

# Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**Thursday, 27 January 2022 at 5.45 pm  
at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillors Gavan (Vice-Chair), Ashman and V Smith

**Also present:** Nigel Collumbell (Service Manager – Housing Management), Tessa Mitchell (Business Manager – Community Safety and Resilience) and Karl Robinson (Business Manager – Housing Solutions).

## **39/21 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mabena (Chair), Fisher, G Gill, Randhawa, and K Singh.

## **40/21 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

## **41/21 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

## **42/21 Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

## **43/21 Sandwell Community Safety Strategy - 2022-26**



The Board considered the draft of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board's (SSPPCB) Community Safety Strategy 2022-26 which outlined the partnership's key priorities and direction of travel over the next 5 years.

It was reported that the SSPPCB had developed and overseen a themed approach to community safety in Sandwell over the past three years which had focused around:

- The prevention of violence and exploitation;
- Reducing offending, reoffending and serious organised crime;
- Preventing crime and antisocial behaviour in Sandwell's Neighbourhoods.

The SSPPCB agreed that these priorities should remain current for the new strategy on the 15th July 2021. This was also reinforced by feedback from residents obtained over the past three years from a variety of sources including most recently, the Community Safety Strategy Consultation undertaken as part of this year's Safer 6 campaign. It was also reinforced through Sandwell's Annual Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment.

The strategy also encompassed two other significant cross cutting themes: tackling substance misuse to save lives and reduce crime, aligned with the Government's new Drugs Strategy and delivering on the new Serious Violence Duty. The Duty was a key part of the Government's programme of work to prevent and reduce serious violence; taking a multi-agency approach to understand the causes and consequences of serious violence, focused on prevention and early intervention, and informed by evidence which required a joined up holistic approach.

The golden thread running through all these priorities was the partnership's commitment to protecting and supporting vulnerable victims. It was intended to deliver these priorities through adopting a public health approach, understanding that violence was preventable and identifying the reasons why people got drawn into crime. The partnership would also support organisations to become trauma aware and embed such approaches into their practice and tackle these issues through the adoption of a 4 P Plan which aimed to: prevent violence, abuse and exploitation; protect those affected; reduce harm and pursue those who perpetrated.

The new strategy built on the work undertaken highlighting the considerable progress and achievements made whilst also setting out the new overarching objectives to take this work forward. It had been produced by partners and each of the SSPPCB's three sub-groups was developing, and would be responsible for, an annual work plan which would be regularly reviewed throughout the year and updated annually. This aimed to ensure the flexibility to predict and respond to any emerging trends.

Members noted that the issue of community safety interrelated with a wide range of issues and services across the Council including homelessness, Children's Services and domestic abuse.

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

- Sandwell had been recognised nationally as an exemplar in relation to Modern Day Slavery. There was an ongoing ambition for Sandwell to be a slavery-free borough.
- An increase in knife crime had led to further partnership initiatives being introduced, including a project to work with potentially excluded communities in Smethwick.
- For Under 25s Violence and Knife Crime work with schools was taking place through school liaison police officers and chaperones on school routes.
- Offending rates of adults and young people had fallen in Sandwell over the last year.
- A Serious Organised Crime Group, headed by the Police, worked in Sandwell to disrupt and tackle such crime. County Lines was part of this area of work and there was an 'intensification week' scheduled soon to continue to address that issue.
- The Government had introduced a Serious Violence Duty to bring partners together – but Sandwell already had a sub-Group on this so was strongly placed to take work to fulfil this duty forward.

Members commented on the strong multi-agency work taking place in Sandwell and placed on record their thanks to all partners

for their work in continuing to address anti-social behaviour, crime and community safety in the borough.

**44/21**

## **Review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy**

The Board was advised that, under the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities were required to produce, on a maximum five-year cycle, a homelessness review and a homelessness strategy that set out the strategic direction that the local authority would take to tackle homelessness. The Council last adopted a homelessness strategy in April 2018 and in partnership with Sandwell's Homelessness Partnership officers have produced a revised and refreshed strategy to provide this strategic direction from 2022 - 2027 (unless significant developments required a revision at an earlier date).

The Board therefore considered a draft refresh of the strategy which had been co-produced with partners. It was also intended to widely consult on the strategy prior to Cabinet's consideration of it.

In accordance with legislation, the strategy set out how the Council would:-

- prevent and relieve homelessness;
- ensure that a range of suitable, sustainable accommodation options were available for people who were or might become homeless;
- understand its customers and the real problems to solve around homelessness;
- provide robust holistic support for people who were or might become homeless, or who needed support to prevent them becoming homeless again;
- ensure that no one in Sandwell had to sleep rough.

The strategy would also be accompanied by a Delivery Plan that would be finalised once the strategy was approved.

The six priorities that would form and underpin the outputs of the Delivery Plan were:-

- Preventing homelessness;
- Improve communication, education and engagement;
- Enhancing housing options;
- Improving partnership collaboration and whole system.

It was reported that key causes of homelessness included friends/family no longer being willing to accommodate, end of a private rented sector tenancy or domestic abuse. Understanding the causes would allow the Council to work to avoid households and individuals becoming homeless in the first place.

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

- A significant amount of the local housing market was not financially accessible to a lot of Sandwell residents.
- Over 4000 households per year presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness. This excluded rough sleepers.
- Presentations of homelessness (or risk thereof) had reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, however they were increasing again.
- Sandwell had a small number of rough sleepers and the most current count indicated that this had further reduced.
- The Council had participated in the Housing First pilot scheme, being one of only two local authorities to meet the targets. Officers had ensured that learning from that pilot had been factored into the new strategy.
- It was noted that whilst Sandwell was good at easing homelessness, further partnership work needed to be done to strengthen the prevention aspect.
- There was a risk of partners working with the same household for different things. Co-ordination was needed, through a key worker who held the case and pulled in expertise from different partners.
- It was important to develop the Private Rented Sector as a viable option for customers. A key strand was showing landlords that customers weren't a risk. The Council offered incentives such as a rent guarantee. A wrap-around support offer for tenants the same as for council tenants was also provided

- The Council held only a percentage of social housing so needed to work with other providers of such properties such as Housing Associations and registered providers to ensure that housing was provided to those who needed it.
- Two staff members who have gone through homelessness journey were helping to embed the customer experience into improved ways of working. The Council also had some former rough sleepers acting as mentors for new rough sleepers.
- The initiatives and measures introduced by the Council during the COVID-19 pandemic to minimise rough sleeping had proven successful and had been retained following the end of the pandemic.
- The Council was developing a 'Call before you serve' initiative to encourage landlords to contact the Council before serving an eviction notice. This would provide an opportunity to support the household in an appropriate way, that could help sustain the tenancy.
- Council housing voids were not a significant impact on homelessness, but the Council always wanted to turn around voids in a timely fashion; the average was 3 weeks unless major works were needed to make a property habitable.

Members commented on the opportunity to work with potential buy to let housing investors who may prefer to let their properties through the Council.

**45/21**

### **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.

**46/21**

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

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

Meeting ended at 7.00 pm

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