

## Minutes of Council

**Tuesday 19 March 2024 at 6.43pm  
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** His Worshipful The Mayor, Councillor Gavan (Chair);  
Deputy Mayor, Councillor E M Giles;

Councillors Akpoteni, Anandou, Bhullar, Carmichael, Chambers, Chapman, Chidley, Crompton, Davies, Dhariwal, Dhatt, Dunn, Fenton, Fisher, Fitzgerald, J Giles, L Giles, S Gill, W Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hemingway, Hinchliff, Hughes, Hussain, Jalil, Johnston, Kalari, Kalebe-Nyamongo, Kaur, Khan, Khatun, Lewis, Maycock, Mayo, Melia, Millar, Millard, Muflihi, Owen, Padda, Pall, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Randhawa, Rollins, Shaeen, J Singh, N Singh, Smith, Taylor, Tromans, Trumpeter, Uddin, Uppal, Webb, Weston, Wilkes and Williams.

**Officers:** Shokat Lal – Chief Executive; Mike Jones – Assistant Director Legal and Assurance and Monitoring Officer; Suky Suthi-Nagra – Democratic Services Manager; Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer, Anthony Lloyd – Democratic Services Officer and Kennedy Brown – Sergeant at Arms.



## 24/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Abrahams, K Allcock, M Allcock, Ashraf, Choudhry, Dhariwal, Kordala, Loan, Moore and Tipper.

## 25/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared at the meeting.

## 26/24 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary meetings of Council held on 20 February 2024 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 27/24 **Motion to suspend Standing Order 6 (variation to the published order of business)**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 12, the Mayor sought approval to suspend Standing Order No. 6, therefore varying the order of business, to enable the Improvement Plan Progress – Grant Thornton Follow-up Report 2023 to be considered first.

**Resolved** that, in accordance with Standing Order No. 12, Standing Order 6 is suspended in order to vary the order of business.

## 28/24 **Improvement Plan Progress - Grant Thornton Follow-up Report 2023**

Further to Minute No. 17/24 (of the meeting held on 20 February 2024), the Council received representations from Grant Thornton, the Council's external auditors, in relation to the progress achieved against the Improvement Plan.



Grant Thornton highlighted that although considerable progress had been achieved, work was still required to implement and embed the changes to ensure that the improvements made were maintained. Effective infrastructure had been put in place by the Council and significant strides had been made to improve the customer experience. Remaining financially stable was also a major goal for the Council.

The Council's approach and willingness to collaborate with Grant Thornton was noted and gratitude was expressed to the Council's members and officers for engaging positively throughout the process. Going forward, Grant Thornton would continue to support and provide annual reports to the Council to assist and monitor with any outstanding recommendations.

Members welcomed the report, noting the difficult but rewarding journey that had been undertaken. Members emphasised that every decision taken throughout the process was to ensure that the Council remained on a firm financial footing and that the satisfaction of Sandwell's residents was the main priority.

Members thanked the numerous committees and boards, including the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, for their hard work in continuously monitoring the improvement plan throughout. Finally, the Council's Strategic Lead - Service Improvement, Kate Ashley, was acknowledged for her continuous excellent work on leading the Council on its improvement journey.

29/24

## **Announcements**

Council received announcements in relation to the Mayor's recent engagements.

## **Government Intervention Update**

The Lead Commissioner – Kim Bromley-Derry, addressed the meeting and announced that, having considered the evidence provided the Secretary of State, agreed with the Commissioners' assessment that the Council was now meeting its Best Value Duty.



As such, the government's intervention would formally end on 22 March 2024.

Members received praise and congratulations on the political stability of the Council as well as clear signs of improvement in relation to governance, the scheme of delegations and overall responsibility for decisions. Additionally, significant progress had been made regarding the Council's scrutiny function which ensured that an efficient check and balance system contrasted with the Council's Executive.

The Council would continue to work on making improvements around resident focus and responsiveness. Both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive noted the journey and expressed their thanks to staff who had responded effectively to intervention. There was a huge emphasis on the customer journey, which would be prioritised as the Council worked towards being a national example of best practice.

### **Celebration of Bravery of Council Officers**

The Chief Executive reported on the heroic actions of two Serco officers. During a routine refuse collection round, Steven Whitehouse and Kevin Marriott came across a house fire in Tipton. Steven rescued two people and their pet dog, whilst Kevin alerted neighbours to the danger, helping them to evacuate. Following the incident, they had both gone on complete their collection round.

Members applauded Steven and Kevin for their heroic act and they were presented with an award and certificate in recognition of their dedication as public servants for going above and beyond in their role.

### **JTL Regional Award**

The Chief Officer congratulated Ed Barber on his accomplishment of winning the JTL Regional Award. Ed had also qualified for the National Award. Ed had joined Sandwell at the end of 2018 as an apprentice plumber. Whilst working towards his plumbing qualification, Ed had also started a gas repair and installation qualification to give himself a wider range of skills. To win the JTL regional award was a great achievement for Ed, and was an



excellent endorsement of the Council and its apprentice scheme. Member's applauded Ed's success.

### 30/24 **Written Questions**

Questions received under Standing Order No. 9. were asked of the relevant members and responses were received.

### 31/24 **West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority Update**

Council received an update on the work of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority from Councillor Jalil, the member nominated to present such reports pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985.

### 32/24 **Transport for West Midlands Update**

Council received an update on the work of Transport for West Midlands from Councillor Melia, one of the members nominated to present such reports pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985.

### 33/24 **West Midlands Police and Crime Panel Update**

Council received an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel from Councillor Khatun, the Council's representative on the Panel.

### 34/24 **West Midlands Combined Authority Update**

Council received an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Combined Authority from the Leader of the Council.



35/24

## Performance Champions Progress Report

Council received an update on the work of the Performance Champions and endorsed the next steps in relation to the further development of their work areas.

Performance Champions provided an additional mechanism and opportunity for important views and opinions to be ascertained, in particular from the public, partners and stakeholders. This was in addition to the other functions and mechanisms already in place, such as the Council's Scrutiny function and consultation arrangements and methodologies.

In June 2023 the Leader had e-aligned the Performance Champions' responsibilities to support Council commitments and revised the role descriptions. The new responsibilities reflected the following priorities:-

- Neighbourhoods and Lead Champion – Councillor Maria Crompton
- Safer Communities – Councillor Mohammed Jalal Uddin
- Cleaner and greener – Councillor Harnoor Bhullar
- Our Economy – Councillor Pam Randhawa
- External partnerships – Councillor Vicki Smith

Much of the last nine months had been spent building relationships, understanding challenges and the context around those challenges, capturing what was working well and what wasn't and capturing feedback and intelligence. Members noted the activities that the individual champions had taken part in and their proposed next steps, which included all champions considering the impact of the current fiscal environment and cost of living challenges on service provision in the future.

36/24

## Corporate Parenting Board Work Progress

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education presented an update on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board





in relation to how services were supporting children in care and care experienced young people.

Representatives on the Board included the Council, Sandwell Children's Trust, Education, Skills, Employment and Training, Social Care, Foster Carers, children and young people, NHS, West Midlands Police, Department of Work and Pensions and Elected Members including the Leader of the opposition.

The focus of the Board was to investigate the key areas that had impacted children in care and care experienced young people. Additionally, the Board considered areas around safeguarding, access to services, assistance for young adults, employment skills and training for care leavers.

The Board followed a 12-24 month thematic programme of deep dives, with each deep dive looking at the seven key priorities affecting those areas. From January 2023 to January 2024, deep dives had taken place into safeguarding and stability for Children in Care, Access to Services Care Leavers and Local Offer Review, Assurance Report for Post 16 Pathway Plans and Education Skills Employment and Training Education: Sandwell Virtual School for Children in Care.

Members noted the valuable work of the Corporate Parenting Board and were reminded that being a corporate parent was everyone's responsibility.

37/24

### **Sandwell Council Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) - Proposed Council Size**

Approval was sought for a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the proposed council size for Sandwell.

Sandwell's council size submission provided the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) with the Council's view on the appropriate council size, having considered the current and



future direction of the Council in relation to strategic leadership, accountability (scrutiny, regulatory functions and partnerships) and community leadership .

This submission formed part of the first stage of the LGBCE process - information on the position of the council, population, and electorate forecasts. Following review, the LGBCE would draw conclusions on the most appropriate council size. It was noted that opportunity for public representations would be available, with the submissions from public, stakeholders or representative groups being considered by the LGBCE alongside the Council's submission. A further submission would be required at stage two of the process, setting out the Council's view on the most appropriate pattern of wards, which would be followed again by a public consultation before the LGBCE drew up the new electorate arrangements.

72 was deemed as an appropriate number to discharge statutory and regulatory functions satisfactorily and efficiently. The number would ensure that the Council fulfilled its duties as a strategic place maker, deliver high quality and efficient services, allow for adequate citizen representation, and deliver robust governance. These considerations recognised continuous improvements and transformation in service delivery models and governance that the Council continued to implement.

Members wished for their gratitude to be placed on record for the work carried out by the Cross-Party Boundary Review working group.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that a Council size of 72 councillors is recommended to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England;
- (2) that the submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and accompanying documentation, as set out at Appendices 1 to 4 is





approved, fulfilling stage one of the LGBCE electoral review process.

38/24

## Pay Policy 2024 and Gender Pay Gap Reporting

Each year the Council was required under the Localism Act 2011 to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement, setting out its policies relating to the remuneration of their chief officers, the remuneration of their lowest-paid employees, and the relationship between the pay of chief officers and that of other employees. Additionally, the Council was also required by the Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 to prepare and publish its Gender Pay Gap data.

The median Full Time Equivalent (FTE) salary had continued to increase over the 12-month period from £30,151 to £32,076 per annum, or by 6.4%. The increase in the previous year had been 5.2%.

It was noted that when comparing pay ratios between the lowest paid FTE employee and the Chief Executive's pay and between the median FTE earnings and the Chief Executive's pay, these ratios had increased over the last 12 months from 1:8 to 1:9 and from 1:5 to 1:6 respectively. This was due to the Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Committee (COTCC) approving a reasonable and appropriately benchmarked salary range for the Chief Executive.

The gender pay gap was an equality measure that showed the difference in average earnings between men and women, expressed as a percentage of male earnings (excluding employees of maintained schools). The Council's 'mean' Gender Pay Gap figure for 2024 had increased from 0.6% to 2.5% over a 12-month period. It was noted that the first 'mean' Gender Pay Gap figure, published in 2018, was 8.4%. The Council used this figure as an initial baseline to enable the monitoring of progress.

The Office for National Statistics' (ONS) annual survey of the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom reported that the mean Gender Pay Gap figure as of 1 April 2023 was 7.7%.



Approval was sought to the Pay Policy Statement 2024 and the Gender Gap Pay Data prior to publication before 31 March and 30 March respectively.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that in advance of publishing prior to 31 March 2024, the Council's Pay Policy Statement 2024 is approved;
- (2) in advance of publishing prior to 30 March 2024, the Council's Gender Pay Gap data is approved.

39/24

**Designation of Statutory Chief Officer – Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer/Senior Information Risk Owner**

Approval was sought to the designation of Alex Thompson, Executive Director Finance and Transformation, as Chief Finance Officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, following his appointment by the Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Committee on 29 January 2024. Additionally, the Council was required to designate a Senior Information Risk Owner. Mr Tho

Members thanked the current Interim Section 151 Officer, Brendan Arnold, for his hard work and crucial role in preparing the Budget and medium-term financial plan for 2024/25. Thanks were also given to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.

**Resolved** that, in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, and with effect from 7 May 2024, Alex Thompson, Executive Director-Finance and Transformation is designated as:-

- (1) the Council's Chief Finance Officer/Section 151 Officer;
- (2) the Council's Senior Information Risk Owner with effect.



## 40/24 Interim Changes to Scheme of Delegation

Following changes to the Strategic Leadership Team, it was necessary to make changes to the Scheme of Delegations to Officers to ensure continuity of service provision and clear allocation of decision-making responsibilities.

**Resolved** that the interim changes to the Scheme of Delegation, as set out in Appendix 5, are approved.

## 41/24 Notices of Motion

The Council considered the following motions received under Standing Order No. 12:-

### 41/24(a) Inclusion of Co-operative Housing Models in the Sandwell Local Plan

It was moved by Councillor Davies and seconded by Councillor Hughes:-

“Council notes that a housing co-operative is a group of people who manage and control the housing in which they live, with each person who is a member of the housing co- operative having an equal say in decision-making.

Council further notes that there are currently over 900 housing co-operatives in the UK involving over 196,500 homes.

Council acknowledges that those co-operative housing models as a rule produce high-quality housing at lower rents than most private rented models, as well as fostering a strong sense of community values.

Council further notes that co-operative housing is already referred to in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and it is therefore considered an appropriate form of social housing.



Council also notes that including a specific reference to co-operative housing models in the Local Plan will give this option a further degree of prominence.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to –

1. Consider the development and adoption of a Co-operative Housing Policy; and
2. Consider the inclusion of a reference to co-operative housing models in the draft Local Plan in the section currently related to self-build and custom-build housing.”

The motion was put to the vote and was carried.

#### 41/24(b) **Modern Slavery and Sandwell Council**

It was moved by Councillor Dunn and seconded by Councillor Chapman:-

“Council recognises progress made across the West Midlands to eradicate modern slavery but acknowledges that there are approximately over 4,000 survivors of Modern Slavery in the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

Council notes and welcomes its previous decision to adopt a Modern Slavery Statement.

Council further acknowledges and reaffirms the importance of vigilance for all Sandwell Council elected members and employees when dealing with supplier contracts with high-risk sectors being care, construction, agriculture, and hospitality.

Council therefore reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that Sandwell is Slavery Free and, recognising the importance of partnership work in the fight against Modern Slavery, resolves to –



1. Request the Leader and Cabinet review and update the current 'Slavery Free Sandwell Strategy Plan' with achievable goals which will enable regular assessment of progress and scrutiny of areas which may require improvement.
2. Request the Chief Executive convene a West Midlands Anti-Slavery Summit - inviting all the local authorities in the West Midlands Combined Authority region, the Mayor of the West Midlands, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and our region's Members of Parliament, as well as relevant charitable organisations like the Black Country Women's Aid where partners can share best practices as well as improve collaboration among regional partners.
3. Implement annual modern slavery and human trafficking training for all elected members and council employees.
4. Continue to engage all stakeholders, including elected members, council employees, and contracted partners through regular awareness campaigns and reports on our Modern Slavery strategy being delivered to Council regularly and reaffirms the principle of ensuring that all members of this authority are clear in knowing it is our duty to highlight concerns to ensure the Council can fulfil its role as a First Responder Organisation to refer potential victims."

The motion was put to the vote and was carried.

#### 41/24(c) **Inclusive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

It was moved by Councillor Hartwell and seconded by Councillor Hinchliff:-

"Council notes that most Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is designed for men and fails to consider diverse end users. Inclusive PPE considers the user's Protected Characteristics (i.e. gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy, disability, and ethnic minorities)



Council further notes that finding PPE that fits can be an ongoing struggle for many females. Whilst legally companies and contractors must provide PPE, there is no rule about the PPE needing to fit correctly. Female-specific PPE, whilst good quality, can currently be 2-3 times the cost.

Council notes that British Standard BS EN ISO 20471 is the standard for high-visibility protective clothing. The ratio required for background material to fluorescent reflective material required on garments for certain vocations becomes impossible to produce. The legal requirement is that fluorescent strips:

“Must encircle the torso, sleeves, and trouser legs with at least 40% of fluorescent material present on the front of the garment. The reflective strips must be 50mm wide and the space between the 2 reflective strips must be at least 50 mm.”

Council notes with concern that wearers may be left with no choice but to wear PPE which is compliant but too big or non-compliant but fits and incurring additional costs to make alterations. This causes additional safety concerns to females for just doing their job.

Council further notes and recognises widespread inequalities in the provision of PPE across minority groups in STEM industries, noting that many women face a range of health and safety effects caused by ill-fitting PPE, with a significant percentage not receiving women’s specific PPE from their employers (59.6%).

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to –

1. Take steps to ensure Inclusive PPE is available as required in all areas of the Council business;
2. Encourages local businesses to provide inclusive PPE; and
3. Write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care setting out the terms of this motion and calling on Government to add the requirement for inclusive PPE Regulations 1992, to the guidance on all forms of PPE.”





The motion was put to the vote and was carried.

#### 41/24(d) **Nationwide Restrictions on Pavement Parking**

It was moved by Councillor Anandou and seconded by Councillor Kalari:-

“Council notes with concern the impacts of pavement parking across our communities, restricting pavements and increasing hazards for pedestrians – particularly parents and children, visually impaired and disabled residents.

Council further notes that Government through the Department for Transport undertook a consultation on proposed restrictions during 2020 but that the results of that consultation were never published and as yet have not been acted upon.

Council acknowledges campaigns by organisations such as Living Streets, Guide Dogs for the Blind and British Parking Association continue to call for nationwide restrictions on pavement parking.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways to write to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Transport setting out the terms of this motion and requesting an update on progress toward implementing restrictions.”

In accordance with Standing Order No. 13, Councillor Fisher moved an amendment to the motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Gill:-

“Council notes with concern the impacts of pavement parking across our communities, restricting pavements and increasing hazards for pedestrians – particularly parents and children, visually impaired and disabled residents and the hazards created by parking on grass verges.

Council further notes that the Government through the Department for Transport undertook a consultation on proposed restrictions in



2020 but that the results of that consultation were never published and as yet have not been acted upon.

Council acknowledges campaigns by organisations such as Living Streets, Guide Dogs for the Blind and British Parking Association continue to call for nationwide restrictions on pavement parking and recognises that as an authority we should be doing everything in our power to ensure that pavements are unobstructed.

Council calls on the Governance and Constitution Committee to convene a cross-party Working Group to explore options and work towards a solution on this issue, which may include free parking in Council-owned parks, more traffic wardens present and visible in our communities, or the use of bollards to prevent parking in certain locations.

Council further calls on the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways to write to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Transport setting out the terms of this motion and requesting an update on progress toward implementing restrictions.”

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost and Council moved to consider the original motion.

The original motion was put to the vote and was carried.

Meeting ended at 8.50pm.

Contact: [democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)

