

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

12 September 2023 at 5.50pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Lewis (Vice-Chair in the Chair);
Councillors Davies, Dhatt, Maycock, Shaeen,
Trumpeter and Webb.

Also present: Councillor Padda.

Officers: Ben Percival (Assistant Director – Borough Economy),
Manny Sehmbi (Business Manager - Community
Partnerships), Marcia Sandel-Massey (Neighbourhood
Partnerships Coordinator), Nicola Leavy (Senior Lead
Officer), Nigel Collumbell (Assistant Director – Housing
Management), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services
Manager), Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer)

46/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors
Fenton and Younis and Co-opted Member Ms Phillippe
Brown

47/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

48/23 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to
consider.

Neighbourhoods Partnerships Team Update

The Board received an update in relation to the development of the Neighbourhood Partnerships Team.

A pilot for the development of the team had been established in September 2020. Initially, the model only operated within Rowley Regis and Wednesbury, however, it was evident that the pilot was making a significant impact at a neighbourhood level and so the service was expanded across the borough. A full team, consisting of two officers per town, had been in place since November 2022.

The core work of the team revolved around asset-based grassroots community development which had been eagerly welcomed amongst each of the towns and the voluntary sector. Work undertaken was aligned to relevant policies, including Social Housing Legislation. Co-production and co-design was a key element and the approaches used by officers varied depending on what was relevant to each town although it was noted that a general framework was in place.

The team worked closely with communities and voluntary organisations to develop projects that; supported improving mental health, combatting social isolation and improving digital inclusion. Additionally, the team was also responsible for the delivery of “Cost of Living” training across the borough.

Tenant engagement was another key priority for the team and over 1,120 voluntary hours had been contributed; this was equivalent to just over £22k in monetary value. Support had been provided to resident associations and residents had been encouraged to apply to the holiday activities fund.

Further examples of the work carried out were provided to the Board including engagement sessions with residents living in and around Manifoldia Grange to promote cohesion and opportunities for residents to come together regardless of background.

In response to questions from members, the following points were made:-

- recruitment to a Tenant Engagement Officer in Smethwick was underway;
- Whilst officers had been attempting to access as many different communities as possible, it was noted that time was the main factor in reaching more isolated groups;
- the Framework ensured that a consistent approach was taken across the borough although this would vary depending on the needs of each town;
- networking was being explored to help the development of Tenants and Resident Associations (TRAs) and communal spaces were being used to encourage tenants to utilise them;
- capacity was in place to maintain engagement work, but it was highlighted that the long-term plan was for tenants to be the main contributors;
- data was collated and used to encourage collaboration between internal Council teams.

Officers were thanked for their attendance and hard work.

50/23

Haden Hill Leisure Centre Rebuild Options

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism presented the Haden Hill Leisure Centre Rebuild Options to the Board.

Haden Hill Leisure Centre was an aging and inefficient leisure centre that was in desperate need of refurbishment; the site also created disability access issues. In March 2023, the site was closed following the collapse of the suspending ceiling. In January 2023, the Council received notification that the bid to the Levelling-Up Fund to secure £20m of funding for the build of a new facility at Haden Hill had been successful.

Following approval by Cabinet to formally accept the grant, the Council's Urban Design and Building Services team reassessed the projects costs. The revised estimates totalled £30m. Due to the increased costs, the Council worked with architects to take the project to the initial concept design whilst remaining within the available budget.

Three options were under consideration for the project:-

- Part rebuild and part refurbishment – rebuild of wet facilities, refurbishment of the dry area.
- Part rebuild and part refurbishment – rebuild of dry facilities, refurbishment of the wet area.
- Demolish and rebuild to a reduced scope to fit the available funding

In May 2023, Levelling-up Fund (LUF) officers identified that all LUF funds must be used by the end of March 2025. The programme options would not have seen that level of expenditure until 2025/26; reducing the programme to fit the deadline would not have been achievable. As a result, it was agreed that once Council officers had identified a clear revised option for the scheme, a project adjustment request form would require completion before being approved by the constituency MP. James Morris MP had met with Council officers on several occasions and was supportive of the approach the Council had taken.

Although option 1 was the favoured option by officers, the opinion of the Board was sought. The main asset liability, which would be addressed by option 1, was the swimming pool. The swimming pool required replacement to avoid long-term asset liability and it was highlighted that the main impact on customer satisfaction was the swimming pool and associated changing room areas. A high standard was required to be delivered in these specific areas. Under option 1, a new fitness gym and changing rooms would also be provided. The retained sports hall would be refurbished with new floor and ceiling.

The second option considered was a rebuild. The “dry” side of the building whilst retaining the 47 year old swimming pool. Finally, a third option was also available that prioritised a new, but much smaller site. Although this would result in a new facility, the reduced size would have provided less provisions to the community which was not ideal.

Following further questions from members, it was confirmed that:-

- Once completed, there would be no swimming pool within Sandwell that was over 10 years old;

- any issues regarding Asbestos and RAC concrete would only be identified once works began, however the budget was flexible to ensure costs were covered;
- no immediate funding options were present to expand the building;
- the site would be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)
- no operational loss would be occurred within the first three years.

Resolved that option 1, “Part rebuild and part refurbishment – rebuild wet facilities, refurbish dry facilities”, be recommended to Cabinet as the most appropriate course of action to the Haden Hill Leisure Centre Rebuild.

51/23

Future Provision of Leisure Services

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism presented the Future Provision of Leisure Services report to the Board. At its meeting on 9 February 2022, Cabinet resolved to not approve the Sandwell Leisure Trust’s (SLT) business plan and instead, on June 2022, gave approval to progress the establishment of a Local Authority Trading Company to operate the Council’s leisure facilities. This trading company was under the sole ownership of the Council and therefore, the Council would have control over the direction of the company. Following consultation with members, the company name “LiveWell Leisure” was agreed.

Due to cost pressures and an improved relationship with SLT, the termination notice with SLT was extended until the end of March 2027. Mark Braithwaite, who had been named as a company director of Local Authority Trading Company, had also been seconded to the SLT to act as their Chief Executive from May 2023 to ensure a smooth transition when the termination period ended in 2027.

It was highlighted that the team at SLT had been supportive and were keen to work in partnership with the Council. Joint strategy days with the SLT Board had reflected positive working arrangements moving forward. The intervening period until 2027 would enable officers to review processes

and determine the Council's long-term position and strategy, especially when considering the ever-changing circumstances due to inflation. Members requested that residents be continuously consulted and informed on any planned projects, especially in relation to the large mural currently located at Langley Baths.

Resolved that a further report on the future provision of leisure services be provided to the Board once a decision on whether or not the Council will continue with its approach to provide leisure services via a Local Authority Trading Company in 2027 has been made.

52/23 **Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations**

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

53/23 **Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan**

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

Members requested that the Playing Pitch Strategy item be added to the work programme to be considered at a future meeting.

Meeting ended at 7.21pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk