

Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday 21 December 2022 at 11.30pm
at Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House**

Present: Councillor Carmichael (Chair);
Councillors Ahmed, Piper, Hartwell, Hackett, Rollins,
Millard and Singh

Also present: Rashpal Bishop (Director of Adult Social Care), Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing), Alice Davey (Director of Borough Economy), Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth), Mark Stocks (Grant Thornton), Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer) and Trisha Newton (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)

242/22 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

243/22 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

244/22 Additional Items of Business

There were no additional items of business to consider.

245/22 Improvement Plan Progress - Grant Thornton Follow-up Report

The Cabinet received an update on Grant Thornton's Value for Money Governance review and the follow up Review Report.

Significant progress had been made by the Council, especially regarding the statutory recommendations made by the initial Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance review.

The Council had a greater corporate grip over improvement, performance and decision making. It had demonstrated progress on a number of areas such as children's social care and leisure services. The Council's leadership had taken shared responsibility for the oversight of the delivery of the Improvement Plan, and for cascading the plan through the organisation. The introduction of a Performance Management Framework (PMF) provided an opportunity to improve evidenced based decision making, and set out accountabilities to drive the delivery of the Corporate Plan. Significant progress had also been made on the ERP systems replacement including the procurement of a new implementation partner.

Improved engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and Senior Officers was evident. Work programming and planning was efficient, and a greater level of professionalism was now being displayed in the way in which business was being conducted.

The Council had improved its relationships and contract management arrangements with Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) and the most recent Ofsted rating is evidence that positive steps had been taken on the Trust's improvement journey. It was advised that the Council should continue to work with SCT to ensure there was sustainability of continued progress. The Council had taken decisive steps to manage the contractual arrangements with Sandwell Leisure Trust and was making changes to improve the provision of leisure services. A better relationship with SERCO was underway but more work was needed to monitor progress. It was also noted that issues around Providence Place, Made Festival, SLaP and SEND transport had been resolved.

It was highlighted that the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements required significant improvement. A number of legacy issues from prior years, dating back to the previous accounts, were still undermining the quality of the financial statements. This needed to be an area of priority for the Council. The Council also needed to successfully implement the new corporate asset management system to timescale, ensuring all key finance roles had permanent appointments.

Four main recommendations were made to members in relation to the next steps for the Council to continue the improvement journey:

1. The Council must conclude the design of Phase 2 of the Improvement Plan, which focused on organisational culture, values and behaviours required to deliver change, and introduced a “golden thread” aligning corporate KPIs to individuals performance objectives, so that planned improvements and changes became embedded across the organisation.
2. The Council needed to ensure that the new corporate PMO remained appropriately resourced, integrates all transformation and change activity being undertaken across the Council, and has access to appropriate data sources to be able to effectively monitor the delivery.
3. The Council should progress and finalise outstanding actions relating to previous recommendations, in particular introducing a commercial strategy and an asset management strategy and conclude the service-based actions arising from previous recommendations, including improvements in the management of the waste contract and the creation of the new leisure services company.
4. Once all the planned revisions to the Constitution had been agreed, the Council would need to embed these changes and demonstrate sustainable improvements in governance and scrutiny of decision making.

Members welcomed the report and agreed that significant good work had taken place. Officers and external reviewers were thanked for their support in ensuring the Council

Meeting ended at 11.55am

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk