

# Report to Cabinet

**17 July 2024**

<b>Subject:</b>	Council Plan 2024-2027
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Leader of the Council Councillor Carmichael
<b>Director:</b>	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes (c) to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
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## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council be recommended to approve the Council Plan 2024 to 2027 as set out in Appendix A.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations


- 2.1 In March 2024 the Council was advised by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that government intervention would formally end on 22 March 2024, recognising that the Council was more resilient, with improvement more embedded in the culture and continuous improvement sustainable.
- 2.2 Our previous Corporate Plan (last refreshed in Summer 2023) was focused on improving standards and responded to the various recommendations contained in external reviews.



2.3 As we emerge from intervention, we are refocusing our efforts from being brilliant at the basics to becoming an outstanding council. This three year Council Plan will focus on what matters to our residents, a clear line of sight to our outcomes and an ability measure how well we are performing.

2.4 This new Council Plan demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to excellence and its dedication to the community we serve. It outlines new strategic themes, sets out the vision for the future, and details the actionable steps the Council will take to achieve these goals. Through innovative leadership, collaborative efforts, and a deep understanding of resident’s needs, the Council will ensure that it not only meets but exceeds the expectations of those that it is here to support. This plan is more than a roadmap; it is a pledge to the community, a promise of transparency, efficiency, and progress in all the Council’s endeavours.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	The new Council Plan will replace the Corporate Plan and the strategic objectives detailed above.
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### 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 In March 2024 the Council was given notice by the Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) that the period of statutory intervention would end on 22 March 2024. DLUHC noted that “the Council is more resilient; that improvement is more embedded in the culture; and that continuous improvement is now sustainable.”

4.2 Commissioners noted that Sandwell was “now an organisation that is resilient and agile enough to provide its services to residents whilst withstanding adversity, and one with plans, aspiration and people to strive for excellence independently”.

4.3 The sustained improvements and impetus of recent years made this the right time to develop a new Council Plan that would take the organisation forward from being brilliant at the basics to being an outstanding Council.



## Basing our Council Plan on Evidence

- 4.4 The Council is committed to listening to the views and perceptions of residents to ensure that it understands the impact of its services across the Borough and the lived experiences of all residents, including children and young people.
- 4.5 The Council Plan integrates insights from a variety of surveys and consultations conducted over recent years, ensuring that the authority's plans are reflective of, and responsive to, the needs of the community. The points below summarise findings from some of the key pieces of intelligence used:-

- **Residents' Survey 2022 and 2023**

These annual surveys capture a broad spectrum of residents' opinions on Council services, community well-being, and priority areas for improvement.

Key Findings:

- Increased demand for enhanced public safety measures.
- Strong desire for improved local healthcare services.
- Support for more community-based activities and green spaces.

- **Budget Consultations 2022 and 2023**

These consultations provide insights into residents' priorities for public spending and areas where they feel more investment is needed.

Key Findings:

- Residents prioritise spending on education and youth services.
- Strong advocacy for maintaining and improving public infrastructure.
- Calls for more efficient allocation of resources to social services.

- **DLUHC Survey of Sandwell 2023**

Conducted by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, this survey provides comprehensive data on socio-economic conditions and resident satisfaction.



### Key Findings:

- Recognition of improvements in local transport but need for further enhancements.
- Mixed feedback on housing availability and affordability.
- High levels of satisfaction with recent urban regeneration projects.

## Shape Surveys (2015 – 2022)

These surveys track long-term trends in satisfaction of children and young people living in Sandwell.

### Key Findings:

- children and young people are finding life challenging with the pressures of schoolwork, exams and fitting into society in an environment of increasing crime and substance misuse.
- Children and young people want to be listened to, so they can be supported adequately, and their needs can be met, particularly to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

## Housing Strategy Consultation 2023

This consultation gathers input on housing policies and future development plans.

### Key Findings:

- Demand for more affordable housing options.
- Importance of sustainable and eco-friendly building practices.
- Need for diverse housing solutions to cater to varying community needs.

## Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2023

This survey measures the satisfaction levels of tenants living in council properties.

### Key Findings:

- Overall satisfaction with council housing management has improved.
- Areas for improvement include communication with tenants and responsiveness to issues.
- Positive feedback on recent renovations and upgrades to housing units.



4.6



This information together with intelligence from our quarterly performance monitoring provided the platform for the development of the Council Plan.

### Developing the Plan

4.7 This intelligence has informed the development of new strategic themes as the broad areas of focus in the Plan: -

- Growing up in Sandwell
- Living in Sandwell
- Healthy in Sandwell
- Thriving Economy in Sandwell

*All underpinned by One Council One Team*

4.8 The themes generally cover a resident's life journey living in Sandwell, from childhood, into adulthood, having a home and job and being part of community life, to later life. With the addition of One Council One Team as the vehicle that will support and drive delivery of everything that the Council does.

4.9 The refreshed Council Plan is structured simply, focusing on evidence, outcomes and measures that will enable clear monitoring and tracking of progress: -



- 4.10 Work commenced in March 2024 with Wider Leadership Team to develop the key outcomes that sit under these themes, utilising the evidence detailed above.
- 4.11 Alongside the outcomes, consideration was also given as to how we could monitor progress.
- 4.12 Further conversations with directorates took place during March and April 2024 to further develop the outcomes and measures.
- 4.13 The Council Plan can be found at Appendix A.

### **Developing our Performance Approach**

- 4.14 Performance measures have been aligned against the outcomes under each strategic theme, which, along with the updates to the business plan actions, will allow the Council to understand if it is delivering against the Council Plan (reported on a quarterly and annual basis).
- 4.15 As a result of the conversations with Directorates, a two-tiered approach to performance measures has been developed:
1. Council measures that are within the gift of the Council and that it can set a meaningful and ambitious target for.
  2. Contextual measures that are important for the Council to monitor but are not solely influenced by the Council and that it would not set a target for.
- 4.16 Examples of contextual measures are 'the overall crime rate' and 'infant mortality'. By monitoring these contextual measures, over time the authority can understand if the activity undertaken by the Council is having an impact or 'shifting the dial'.
- 4.17 The new performance measures, aligned to the outcomes in the Council Plan, can be found at Appendix B.
- 4.18 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) has initiated a new directive for local authorities to create 'Productivity Plans'.





- 4.19 These plans are a strategic response to funding provided by the government, specifically aimed at improving service performance and reducing expenditure. Local councils are expected to outline their strategies for transformation, leveraging data and technology, and identifying barriers to productivity.
- 4.20 The ultimate goal is to foster a model of best practice that can be shared across councils to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in local government operations.
- 4.21 Sandwell has drafted its productivity plan for submission to DLUHC, there is a substantive report on this Cabinet agenda relating to this item.
- 4.22 Core elements of the Productivity Plan, such as transformation, performance and the use of data to inform decision making are all reflected in our Council Plan and in Appendix B to this report, 'Monitoring delivery of the Council Plan.'
- 4.23 Fostering a performance culture and enhancing organisational intelligence are pivotal steps towards becoming an outstanding council. It involves creating a shared vision, nurturing a culture of trust, and encouraging continuous learning and feedback.
- 4.24 This strategic approach not only supports the journey to outstanding status but also builds a resilient and adaptive organisation.

### **Delivering the Council Plan**

- 4.25 Assistant Director level Business Plans will act as the primary delivery vehicle for the Council Plan, across the 35 business plans key actions have been identified that will support the delivery of outcomes in the Plan. Full details can be found at Appendix C.
- 4.26 Whilst the One Council One Team strategic theme is the engine that will power the delivery of the Council Plan, the new People Strategy is one of the key drivers and is pivotal to the success of the Plan as a whole, recognising that the workforce is the most crucial element of the organisation. The success of any initiative depends heavily on the skills, dedication, and well-being of the workforce.



- 4.27 The People Strategy ensures that the workforce is aligned with the Council's vision, values, and strategic priorities. This strategic focus on people not only supports the immediate objectives of the Council but also builds a robust foundation for future success.
- 4.28 Through successful delivery of the strategy, the Council aims to enhance employee engagement, productivity, and retention, which in turn leads to better service delivery for the community. The People Strategy can be found at Appendix D.

### **MTFS and Transformation Alignment to the Council Plan**

- 4.29 The council's Medium Term Financial Strategy sets out the strategic financial approach that the Council will adopt in supporting delivery of the Council Plan, Improvement Plan and the portfolio of other strategies and plans that support delivery of services in the Borough. The council's Corporate Transformation Programme is integral to, and embedded into, the MTFS.
- 4.30 As part of the council's improvement journey to excellence, the organisation has developed a Corporate Transformation Programme working to Five Transformation Design Principles: Customer Centred, Doing What Matters, Value Creating, Outcome Focussed and Financial Prudent. Alongside the Design Principles the Organisational Values and One Team approach provides the Transformation Framework, embedding a culture of change and continuous improvement.
- 4.31 Using the Transformation Framework an ambitious outcome-led Corporate Transformation Programme has been established, aligned to the priorities in the new Council Plan, comprising 11 areas of Transformation activity, including: Constitution Review, Customer Services, Oracle Fusion, Value Realisation, SEND Transport & SEN Placements and Adult Social Care.





## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Our Corporate Plan was refreshed in Summer 2023; we could maintain this document as the strategic focus for the Council.

Whilst both the Corporate Plan, and the proposed Council Plan, set the strategic direction for the council and enable monitoring of performance, should no review or refresh take place, there would not be the recognition or allowance that priorities change over time, particularly following the Council's significant improvements in recent years. This would result in the council's resources and services being out of alignment with the needs of our residents.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	<p>The financial implications of the Council Plan will be addressed by the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), emphasising the importance of an integrated approach. Our ongoing work to support the preparation of the 2025/26 budget and MTFS refresh will continue to emphasise the link between available resources, priorities and pressures on both supply and demand.</p> <p>The Council Plan will be delivered within existing resources.</p>
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<p>There is no specific statutory requirement for the Council to have a Council Plan. However, it is important that the Council sets out its priorities and ambitions so that Members, staff, residents and stakeholders have a clear understanding of what the Council seeks to achieve. Legal advice will be provided on individual projects and initiatives included in the Council Plan and Business Plans as necessary.</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>Risk implications have been considered by services during the development of the Council Plan.</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>Work was carried out during 2020/21 to understand the impact of the pandemic on our communities, this was utilised as evidence to inform the Council Plan along with the evidence described in paras 4.3 and 4.4 of this report. A corporate EIA is attached to this report.</p>



<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	This information is contained within the body of the Council Plan, specifically the Healthy in Sandwell strategic theme.
<b>Social Value:</b>	The Council Plan sets out the strategic priorities for the council, and services will use these to shape delivery to derive maximum social value.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	This information is contained within the body of the Council Plan, specifically the Healthy in Sandwell and Thriving Economy in Sandwell strategic themes.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	This information is contained within the body of the Council Plan, specifically the Growing up in Sandwell strategic theme and in One Council One Team.

## 7. Appendices

Appendix A – Council Plan 2024 to 2027

Appendix B – Monitoring Delivery of the Council Plan

Appendix C – Assistant Director Business Plan Actions

Appendix D – People Strategy

## 8. Background Papers

List source/background documents

