the Cabinet and Officers as they lead the Council, particularly during this past year during the pandemic.

The Boards have sought to focus on the critical issues for the Council and provide constructive input in finding ways to improve outcomes for residents.

I thank all Chairs and Vice Chairs for their help and support and working together on cross cutting issues and providing constructive challenge to the Cabinet, Directors and partners. I would in particular like to thank Councillor Rollins who worked determinedly to bring Climate Change to the forefront in Sandwell and to former Councillor Liam Preece, who as Vice Chair of Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board, made a significant contribution to the work of scrutiny within children’s services and led the Board in the absence of a Chair.

I would also like to thank the wide range of officers who support all the Boards and thank those external to the Council who gave up their time to attend meetings and who have contributed to the work of overview and scrutiny.

I look forward to another year of working through scrutiny to help ensure improved outcomes for all residents of Sandwell.

**Cllr Luke Giles**

**Chair of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board**



## Foreword

The last two years have brought challenges and a period of unprecedented change that no one could have foreseen, this included the General Election in December 2019, national lock down, restrictions and changes to services starting in March 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic.

This Annual report gives you an insight into the work of the Council's five Scrutiny Boards and in depth working groups over 2019-21 municipal years. We are proud of the way the Council and Members have adapted to meet the challenges and to work through the problems faced as one-council.

Our 2019 -20 scrutiny year started with a review of the scrutiny function and explored new focus, structures and mechanisms for scrutiny, this report highlights some of the tools and techniques used and details some of the successes from new ways of working and the refreshed approach. Scrutiny is about making better decisions and relationships across Sandwell and this report aims to highlight what scrutiny has achieved and what it has changed.

In March 2020, Councils across the country had to lockdown services, send staff home, reprioritise staffing allocation and adapt and change the way Local Government services and decision making worked. The huge change paused Scrutiny Boards work until a change in legislation allowed remote scrutiny meetings to commence in June 2020. Members trained and adapted to new ways of working and began to engage in Microsoft Teams meetings and live events. Chairs reprioritised work programmes to respond to emerging priorities.

Remote meetings have allowed decision making and scrutiny to continue and resulted in improved attendance and participation at Scrutiny Meetings. Working groups have flexibility to reach out to a wider audience, visit sites virtually, share information on screen and engage with parents and partners in discussion forums. Whilst remote meetings legislation has now lapsed, it is hoped that a hybrid solution to informal meetings such as workshops and working groups will enable continued engagement and participation of partners and members of the public.

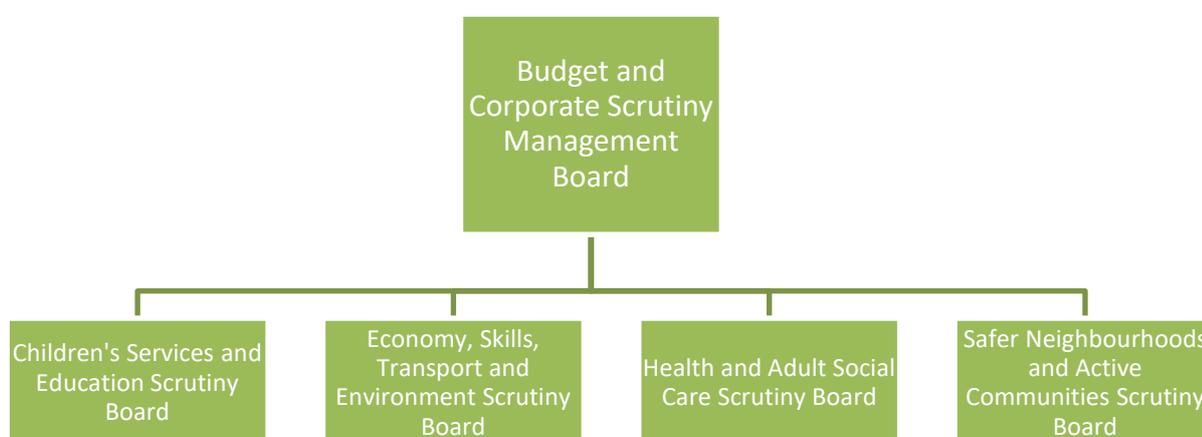


## Introduction to Scrutiny

Overview and scrutiny is a key aspect of this Council's governance framework and is integral to decision making.

Scrutiny Boards fulfil the statutory responsibility placed on local authorities to review and scrutinise decisions and actions taken in relation to the delivery of services, policy making and service shaping to deliver the Sandwell Vision 2030 ambitions and the Council's Corporate Plan '[Big Plans for a Great Place for the people of Sandwell](#)'.

Each year the Council appoints members to a Scrutiny Management Board and four thematic Scrutiny Boards, each Board has its own area of responsibility which are themed around the Council directorates.



The Management Board consists of a Chair and 4 Chairs of the thematic Boards, and each Board is made up of 11 non-executive members. Both Children's Services and Education and Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Boards also include co-opted members who serve on the Boards alongside elected members. You can see more about the Scrutiny Boards membership and activity [here](#).

The Scrutiny Boards terms of reference are approved by Council and set out in the Council's Constitution. They are designed to support and enhance the Council's decision-making processes. Scrutiny Boards are expected to make a positive impact by supporting the development of policy, monitoring performance and making important recommendations to support improvement.



The Boards are able to review and scrutinise the whole range of the Council's functions and responsibilities including those delivered in partnership with other agencies and organisations. Partnership working is an integral part of the scrutiny process and good governance. It creates an environment and a platform to question, shape and develop policies and services with our key strategic partners for the people and communities in Sandwell.

## How scrutiny works

Scrutiny Members can ask people to attend Board meetings or Inquiry sessions to provide information and respond to questions and through working groups which carry out in-depth reviews into issues that are important to local residents and businesses. Scrutiny represents the public voice in decision making.

Boards normally agree a work programme of activity each year based on issues that Members feel are really important to local residents and where they believe they could add value and make a difference. This is a two-year report due to the unprecedented circumstances the work programme was rolled forward.

Scrutiny Chairs attend Cabinet meetings to ask questions and challenge the key decision makers in relation to items on the agenda. Scrutiny Boards also carry out pre-decision scrutiny of key decisions and refer comments or recommendations to Cabinet to consider. It is important for scrutiny members to be involved in decisions at an early stage to ensure they influence the decision-making process and play an important role of 'critical friend'.

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Boards have met virtually since March 2020 to receive high level briefings from officers to strengthen decision making and prioritise agenda and work programming items on emerging issues and matters of urgency.

A Working Group was set up in July 2019 to consider the scrutiny function, the group was made up of Executive and Scrutiny members and reported back to the Scrutiny Management Board in October 2019 about the structure, ethos, engagement of members and methodology. Some suggestions were made to improve the scrutiny model and clarify the role of scrutiny.



Since the review, scrutiny has continued to develop approaches and imbed them into the scrutiny function. These include the Chair and Vice Chair sessions, refresh of the review process and tools used, Question Time session and better use of social media campaign and surveys to engage the public.

## Scrutiny Activity Spotlight - 2019-21

	What we did	2019-20	2020-21
	Scrutiny Board meetings	34	38
	Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny meetings held with Birmingham City Council	4	2
	Review Working Group meetings Site visits & meeting service users Virtual forum with parents and children Inquiry Session – Health Partners	4 6	6 1 1
	Topics considered Councillor Call for Action Question Time	49 1 1	60
	Pre-decision items Boards made recommendations to Cabinet	15 2	15 2

Later in this report tables are provided to summarise all of the matters considered in Scrutiny Board meetings over the two-year period (see appendix 1).

You can read more about the work of each of the Scrutiny Boards, the reports, presentations and minutes can be viewed [here](#) on the Councils website.



## How does Scrutiny make a difference?

There are many ways Scrutiny has had impact and added value over the last two years, some physical changes and actions and some cultural changes.

Scrutiny has investigated a range of issues and every time it starts to look at an issue it starts to make a difference. How?

Holding a matter up for to scrutiny raises awareness...

tells us why we do something; the way things work and how we perform.

questions the issues, barriers or blockages.

identifies good practice and share this more widely

initiates 'the difficult conversation' between interested parties

helps to develop relationships between services and partners, public and officers

invites people into the same space to hold an open and transparent discussion

Makes comments and recommendations to decision makers based on evidence gathered

Monitors and maintains oversight of issues that impact on residents and businesses of Sandwell



## What difference have we made?



### Best start in life for children and young people

#### Commissioning of Children's Centres – *Influence Service shaping*

In March 2021 Scrutiny considered the proposal to Cabinet for the Recommissioning of Children's Centres. The debate highlighted that parents wanted the centres to reflect family and community and to be a space where the community can engage with each other, access Council Services, access provider/voluntary provision and develop community relationships.

The board Highlighted to Cabinet that the centres should be a place for young mothers and families that was not intimidating and that they feel comfortable accessing a range of services.

Cabinet agreed to note the comments and to consider broadening the commissioning arrangements for Children's Centres to orientate the provision towards the development of a 'Family Centre'.

#### SHAPE Programme – *Participation in Decision Making*

Scrutiny welcomed young people from the SHAPE Youth Forum to a meeting to share about the work they do and why they participate in the activities and consultation in their own time. The Board recognised the need to promote their work and to get all Members of the Council involved. They highlighted the development opportunity and confidence that the forum gave them through the programme of events, activities and projects

The debate highlighted that young people want their voices to be heard and to be involved in consultations, decision making process, scrutinising policy and any matters that affect them and influence their future.

As a result of this discussion SHAPE members were invited to participate in the Youth Facilities Scrutiny Review and participate as the audience at a Question Time Session with the working group members and officers.





## Youth Facilities Review - *Protecting Services for Young People*

The Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board set up a working group January - April 2020 to consider if the current local youth provision was sufficient and to explore what young people 'have, need and want'.

Youth facilities across the Country had been significantly depleted over a decade but Sandwell Council had protected important services for young people that others had not managed to. The Group gathered evidence from service users, parents and providers using a range of methods included a survey, site visits, forums and 'Question Time' session with young people. The group reached out to service users, parents and providers, out of 92 young people involved in the review work 26 (28.3%) were registered as BAME young people.

Their findings led to seven recommendations to inform service shaping, resource requirements and future youth facilities provision, they highlighted:

- a need for better information and communication;
- that young people wanted Wi-Fi and a place of their own;
- to consider transport to youth facilities for vulnerable young people;
- to identify future funding;
- to consider the sufficiency of Sandwell Youth Offer;
- to consider youth worker capacity;
- to involve young people in decision making.

The report highlighted the importance of protecting the future of youth services in Sandwell, the need for multi-agency working and its impact on youth crime. The pandemic highlighted the need to change how we deliver services in an environment of change and increasing demand and resource pressures.





## **Elective Home Education Working Group – *Improving support for families***

Childrens Services and Education Scrutiny Board received an update which highlighted that there had been an increase in numbers of elective home education cases and it was questioned why parents were choosing to home educate and whether current support provision was sufficient.

The Board agreed to establish a working group to receive further analysis of data consider the range of ways to carry out education out of the school system and to hear the child’s voice about home education.

The working group has met four times to gather evidence through a range of mechanisms, including data analysis, surveys and focus group with parents and EHE advisory teachers.

There are several areas of concern emerging from the evidence gathered so far that require further investigation and that will inform recommendations to Cabinet in the spring 2021. Further sessions are planned January - March 2021, including a focus group with teachers and head teachers.

The Children’s Services and Education Board has received update reports from the working group and invited the DfE Regional Advisor to provide an update relating to the Select Committee Inquiry into Elective Home Education which commenced in October 2020. It is anticipated that the working group evidence will contribute to the Select Committee work in 2021





## People live and age well

### Harmonisation of treatment policies Phase 3 – *Statutory health scrutiny*

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board approved the 13 Phase 3 clinical treatment policies to be implemented from 1st April 2020. They considered whether the 13 draft NHS policies reflected contemporary clinical evidence and ensured that policies incorporated the most up-to-date published clinical evidence so that the prioritised funded treatments were proven to have clinical benefit for patients.

The development of the 13 policies helped to stop variation in access to NHS funded services across Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country (sometimes called the 'postcode lottery' in the media) and allow fair and equitable treatment for all local patients.

### Mental Health Support - *collaborative Partnership working*

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board on 14 September 2020 received presentations relating to the different tiers of mental health services available and the sufficiency of support from Council and Partners. The Board agreed to continue the evidence gathering at a joint meeting with Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board which was held on 2 December 2020 to scrutinise Mental Health Support.

The Inquiry session received evidence from Children and Adult Services, Black Country Health Foundation Trust, CCG, Public Health and Human Resources. The Joint Board considered the breadth and depth of well-being and mental health support across Sandwell and in the workforce.

Several matters were identified for further scrutiny by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board and the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board in 2020-21.





## Strong Resilient Communities

### Legacy Plans for the Aquatics Centre and Commonwealth Games 2022 *Shaping Community Facilities for future families*

The Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board reviewed the proposals for the development of a Legacy Plan for the new Aquatics Centre and the Commonwealth Games 2022. The Legacy work was based around five key themes:

- Sport Development and Clubs;
- Public Health and Physical Activity;
- Skills and Education;
- Regeneration, Job, Tourism and Place Building; and
- Culture and Communities.

Significant consultation and engagement had taken place to develop the Legacy for this community facility. The Scrutiny Board had maintained a watching brief since 2019 in relation to progress against the project phases, including a virtual drone visit to site in November 2020. There had been some impact to the programme during Covid-19 but this had been limited due to the pro-active approach by the Council and Wates Construction Ltd and the support of Games Partners. the project was on track with Highways works to be completed by May 2021.and the timescales required to host the swimming and diving events at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.





## **Town Deal Fund – *Bringing priorities under the spotlight***

Scrutiny considered the Government's Town Deal in February 2020 and the process and governance arrangements for a Super Board and Town Boards for Smethwick, Rowley Regis and West Bromwich Towns to develop Town Investment Plans (TIPs) to bid for funding.

The funding would be allocated on the strength of TIPs, up to £25m per town, scrutiny made recommendations for each Town Deal Board to develop their TIPs to attract the maximum possible level of funding available from the Town Deal. To do this they further endorsed that capacity funding be used to procure consultancy services and suggested that local Members should be involved in the Town Deal Boards with a wide range of key stakeholders from community, business, voluntary, public-sector and faith organisations.

The TIP's were submitted to Government on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Government announced on 3 March 2021 Sandwell's bids to the Government's Towns Fund had been granted, with the borough on course to secure £67.5 million of investment. This is the largest amount to any local authority area. The announcement means Rowley Regis is set to be allocated £19 million, Smethwick £23.5 million and West Bromwich £25 million.





## **Councillor Call for Action Bexley Gate – *Act for the community***

A Councillor Call for Action was raised by a member speaking on behalf of a local community to make a difference. In 2017 a request was made to gate an access way, to stop anti-social behaviour occurring, but the issue had not been fully resolved, some communication between members and the local office had taken place but it was found that information should have been provided that the gating of Bexley Grove was not in the jurisdiction of the Highway Authority anymore, and that proposals by Housing and Communities service for further discussions was underway.

Scrutiny found that a that protocol had been put in place to ensure that all enquiries from MPs, Cabinet Members and Councillors were answered in a timely manner, even if this was simply to direct the enquirer to the correct team for action and that there was a clear gating policy and a process to follow.

The Councillor Call for Action resulted in an initial meeting with residents and councillors to offer assurances that there was a clear gating policy in place and to discuss how to address anti-social issues affecting this area. Assurances were given that residents would be supported to form a Committee, to manage the setting up of the gating scheme and its future maintenance, including LAB funding for the supply and fit of the gates, if the community wanted to proceed.





## **Climate Change Implementation – *Creating a greener and sustainable borough***

Following the establishment of an Economy Skills Transport and Environment Working Group to examine the Climate Change Programme, the Scrutiny Board received a presentation on Climate Change, setting out the main challenges and areas of activity.

The challenges of developing a strong corporate focus and leading Sandwell by example to tackle climate change were recognised. At the meeting, it was agreed that the Board would actively consider how climate change is being embedded into all council decisions, in support of the 2030 target for carbon neutrality and to encourage behavioural change in the borough.

In light of the threats to the well-being of residents, posed by climate change, the Board recommended to Cabinet that it considers how to embed climate change in all council decisions, to help meet the 2030 target and to maintain the credibility of Sandwell's role as an advocate of climate change action.





## Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

### Housing Allocation Policy - *Shaping policy for residents*

Scrutiny considered Housing Allocations Policy on two occasions, it identified challenges that affordability within the Private Rented Sector was becoming a significant issue in Sandwell, as there was a weekly affordability gap of between £16-18 for properties of all sizes.

It was further noted that the five-year residency test could cause some households to be excluded from the housing register because of the test itself, or their inability to provide proof of residency even when they had been resident within Sandwell for the required length of time.

The Cabinet Member for Homes and Director – Homes and Community agreed to consider including specific reference to the use of Local Lettings Plans for new build housing and areas experiencing anti-social behaviour in the Housing Allocations Policy and to review the support offered to households on the housing register who may have difficulty accessing information or bidding processes due to technological or language barriers.

The public highlighted key themes from a public survey relating to frustration at lack of housing supply and perceived excessive length of time on the housing register. It was noted that these issues of stock supply were due to national policies such as Right to Buy, welfare reform and the overall national decline in social housing lettings rather than local policy.

Cabinet was asked to take scrutiny comments on board in relation to the revised policy, specifically to consider for inclusion in the Housing Allocations Policy the use of local lettings plans for new build housing and areas experiencing anti-social behaviour; and the need to review the support offered to households on the housing repair list who may have difficulty accessing information or bidding processes due to technology or language barriers.





## Tenant Engagement and Participation – *representing the service user*

The Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board considered this matter and requested that as part of the review of Sandwell's Development Plan, further work should be undertaken on a Policy and Supplementary Planning Document on Houses in Multiple Occupation and that further information on how to raise concerns about Houses of Multiple Occupation should be sent to all members.

Officers were reviewing the policy and consultation was being carried out with a wide range of organisations including the Tenant Review Panel, Tenant Management Organisations, the Housing Management Partner for the Sandwell PFI and Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service (known as SCIPS). It was agreed that scrutiny members were represented on the Tenant Engagement and Participation Working Group and that consultation carried out during the review of Tenant Engagement and Participation was accessible and sought views that were representative of Sandwell's population.

The Board recognised the importance of this work and specified that the outcomes of the review of Tenant Engagement and Participation were considered as a pre-decision scrutiny report particularly relating to the Council's role, responsibilities, challenges and future plans in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation in the borough.

The Board received the Governance and Tenant Engagement pre-decision report to its meeting 1 April 2021.

The report took account of the need to develop tenant involvement and participation and strengthen the tenants voice within the Council and wider neighbourhoods and recommended a review is undertaken every 3 years.





## Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code – *The Public Voice*

Scrutiny considered the Council's work to self-assess against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and report before 20 December 2020. Work had been carried out including the establishment of a working group and virtual meetings with Sandwell Community Information Participation Services (SCIPS) to get residents' feedback and ideas. It was confirmed that no policies or procedures were being amended, but that elements were being brought together in one place, which would make things easier for residents.

Scrutiny sought clarification on the wording in the Customer feedback guide and recommended that there should be wider consultation with community groups including those who may be digitally excluded, and officers should consult with the Tenant Review Panel on the Customer Feedback Guide and associated processes.





## A Strong Inclusive Economy

### **Inclusive Economy Deal – *Growing the local economy***

The Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board wanted to understand the principles of an inclusive economy deal to robustly check and challenge the consultation and engagement co-development phase of developing a Sandwell Inclusive Economy Deal. The Board found that developing and shaping the deal would ensure that everyone in Sandwell could benefit and that Metro Dynamics had been engaged to prepare a 'State of the Borough' report relating to the health, economy and demographics of Sandwell. The understanding was that the level of deprivation in the Borough had resulted in many of the performance indicators not being met for a number of years and that the Council needed to take a different strategic approach.

Members highlighted the need to focus on high technical skills and automated manufacturing because the traditional metal and heavy industry in the area was declining. They also recognised the need to link into the WMCA Industrial Strategy and to focus on skills and investment in new industry such as in the giga factory for making batteries for electric vehicles.





## West Midlands Combined Industrial Strategy and the Local Industrial Strategy

Scrutiny invited the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to provide an overview of the Industrial Strategy at a sub-regional level and from a Sandwell perspective.

The Board noted the approach taken for the implementation of the West Midlands Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) and the integral role of the Black Country Consortium LEP in providing and co-ordinating the evidence that underpinned the strategy. The Chair welcomed the Industrial Strategy that had taken information into account about economic and environmental factors and the positive messages around growth but recognised that there were still challenges such as youth employment and affordable housing to consider, and the importance of local needs.

The Board welcomed that the Black Country LEP led on aerospace, construction, metals & materials and rail and continued to provide data to the Overall LIS across the region. Understanding the current and future sector strengths was important to take forward economic opportunities in Sandwell and the Board welcomed that development of the strategy placed the West Midlands in a good position for future Government Investment, to have detailed information relating to health, economy and demographics available to bid for funding would speed up the bid submissions provide the actions needed to help businesses deliver and overcome barriers and to be ready for opportunities to secure the right deal from any future replacement for existing EU funding.





## **Sandwell Guarantee – *Recognise success and invest in young people***

The Sandwell Guarantee began in September 2014 to respond to high youth unemployment in the area and limited external support for this age group. The Sandwell Guarantee represented access routes for Sandwell residents to Employment support including Work Experience, the Connexions Service, Youth Services and Sandwell College. The Sandwell Guarantee had been successful and had helped fund 700 young people in the Borough to find training opportunities and work, with 368 organisations being supported by the programme. The funding for the programme was one off funding from Council reserves and funded wage subsidies for local employers to employ an apprentice or provide a job opportunity.

The Board was proud of what the Sandwell Guarantee had achieved to reduce youth unemployment in Sandwell and recommended that performance data was reviewed at the end of the programme to establish the impact and the potential for the Council to continue specific services when costs, revised budget and the Government settlement figure were confirmed in March 2020.





## **Vocational Qualifications – Consultation response to Government**

The Principal and Deputy Principal of Sandwell College presented the proposed change to vocational qualifications and its implications for the future of the College to the Board.

In recent years there had been an increase in the number of young people progressing from Level 1 and 2 qualifications to Level 3, with a number of these students progressing to university. There had been a large increase in young people undertaking BTEC qualifications in Sandwell which had widened their future opportunities.

Government was consulting on proposals to remove funding for BTECs and instead introduce T Levels, which were new qualification which would restrict the choice for many young people, predetermine educational pathways and may result in them not being able to progress to university. T Levels included a requirement for young people to undertake 300-900 hours of unpaid work as part of the qualification, for many young people in Sandwell this would not be a viable option.

There was the consensus of the Board that a response should be made by the Local Authority to voice concerns to the Government consultation in terms of the potential impact on young disadvantaged people in Sandwell and their future opportunities.





## A Connected and Accessible Sandwell

### **Cycling Infrastructure Programme – *Policy development***

Scrutiny had monitored the development of the Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Programme SCWIP from inception in 2018 and was very pleased that it developed and supported the West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan—Movement for Growth and contributed to the provision of a high-quality transport system linking homes and communities to jobs and facilities. The policy would put Sandwell in a good place to submit bids, get projects going and to develop the cycle and walking routes in the plan.

The Boards comments and scrutiny strengthened the policy and decision making relating to the programme of cycle infrastructure improvements. Scrutiny agreed to monitor future developments in the Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

### **Air Quality Action Plan – *Monitoring Implementation of Action Plans***

Projects delivered through the last AQAP included promoting health initiatives that support sustainable transport and behavioural change; traffic management and highway improvements and improving understanding of pollutant behaviour.

The Council has a statutory duty to have an AQAP and that the approach to tackling air quality had become integrated with the Councils Climate Change Strategy. The emissions that pollute the air and those that warm the planet have common sources, vehicles, buildings, power generation and industry. In Sandwell the principal source of air pollution is vehicle exhaust.

Scrutiny endorsed seven priority actions to reduce emissions and agreed to monitor progress against the implementation of the AQAP.





## Big Plans for a Great Place for the People of Sandwell

The Sandwell Plan 2020-25 set out how the Council would deliver its part of Vision 2030 for the next five years focussing on six 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.

The outcomes could not be delivered by one directorate alone, so would be delivered using a 'One Team, One Council' approach. This approach moved away from the previous system of individual directorate business plans and sought to unite the Council as one team to deliver on the strategic outcomes.

Scrutiny fed comments and observations relating to 'Big Plans for a Great Place...For the People of Sandwell' to the Cabinet and agreed that scrutiny Boards would align work programmes to the strategic outcomes.

## Reset and Recovery – *public awareness, risks and re-opening services*

All Scrutiny Boards in 2020-21 have focused on the implications of the pandemic on services and the needs of residents, staff and businesses.

Regular updates about the reset, restoration and recovery plans for the Council and Health organisations highlighted how well partners were working together, to support, adapt and redeploy resources and staff where it was needed most. Public concerns were raised through Healthwatch and Councillors on matters like access to services. to raise awareness and give assurances to the public about matters that were of concern to them.

Health and Adult Social Care Board has been proactive and flexible in inviting Health Partners to each meeting to update on the progress and challenges for health providers and to inform and reassure about Covid infection rates, hospital admissions and vaccination roll out. We had to change, be flexible, adapt, redeploy, reprioritise and educate to meet the public need and government guidelines and directives.





## **The Budget - *Monitoring the Corporate Purse***

The Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board has maintained overview and challenge of the Council's budget monitoring, business plans, outturns and proposed budgets throughout the year. This work has proven ever more vital in the face of the Government's continued austerity programme and the cost of Covid-19. The Scrutiny Management Board made a number of recommendations arising from its regular monitoring and has identified topics for in-depth review as part of the Scrutiny Work Programme in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

## **Brexit - *Promote the EU Settlement scheme for EU Nationals***

The Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board received a report from, designated Brexit Lead Officer, that provided an overview of the plans that had been put in place regarding Brexit and any mitigations that could be actioned. The Brexit Lead Officer had set up a Brexit Working Group with officers from the Council which had met to consider the risk register and risk areas, and to prepare a Communications Plan to inform residents about Brexit preparation.

The Board requested a briefing to set out what voluntary services support was available in Sandwell for people in hardship or with no recourse to public funds, or those needing help with applying for EU settled status. The council's corporate communications team promoted the EU settlement scheme to EU nationals via a wide range of channels as outlined in the attached communications plan.



## Work Programme 2021-22 and Looking Forward

Covid has had a big impact on the way services are provided, the way people access services, the finances of the Council and on our residents and businesses.

The scrutiny work programme this year and over the next few years will focus on some big topics as the Council and Cabinet have to make some difficult decisions on what services are provided and how they are provided.

New policies will be required, and old policies will need to be reviewed and refreshed in light of changes post Covid.

There will be a need to maintain oversight and monitor the finances, performance and risks to the Council Services.

Big issues on the horizon:

- The Impact of Covid on the Council and Health Services
- NHS and Social Care Reform – White Paper
- Climate Change Strategy Implementation
- Education Excellence Everywhere – White Paper
- Elective Home Education
- Children’s Mental Health

Some topics will also be rolled forward from previous work programmes and a public consultation exercise highlighted matters that are of concern to the public and businesses in Sandwell to be considered for inclusion in the work programme.

### Good governance and scrutiny is at the heart of what we do.

It is about how the council ensures that it is doing things right, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable way.



## Summary of Topics Considered 2019-2021

This update provides a summary of activity since the start of the municipal year 2020-21 which commenced in June 2020.

The following meetings have been held and topics considered: -

### Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

2019-20

BCMSB Work programme;  
Scrutiny Work programme 2019-20;  
Draft Annual report 2018-19;  
Scrutiny Review;  
Financial Outturn 2018-19;  
Quarter Budget monitoring 2019/20;  
Revenue and Benefits Service Update;  
ICT Update;  
Budget provisional settlement;  
Corporate Plan 2020-25 and Budget.

2020-21

COVID-19 Reset and Recovery  
Budget Monitoring and Updates  
Update on Members ICT and Remote Meetings  
Leisure Provision in Sandwell  
2019-20 Financial Outturn  
Future Use of 1 Providence Place and other assets in West Bromwich Town Centre  
Reset and Recovery Phase 1 Findings  
Senior Management Restructure  
Towns Fund Update  
Medium Term Financial Strategy  
Leisure in Sandwell – External Consultants Findings  
Medium Term Financial Strategy  
Street Cleaning Update

### Children's Services and Education

2019-20

Work Programme 2019-20;  
Education Services,  
Child Health Services;  
Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2018/19 and Improvement Plan 2019/22;  
Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019-20;  
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs);  
SHAPE Programme;  
Regional Adoption Agency;  
Annual Admissions;  
Exclusions and Alternative Provision;  
Youth Facilities Review.

2020-21

Phased return of pupils to Sandwell Schools  
Youth Facilities Review Working Group Report  
Sandwell Children's Trust Update  
Elective Home Education  
Reset and Recovery Update  
Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report 2020-21  
Youth Facilities Review- Executive Response  
Reset and Recovery Update  
Adoption@Heart Annual Report  
Elective Home Education Working Group Update  
Reset and Recovery Update  
Vocational Qualifications  
Examination – A level and GCSE moderating  
Recommissioning Children's Centres  
Holiday Activity and Food Scheme.



## Economy Skills Transport and Environment

2019-20;  
 West Bromwich Indoor Market Redevelopment Proposals and Investment Opportunities;  
 Inclusive Economy Deal;  
 Our Waste Our Resources – Strategy for England;  
 Sandwell Guarantee;  
 Unified Careers Offer for 15-29 year olds;  
 Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (SCWIP);  
 West Midlands Combined Industrial Strategy and the Local Industrial Strategy;  
 Brexit Update;  
 Towns Fund;  
 Re-wilding Grass verges and Open Spaces in Sandwell.

2020-21  
 Moving to Reset and Sustain an Inclusive Economic Recovery in Sandwell  
 Re-wilding Inquiry Update  
 Reset and Recovery Updates  
 Community Wealth Building and Inclusive Economy Action Plan  
 Planning White Paper- Planning for the Future  
 Draft Sandwell Skills Strategy  
 Climate Change Strategy - Implementation  
 Air Quality Action Plan

## Health and Adult Social Care

2019-20  
 Harmonisation of Treatment Policies;  
 Minor Surgery and Non-Obstetric Ultrasound Scan (NOUS);  
 Re-establishment of Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements with Birmingham City Council;  
 Reconfiguration of Inpatients Respiratory Medicines; System Changes;  
 Tackling loneliness and Isolation- social prescribing;  
 Black Country and West Birmingham Long Term Plan; Care Alliance;  
 Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report;  
 Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) mental capacity;  
 Proposed Change of location for Dental Services under General Anaesthesia for Children;  
 Walk in Centre.

2020-21  
 Sandwell Council's Covid-19 Reset and Recovery Planning  
 NHS Restoration and Recovery Plan – Black Country and West Birmingham CCGs  
 Draft Quality Account Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust  
 Mental Health Support  
 5G Communication Technologies Public Health  
 Focussed Session on Mental Health Support in Sandwell  
 Primary Care Access  
 Restoration, Recovery and Reset Plans – Sandwell MBC and Birmingham and Black Country Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)  
 Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust Covid-19 Update  
 Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report and Update  
 White Paper – NHS and Social Care Reform  
 Sandwell's Air Quality Action Plan



## Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2019-20

Solid Tumour Oncology Services and Specialised Cancer Surgery Services in Sandwell and West Birmingham  
 Midlands Metropolitan Hospital  
 Proposed Changes to Some GP Practices in Sandwell and West Birmingham  
 Measures to Address Waiting Times at Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals  
 Recommissioning of Gynae-oncology Services

2020-21

Midlands Metropolitan University Hospital Update  
 Primary Care Networks in Sandwell and West Birmingham  
 Merger of the Provider Trust Update (Royal Wolverhampton Trust Walsall Healthcare Trust and the Dudley Group Foundation Trust)  
 Diabetic Eye Screening Procurement – Black Country, Birmingham and Solihull

## Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities

2019-20;

Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy Refresh;  
 Review of Tenancy Conditions;  
 Commonwealth Games – Sandwell Aquatics Centre; Commonwealth Games Legacy; Discussion with Cabinet Member for Safer Neighbourhoods;  
 Discussion with Cabinet Member for Homes;  
 Impact of burials of non-Sandwell residents in the Borough;  
 Tenant Engagement and Participation;  
 Houses of Multiple Occupation in the Borough;  
 Sandwell Green Space Strategy;  
 Adoption of Revised Housing Allocations Policy;  
 Brandhall Golf Course - Proposed closure and future use.  
 Councillor Call for Action – Bexley Grove West Bromwich Gating

2020-21

COVID-19 Reset and Recovery – Neighbourhoods  
 COVID-19 Phase 1 – Communities Findings  
 Homelessness Update  
 Discussion with Deputy Leader  
 Appointment to the Building Safety Board Sandwell Aquatics Centre  
 Housing Ombudsman Compliant Handling Code  
 Trading Standards  
 Libraries Service  
 Governance and Tenant Engagement Arrangements  
 Discussion with Cabinet Member for Homes

## Joint Health and Adult Social Care and Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

2020-21

Mental Health Support in Sandwell

