Review of Neighbourhood Working at Sandwell Council

March 2024

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1. Executive Summary

The Council has signalled for some time of the importance it attaches to working in neighbourhoods, making people feel valued and connected in their communities and this is clearly expressed in the Vision 2030. Moreover, to achieve this ambition, this review was commissioned to independently examine the current approaches to neighbourhood working, their effectiveness and any shortcomings.

This report confirms that the current arrangements are unlikely to deliver and retain the support of elected members and the case for change is set out. A new approach is proposed and expressed as a new model for neighbourhood working at Sandwell together with an associated Strategy as a framework for implementing the new model.

The recommended approach acknowledges and accommodates the unique circumstances of a Borough that has six distinct towns and the allegiances that people have to those communities, while at the same time recognising that effective locality working also needs to be at a finer ward level, where ward Councillors can fully respond and prioritise as community leaders.

The approach, to deliver effectively will require some structural change as well as cross Council collaboration to support the model. Some historical organisational and cultural issues have arisen during the review, and these will need to be addressed as part of the implementation of the model.

The review has learnt from best practice elsewhere in local authorities and listened to the differing views and opinions of members and officers.

The new model will enable a fresh approach where local priorities can be established and the challenging issues that communities face as the 8th most deprived local authority area in the country can be addressed at a local level.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Council agrees and adopts the approach set out in this report as the new Model for Neighbourhood Working in Sandwell.

2.2 That the Strategy attached as Appendix No 1 be agreed.

2.3 That pursuant to Recommendation 2.1 above the Council commences a transitional period of implementation to the new model.

2.4 That an Interim senior officer be appointed / seconded to lead the implementation of the new approach to neighbourhood working reporting to the Assistant Chief Executive.

2.5 That a review of staffing structure in the Neighbourhoods Partnerships Team and the Neighbourhood Engagement Team be undertaken, including repositioning both teams into a single new Neighbourhoods Team reporting to the Assistant Chief Executive (with both establishment levels and a comprehensive refresh and review of all roles and responsibilities being implemented under delegated powers).

2.6 That budgets and grants to neighbourhoods be consolidated as set out in Section 8.3 and the administration be the responsibility of the new Neighbourhoods Team.

2.7 Pursuant to Recommendation 2.6 above, the budget package is to include:

(a) an **annual ward budget** scheme be agreed within the range of £1500- £2000 per member to be used for member priorities within their ward and a Protocol for use of ward budgets (including a 'menu' of applicable uses/services) be presented for approval by Council.

(b) a new **Neighbourhoods Support Fund** to support community organisations, events and local ward and town-based initiatives.

(c) Retention of the **Events budget.**

(d) **CIL** no change

2.8 That the new budget package scheme be funded from Local Area Budget, Innovation Fund, and a proportion of the establishment savings as a result of the new structure.

2.9 That the Council should consider where the ASB Team is located and managed within the organisation recognising its important role in effective neighbourhood working and the need to work alongside the new Neighbourhoods Team.

2.10 That the Council consider the future management of any residual roles/ responsibilities outside of neighbourhood working, such as community centres.

2.11 That the Council consider what resources may be available from any savings to strengthen and supplement the communications resources dedicated to neighbourhood working.

3. Introduction and Background

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This review was commissioned by the Chief Executive in September 2023 with a specific remit to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current neighbourhood working at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and its effectiveness and recommend a new approach for resident engagement and neighbourhood working. The Terms of Reference are set out in Section 3.4 below.

3.1.2 The Objective of the Review is:

To review the current approaches to neighbourhood working within Sandwell and develop a new a refreshed coherent, cross- council model for neighbourhood working which has elected members and communities at the core delivering outcomes in their localities.

3.2 The Borough and its Challenges

3.2.1 Sandwell is a metropolitan borough in the Black Country that brought together six boroughs: Oldbury, Rowley Regis, and Smethwick in the south, and Tipton, Wednesbury, and West Bromwich in the north. It has a population of just under 330,000 and is the 34th biggest local authority in England. It is projected to grow further and faster than the West Midlands and national average. It borders Birmingham, Dudley, Walsall, and Wolverhampton and is divided into 24 wards represented by 72 Councillors.

3.2.2 The Borough has a relatively young population with more than 40% of residents under 30 years of age in 2019 and nearly 40% of residents are from an ethnic minority. Some 28,600 homes were still managed by the Council in 2019 accounting for 21.6% of the borough's housing stock.

3.2.3 The Borough has its challenges. The number of localities in the worst 1% nationally has noticeably dropped but overall Sandwell remains the eighth most deprived English district. This reflects place-based issues but most seriously, people-based outcomes: low skills and educational attainment leading to labour market exclusion; child and family poverty; and poor health and life expectancy.

3.2.4 According to the Council's 2023 Residents Survey (Appendix 2), 81% of respondents are satisfied with their area as a place to live and 83% feel strongly about belonging to their local area which reflects the self-evident strong local community attachments that residents have.

3.2.5 The ambition to have impactful and strong outcomes from a new approach to neighbourhood working and resident engagement will offer increased opportunity to address the challenges and tackle them at a locality level.

3.3 Strategic Policy Context

3.3.1 This review and the commitment to neighbourhood working follows the aspirations, ambitions and objectives of the Council's corporate plan and its improvement journey.

The Sandwell Vision

3.3.2 The Sandwell Corporate Plan 2021- 2025 sets out the Council's strategic vision, ambitions and strategic outcomes and is the foundation of the focus for the Council's activities and resources.

3.3.3 The vision for Sandwell in 2030 is:

> *a thriving, optimistic and resilient community. It's where we call home and where we're proud to belong - where we choose to bring up our families, where we feel safe and cared for, enjoying good health, rewarding work, feeling connected and valued in our neighbourhoods and communities, confident in the future, and benefiting fully from a revitalised West Midlands.*

3.3.4 This commitment is also reflected in Ambition No 8 which states:

> *Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.*

3.3.5 The Review also supports the strategic outcomes in the Sandwell Plan including:

> *Strong resilient communities.*

The Sandwell Council Improvement Plan

3.3.6 The Council approved its Improvement Plan in June 2022, and one of the six themes relates to the strategic direction of the Council. The Plan highlights the adoption of a new model for locality working and this also links to the need for an improved customer journey. A coherent, cross-council model is the ambition which this review seeks to deliver.

Sandwell's Transformation and Design Principles

3.3.7 As an integral part of, and the guiding tenets for the Council's transformation programme into a modern and agile organisation doing what matters for the positive benefit of the residents of Sandwell, a set of Design Principles have been agreed (Appendix 3). The development of a new Neighbourhood working model is part of the change process.

Corporate Peer Challenge

3.3.8 The Council undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge in early 2022, the report identified the opportunity for enhanced neighbourhood and locality working and

reflected on the need for greater join up and less silo working as well as highlighting that neighbourhood teams which had been assumed to be cross organisational, were comprised only of staff within housing roles.

3.3.9 Organisational changes have been made since the report was received but this review seeks to go further and endorse the *One Council – one Team* ethos of the Sandwell Plan as well as creating a more focussed approach to the governance and delivery of locality working in Sandwell.

Sandwell's Values and Behaviours

3.3.10 The Council has recently adopted new corporate values and behaviours and the implementation and operation of any new model should ensure that both officers and members have full regard for them.

3.4 Terms of Reference

3.4.1 The Terms of Reference for the review have provided the context for the review and these were agreed by the Steering Group (see Appendix 4) in November 2023.

They are:

- A complete identification/process mapping of all existing resources (teams, budgets, roles, resources) that are focused on working in localities, towns, and wards.
- An evaluation of impact of current services in wards.

- Understanding the resident perspective and view the current working arrangements through the lens of tenants and residents.
- Identify and learn from areas of best practice elsewhere where neighbourhood working is embedded.
- Identify what a more integrated model of neighbourhood working would look like that empowers ward Councillors, aligns with the customer journey, and provides residents and tenants with a clear line of sight in 'making things happen' within their ward.
- To recommend a new structure and model of neighbourhood working for Sandwell.

3.5 Principles Adopted for the Review

3.5.1 To support the Terms of Reference and to guide the review a set of Principles were established.

3.5.2 To this end, any new model proposed as a result of this review would need to:

- Have buy-in from elected members and officers.
- Provide a compelling case for changing the existing approaches.
- Align with the Council's strategic objectives.
- Be affordable, sustainable, and fundable over time.

- Be inclusive.
- Puts neighbourhoods and localities at the heart of the Council's activities.
- Reflect the needs of individual localities and neighbourhoods.
- Be legible and readily understandable for customers, partners, and communities.
- Be delivered successfully and in a timely manner by the Council.
- Deliver demonstrable outcomes for localities.
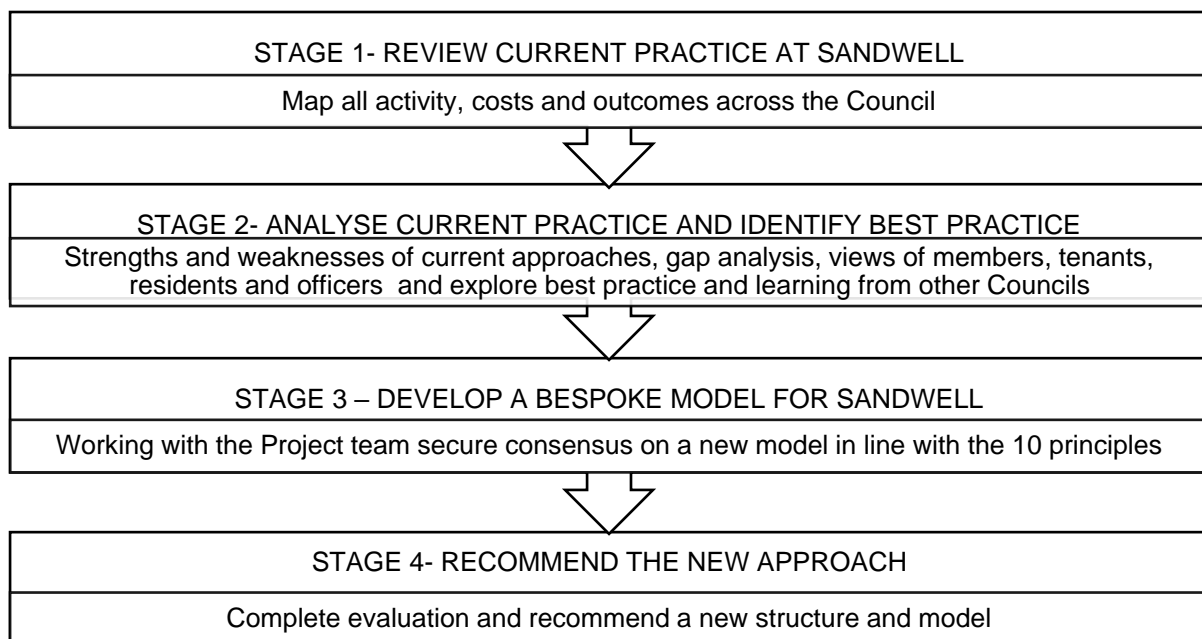
4. Methodology for the Review

4.1 Structure and Governance of the Review

4.1.1 The Chief Executive established a small team to lead the review and deliver this report following the Terms of Reference and guiding Principles. The team comprises:

-Jack Hegarty: Former local authority Chief Executive with 35 years' experience in local government to lead the review and provide an external and independent perspective on the current practice at Sandwell.

-Saffron O'Meara: a recently appointed Sandwell officer – part of the National Graduate Development Programme and assigned to this project.

4.1.2 The review has followed a structured 4 stage approach agreed by the Steering Group. This is:

STAGE 1- REVIEW CURRENT PRACTICE AT SANDWELL
Map all activity, costs and outcomes across the Council

STAGE 2- ANALYSE CURRENT PRACTICE AND IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICE
Strengths and weaknesses of current approaches, gap analysis, views of members, tenants, residents and officers and explore best practice and learning from other Councils

STAGE 3 – DEVELOP A BESPOKE MODEL FOR SANDWELL
Working with the Project team secure consensus on a new model in line with the 10 principles

STAGE 4- RECOMMEND THE NEW APPROACH
Complete evaluation and recommend a new structure and model

4.1.3 A member Steering Group was established to oversee and guide the review. It was chaired by the Leader of the Council and comprised the following members and officers:

Officers	Members
Shokat Lal	Councillor Kerrie Carmichael
James McLaughlin	Councillor David Fisher
Matthew More	Councillor Bob Piper
Jack Hegarty	Councillor Suzanne Hartwell
Saffron O'Meara	Councillor Caroline Owen
	Councillor Julie Webb
	Councillor Farut Shaeen
	Councillor Abid Hussain
	Councillor Luke Giles
	Councillor Pam Randhawa

4.1.4 The Group met 4 times between November 2023 and March 2024. The agendas and presentations to the Group are attached as Appendix No 4 & 5.

4.2 Review Timetable

4.2.1 The project commenced in October 2023 and was originally programmed for completion in 12 weeks. The need to ensure sufficient time for both member and officer input to the process and allow for views and opinions to be expressed has lengthened the project timetable to the end of March 2024 (21 weeks). The additional period has added value to the review in terms of the breath of input from officers and members.

4.3 Scope of Review

4.3.1 The structured 4 stage process has facilitated a number of workstreams and the process in more detail has included:

Stage	Aim	Key Actions
1.Review current practice at Sandwell	To identify all existing resources and activities in relation to locality working	• Work with teams to map current activity across the Council. • Work with finance team to identify locality working budgets and expenditure.
2.Analyse current practice and identify best practice	To look at strengths and weaknesses of current neighbourhood working: obtain views of members, officers and public and look at best practice elsewhere	• SWOT analyses of locality working from different service provider/ user perspectives. • Identify good practice at Sandwell and good outcomes. • Provide opportunity for member dialogue and input. • Secure views of officers working in localities. • Listen to the experiences of other Councils and other best practice examples.
3.Develop a bespoke model for Sandwell	Work with the project team on a development of a new model in line with the 10 principles	• Identify the optimum building blocks for a neighbourhood working model (wards, towns, localities). • Identify efficiencies and new ways of working where appropriate.
4. Recommend the new approach	Complete an evaluation of a new model in agreement with project owners	• Test elements of new model with Steering Group and Leadership Team. • Set out any constraints and risks during implementation of model. • Draft a new Neighbourhoods strategy.

4.3.2 As part of the scope the process has included interviewing and meeting with the following officers and members. We thank the participants for their considered and helpful input to the process and sharing their knowledge.

Neighbourhood Partnerships Team	Manny Sehmbi (Head of Community Partnerships and Support Services) Marcia Sandel Massey (Neighbourhood Partnerships Coordinator) Neighbourhood Partnerships Officers Community Development Workers
Neighbourhood Engagement Team	Santokh Singh (Neighbourhood Engagement Manager) Neil Bould (Grant Officer and Ward Coordinator Manager) Ward Coordinators Neighbourhood Engagement Officers
Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)	Nicola Plant (Assistant Director Public Protection and Community Safety) Tessa Mitchell (Business Manager Community Safety and Resilience) Andrew Clarke (ASB Team Manager)
Housing	Nigel Collumbell (Assistant Director Housing Management) Jim Brennan (Senior Housing Manager)
Public Health	Liann BrookesSmith (Interim Director of Public Health) Ricky Byrnes (Communities & Partnerships Programme)
The Research Sandwell Team	Lina Martino (Consultant in Public Health) Jason Copp (Senior Research Officer)
Communications Team	Harpreet Dhillon (Senior Marketing and PR Officer)
Digital Transformation Team	Andrew Langford (Senior Lead Officer-Digital Transformation)
Green Spaces, Green Services and Events	Matthew Huggins (Assistant Director: Green Spaces, Green Services, Events)
Highways	Mervyn Bartlett (Interim Assistant Director - Highways Services)
Family Hubs	Maxine Burrows (Strategic Lead for Family Hubs)
Voluntary Sector	Mark Davis (CEO of SCVO)
Finance	Chris Randall (Finance Lead)
HR	Su Samra (Assistant HR Business Partner)
Legal	Mike Jones (Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance)
	All Neighbourhood Staff Briefing
External Officers	Nicola Butterworth (Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Housing Services at Liverpool City Council) Beth Hanna (Resident Development Operations Manager at Nottingham City Council)

	Leigh Plant (Resident Development Service Improvement Lead at Nottingham City Council) Martin Hughes (Head of Neighbourhoods at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council) Emma Hill (Head of Democratic Services at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council) Jo Brown (Assistant Chief Executive at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council) Councillor Sarah Allen (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Working and Deputy Leader at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council)
Members	Councillor Kerrie Carmichael Councillor Bob Piper Councillor Suzanne Hartwell Councillor Caroline Owen Councillor Julie Webb Councillor Farut Shaeen Councillor Abid Hussain Councillor Luke Giles Councillor Pam Randhawa Councillor Peter Hughes Councillor Nicola Maycock Councillor Syeda Khatun MBE Councillor Charn Singh Padda Councillor Laured Kalari Councillor Claire Mayo Councillor Rizwan Jalil Councillor Ashley Lewis Councillor Simon Hackett Councillor Paul Moore Councillor Luke Davies Councillor TirathSingh Dhatt Councillor Jackie Taylor

4.3.3 While it is arguable that other teams and services within the Council as well as other partner organisations could have been part of the scope, a pragmatic approach has been adopted to enable the review to be conducted thoroughly but also in a timely manner. The Review Team have been satisfied that the information gained from the disparate sources has enabled robust recommendations for the way forward.

5. What is Neighbourhood Working?

5.1 Defining Neighbourhood Working

5.1.1 The reality of trying to define neighbourhood working is that it will be unique to the context of each place or Council area. It will depend on the local views and opinions on what constitutes a neighbourhood. Secondly, it will reflect the Council's, residents, and partners aspirations of what should and can be achieved at a neighbourhood or locality level.

5.1.2 Taking into account the Council's vision for the Borough, a working definition for Sandwell could be:

> *Seeking to improve all our neighbourhoods in Sandwell to create strong and resilient communities with Councillors and officers working with local people on the issues that matter to them on their doorstep including the issues that affect their quality of life, environment and health and wellbeing.*

5.2 Best Practice – Other Council's Approaches

5.2.1 As an integral part of the review, learning from other Council's experiences of both setting up and operating a locality/neighbourhood working model has been an important element of understanding what approach a good fit for Sandwell would be.

5.2.2 The following Councils approaches have been researched:

- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Liverpool City Council

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

5.2.3 Councillors, including the Leader and Cabinet representatives together with senior officers visited Rotherham on 13 April 2023 to view their Neighbourhood Working model. A briefing note for Leadership team was subsequently prepared and is attached for information as Appendix 6. A further Teams meeting with Rotherham representatives took place on 13 March 2024 involving Town Leads.

5.2.4 Rotherham has produced a 'Thriving Neighbourhoods' Strategy to set out the model in operation.

5.2.5 Rotherham agreed its current approach in 2017 replacing a previous citizen engagement model based on 7 Area Assemblies and the current approach has had a number of years to become established. The approach uses wards as the building blocks and Councillors act as community leaders at this local level. The model is 'place'

based and 'strengths' based, seeking to use the skills and knowledge of local communities. The model was refreshed in 2022.

5.2.6 The main learning points for this review from the Rotherham case study are:

- The Council context is similar i.e. an urban metropolitan area on a similar improvement journey.
- The model is well established and resilient.
- The ward-based approach is successful at developing Councillors as community leaders in their neighbourhoods.
- The approach is supported by a dedicated Neighbourhoods Team.
- Services such as housing, street scene, enforcement have been reorganised on a locality basis to support the model.
- The approach works well with partners.
- Outcomes are measured.
- Accountability is sought through annual reporting.
- Members are equipped with a ward budget scheme.
- Ward based newsletter promotes issues and activities in the relevant ward.
- Local priorities are identified in ward plans and shared across Council services.
- Model has Cabinet oversight of governance and accountability.
- Neighbourhood working placed at heart of organisation under the Assistant Chief Executive.

Nottingham City Council

5.2.7 The Leader and Cabinet members visited Nottingham in February 2023 to view the neighbourhood working model in practice. The Leader subsequently advised this review that several aspects of the Nottingham model were noteworthy including the creation of Neighbourhood Action Officers and the speed of response to issues. She also remarked on the ward budgets scheme.

5.2.8 As part of this review a meeting was held with the Resident Development Operations Manager and the Service Improvement Lead for resident development at Nottingham City Council on 16 November 2023. The model has been operational since April 2022 and follows a merger of neighbourhood management and community cohesion teams. Nottingham has 20 wards and 55 elected members.

5.2.9 The terminology used at Nottingham City Council is 'resident development'. The model seeks to empower local people to improve their communities through:

- Identifying needs and issues in neighbourhoods.
- Bringing partners and communities together.
- Action plan, problem solve and influence service delivery.
- Evaluate, best value, and recommend improvements.

5.2.10 The core offer has 6 elements:

1. NATS (Neighbourhood Action teams with meetings every 6 weeks and generally one per ward).
2. Ward meetings (involves Councillors and the Resident development officers with police on a quarterly basis).
3. Neighbourhood Investment Plans (One for each ward. Ward budgets costing about £126K in total. Also, an Area Capital budget of £300k split between wards).
4. Locality partnerships and networks.
5. Resident engagement.
6. Community events.

5.2.11 The main learning points for this review from the Nottingham case study are:

- This is an established and tested model.
- The model is currently subject to vulnerability from funding cuts (supported by General Fund).
- Investment plans and ward trackers have superseded ward plans.
- Neighbourhood Action Teams are a key aspect of the model.
- Model is seen as important in reaching the diverse communities in the city.
- Outcome focussed with monthly monitoring and feeding into KPI's.
- The tracker has replaced the newsletter to provide updates.
- Ward budgets are part of the model and have a robust governance.

Liverpool City Council

5.2.12 As part of this review, a meeting was held with the Corporate Director for Neighbourhoods and Housing Services at Liverpool City Council on 16 November 2023.

5.2.13 The Council agreed to a new neighbourhood model in July 2023 and have yet to implement it. The rationale for a new model was partly based on member and resident feedback complaining that neighbourhood services are not joined up.

5.2.14 Roll out of the model will be phased initially focussing on the services within the Neighbourhoods and Housing Directorate. The model includes 13 proposed new neighbourhoods aligned to the 64 wards. There would be around 30,000 – 50,000 residents per neighbourhood. A new role of Neighbourhood Manager for each neighbourhood is proposed to build capacity and better facilitate collaboration with members, residents, and key partners.

5.2.15 The City Council's aim is to improve outcomes for residents whilst reducing demand and higher-cost responses, which should over time reduce costs to the Council.

5.2.16 The main learning points for this review from the Liverpool case study are:

- The model has yet to be implemented.
- The scale of the proposals is significantly more than Sandwell's and the clustering of wards into neighbourhoods is based on local determinants.
- There is a good focus of achieving outcomes.
- There is good partner engagement and buy in.
- Proposal seeks an accountable, joined up and responsive approach across Council services.
- The collaborative approach with elected members, residents, communities, and partners is fundamental.
- Operationally, the model will be centred around the Neighbourhood Manager role and will use data and insight.
- Recognition around culture change and workforce development.

5.3 What is a Neighbourhood in The Sandwell Context?

5.3.1 The definition of a neighbourhood or locality can be, in many aspects less important than ensuring that residents feel they have a sense of belonging to their local area and can influence the quality of life locally. However, those who have participated in this review have been very clear about the individual identity of each of the 6 towns.

5.3.2 Therefore, with Sandwell comprising six distinct and proud towns and divided into 24 wards the approach to neighbourhood working arguably needs to have regard to both.

5.3.3 While a dual level approach is readily achievable, to allow for a coherent and easily understandable approach, the model will need to have clarity on expectations and responsibilities for community leadership and operational matters.

6. Current Practice at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

6.1 The Teams

6.1.1 The scope of the review focusses on the teams that are either already established to undertake neighbourhood working, community development or those which functionally and organisationally focus their delivery of services on a town or ward basis.

6.1.2 Other teams may also be important in locality working and deliver services which can affect quality of life matters (such as youth services or family hubs). As the proposal in this report will rely on culture change and cross- council collaboration, such services will be expected to be an active participant in any new model.

6.1.3 The teams that have been involved as part of the review are currently as follows:

- Neighbourhood Engagement Team – Assistant Chief Executive Directorate
- Neighbourhood Partnership Team – Housing Directorate
- Housing Services – Housing Directorate
- Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) – Borough Economy Directorate
- Public Health – Public Health Directorate

Also, the review has consulted:

- Green Spaces, Green Services and Events – Borough Economy Directorate
- Highways Management – Borough Economy Directorate
- Family Hubs- Children's Directorate
- Communications – Assistant Chief Executive Directorate
- Digital Transformation Team (MyCouncillor Portal/MySandwell) – Assistant Chief Executive Directorate

Finally, advice has been sought from the following to support the review process:

- Legal – Finance Directorate
- Finance – Finance Directorate
- The Sandwell Trends Team - Public Health Directorate

6.1.4 The SVCO has also been approached as part of the review and its views sought on neighbourhood working at Sandwell.

6.1.5 The review has confirmed that neighbourhood working is dispersed across the Council, often with teams and officers having similar responsibilities. Appendix 7 is a cross referencing exercise of the job descriptions of members of the 5 core teams listed above. While some caution should always be taken, the exercise demonstrates the duplication of effort and disparate nature of locality working across Directorates.

6.1.6 Below is a precis of the work of the core 5 teams listed above together with any feedback received from the teams.

Neighbourhood Engagement Team

6.1.7 The Neighbourhood Engagement team now sits under the management of the Assistant Chief Executive at the centre of the organisation and is led by the Neighbourhood Engagement Manager. The team totals 8 officers and includes ward co-ordinators and neighbourhood engagement officers. The Co-ordinator role is a very recent addition and is currently funded short term.

6.1.8 Some of the work the team are involved in includes the interface with members locally and supporting / administrating local meetings (including members Boards, Town Lead meetings, leader and Town Lead meetings, ward meetings, walkabouts). They also are responsible for CIL, Local Area Budget (LAB) including the events budget.

6.1.9 Feedback from discussions with the team includes the following comments on the current model:

- They have good relations with other teams e.g. highways.
- Officers fail to show up at Town meetings.
- Some officers give very generic and repetitive responses to member enquiries.
- Members sometimes don't challenge officers enough at Town meetings.
- Council works in silos.
- Co-ordinators are stretched (only 3 at present).
- Town meetings could benefit with clearer Terms of Reference.
- Officers just want members to use the portal rather than deal directly with members.
- SVCO now administering small grants pot since 2020 has taken control away.

Neighbourhood Partnerships Team

6.1.10 The Neighbourhood Partnerships Team is part of the Housing Directorate and comprises 15 posts under the management of the Head of Community Partnerships and Support Services. The teams are organised on a 6 town basis with a Neighbourhood Partnerships Officer and Community Development Officer allocated to each town area.

6.1.11 There have been many changes in recent years partially prompted by budget reductions or SVCO role changes. The housing function coming back in house and the public health function being transferred to local authorities has also prompted changes. Regulatory requirements (the new Consumer Standards for housing authorities and landlords) are being introduced bringing the need to demonstrate positive and active working with tenants and communities.

6.1.12 The current model is a recent one and follows pilots firstly at Rowley Regis and subsequently Wednesbury. It has been fully operational for over a year.

6.1.13 The Team produces an annual report of their work with communities (Appendix 8).

6.1.14 The Team Managers feel there is no pressure to follow housing priorities notwithstanding the HRA funding for the unit. They seek to serve the wider community.

6.1.15 Feedback from discussions with the team management and a written submission includes the following comments on the current model:

- The team understand communities and have adapted to many models.
- May not be viable to do community development at ward level / town level more practical (acknowledging that towns may be too big to reflect neighbourhoods).
- Community voices do not present at Town meetings.
- Concern that model could just follow members priorities and not the community's needs.
- They work well with other teams on funding matters e.g. CIL.
- They attend the Town meetings. But suggest that meeting structure needs revisiting.
- No plan in each area for teams to follow priorities.
- Any change needs to reflect community voices.
- Leadership at locality level used to be at director level.
- Need to clarify difference between community development work and community work.
- Different approaches in each of the towns which reflects the skills of each community development worker.
- The review should have an Equality Impact Assessment.

Housing Services- Tenancy and Estate Management

6.1.16 The Tenancy and Estate Management team comprises six teams based on the towns and a further tenancy services team. The teams are under the management of the Business Manager, Tenancy and Estate Management and the teams that are organised on the 6-town basis (known as 'the locals') total 50 (excluding the 22 Housing Services Advisors) posts and include, Housing services Officers, Housing Service Co-ordinators and Operations Managers.

6.1.17 The team focusses its work on:

- Tenancy management issues
- Intervening when tenancy is failing
- Neighbour nuisance issues
- Sustainability of tenancies
- Home checks
- Everything except repairs and rent

6.1.18 Historically, the team were called Neighbourhood Officers, but this changed to Housing Officers after 2019. Members of the team had spent a proportion of their time on non-housing management issues such as town centre enhancements.

6.1.19 The Director has provided information to the review on the Regulator of Social Housing's new emerging consumer standards which set expectations that social housing landlords have to meet, and assurance will be sought against. They are:

- The safety and quality standard
- The transparency, influence, and accountability standard
- The neighbourhood and community standard
- The tenancy standard

6.1.20 It is the neighbourhood and community standard that is likely to be most relevant to this review and appropriate regard to it will need to be fulfilled by the Council. The four requirements of the neighbourhood and community standard are:

- Maintenance of open spaces
- Local co-operation
- Domestic abuse
- Safer neighbourhoods

6.1.21 Feedback from discussions with the team management includes the following comments on the current model:

- The review should be clear on what it is trying to achieve – governance, members focus, community engagement or locality working.
- Town meetings are not open to the public.
- Not clear who sets the agenda for Town meetings.
- Easy for such meetings to focus on matter such as potholes rather than issues that determine better outcomes.
- Should be a clear escalation process for members when they are not satisfied with answer/ outcomes.
- Housing and Neighbourhood Partnership Team should attend Town meetings.
- Neighbourhood Partnership Team should articulate what it is doing.
- Member's portal is good for transactional matters, but gaps exist.
- The 3 neighbourhood co-ordinator posts are HRA funded, and this needs longer term resolution.
- Housing team still get approached to resolve non housing issues e.g. highways or ASB.
- Six town model is very engrained.
- Good relationship with Neighbourhood Engagement Team.
- A protocol exists with ASB to allow for escalation of cases.
- Neighbourhood Engagement Team should continue to lead.

Anti-Social Behaviour Team (ASB)

6.1.22 The ASB team is currently within the Borough Economy Directorate having transferred from Housing in 2021. The team totalling 16 posts is managed by the ASB Team Manager under the Business Manager for Community Safety and Resilience. The team is set up on a six-town basis and includes Town Leads and ASB officers.

The nature of the function means that there is close working with partners (blue light services and the Safer Sandwell Partnership) and town tasking and Borough wide tasking are an important aspect of the roles. The service is principally HRA funded. The service produces an annual report (Appendix 9).

6.1.23 Feedback from the team management and the Assistant Director includes the following comments on the existing model:

- HRA funding causes a different offer to tenants and non- tenants.
- Protocol with housing needs revisiting and clarity over allocation and escalation.
- The portal is important and there needs to be a rebalancing of how member enquiries are dealt with.
- ASB matters have gone to housing team which should be directed to the team.
- Neighbourhood working should be about the determinants of public health.
- There is a current review of enforcement in the Council which has crossovers.
- There is a need to look at capacity as the team is set up for tenancy issues funded by HRA.
- Members get a briefing note monthly of work in each town.
- A lot of housing /tenancy matters are portrayed as ASB matters.
- Police operate on contiguous boundaries to the six teams and relationships are built up at the local level.
- Outcomes could be measured better (and with partners).
- There should be a clear 'front door' for enquiries.
- Member's expectations cannot always be met.

Public Health- Public Health Development Officer Team

6.1.24 The Public Health Development Officer Team (PHDO) comprises 6 officers based on the six-town model. They are the single point of contact for the health and wellbeing services in localities. The team is managed by the Communities and Partnerships Programme Manager.

6.1.25 The origins of the PDHO role came from a Sport England grant funded programme and evolved from there. They work to three priorities (from Public Health Outcomes Framework) based on evidence:

- Reducing health inequalities
- Reducing social isolation
- Improving mental health and well being

and they work in the following situations:

- Schools/ colleges
- Communities
- Primary and secondary care
- Workplaces

6.1.26 The quarterly Public Health network meetings take place in each town and involve representatives from the voluntary sector, statutory sector, and community groups and with an aim of reducing health inequalities. Attendance is good at 20/30 attendees.

6.1.27 The context of public health services currently with cutbacks in services over the years is to place more emphasis on empowering people and communities with community leaders being important. A Towns Directory has been drafted and this will assist GPs' and elected members refer into specific services such as drugs, alcohol abuse, gambling, or physical activity.

6.1.28 Feedback from the team management and the acting DPH includes the following comments on the existing model:

- There should be a no 'wrong door' ethos.
- The strength of the current team is their subject knowledge and locality knowledge.
- PDHO's don't deliver directly generally as they train others to be self-sustaining.
- The six-town model works.
- Rare to get enquiries through the portal.
- PDHOs attend Town meetings, ward meetings and tasking meetings.
- Town profiles are produced, and ward plans need to use the same data sources.
- They have links with the NPT and housing teams.
- PH work is evidence/ data driven and can be different to other services.
- Needs to be clarity on when member request can be turned down.

Feedback from Green Spaces, Highways and Family Hubs

6.1.29 Both the Green Spaces team and the Highways unit provide services that deliver in localities and Councillors have used such issues informally as case studies in their feedback.

Green Spaces

6.1.30 The team is led by The Assistant Director, Green Spaces and is located in the Borough Economy Directorate. It is responsible for the 542 green spaces in the Borough as well as visitor spaces and events. While there are a number of green flag parks, there are many other areas in poor condition. Priorities are set by ward and reflected in the programme of works agreed by Cabinet each year. A good initiative is the publication of the annual programme of works.

6.1.31 The challenges and issues in the context of neighbourhood working include:

- Members wishing for works outside of their agreed priorities.
- Others agreeing to new facilities without having regard to ongoing maintenance costs.

- Resource issues with attending ward meetings or walkabouts (but in attendance at Town meetings).
- Christmas lights are both politically sensitive and resource intensive.
- Performance on the portal is good – down to 2.8 days response time on average.

Highways

6.1.32 The Highways Services teams are currently led on an interim basis by the Assistant Director Highway Services and are part of the Borough Economy Directorate. The current performance in responding to member enquiries and issues is poor and they believe partially due to resourcing issues. MP and elected member enquiries receive a high priority. Three annual planned work programmes are particularly relevant for town and ward level neighbourhood working:

- Street lighting planned works (replacements)
- Road safety schemes
- General planned maintenance

6.1.33 The challenges and issues in the context of neighbourhood working include:

- Resourcing meetings (attend Town meetings as an when required).
- Managing members expectations where highway assets are requested but not warranted.

Family Hubs

6.1.34 The Family Hubs team are located within the Children's Directorate and are focussed on delivering outcomes for families at a neighbourhood level. This programme follows the award of a time limited £4m fund by the Dept of Education and is based on a premise of a universal offer for families. The services operate out of the 7 Children's Centres, and they also are setting up mini hubs to allow for easier access - aim is that families are within a mile of support. A mobile library is also used successfully to reach families and provide ongoing support. They work with public health and the voluntary sector e.g., Barnardo's.

6.1.35 The challenge and issues in the context of neighbourhood working include:

- Awareness and understanding of the service across the Council which means that duplication of effort and resources can occur.
- Ward/ Town profiles are being produced which can feed into ward plans.
- Service links to Town teams and Neighbourhood Engagement Team but no representation on their implementation board.
- Their elected member liaison could be better.

6.2 The Customer Journey – Digital Transformation

6.2.1 The review team involved the Digital transformation team ([MySandwell](#) and [MyCouncillor](#) Portal) and the Sandwell Trends team in the review as data and information management would be key components of any enhanced neighbourhood working model for Sandwell. We are aware that a separate Council review into the customer journey will commence in the near future. Nonetheless, some key feedback during the review, particularly from members has been in relation to the merits and performance of the MyCouncillor Portal. In addition, debate has taken place about the channels available for member, resident and tenant enquiries and complaints.

6.2.2 The MySandwell portal (for members of the public) and the MyCouncillor portal (for elected members) use the same platform, and both were established for channel shift, and they represent the digital front door for the Council. It went live in March 2021 and the MySandwell portal is now one of the main channels for residents covering 174 services.

6.2.3 The impetus for the MyCouncillor portal came from members because of challenges in managing their casework and a view that officer's responses were poor.

6.2.4 The portal allows members to interact in 4 ways:

- The *Report it* function (accounts for 25% of matters)
- The *raise new casework* function (accounts for 75% of matters)
- The *new external casework record* function
- The *view casework* function

6.2.5 Attached as Appendix 10 is a snapshot of overall performance data for the MyCouncillor portal since it was set up to date. It also shows average satisfaction ratings from members. Only 3% of cases are escalated by members. 45% of poor ratings are because of officer management and 30% for quality of response.

6.2.6 The observations on MyCouncillor portal are:

- There is dissatisfaction from members (regular and less frequent users).
- The management reporting tools within the portal e.g. heat mapping are underused and could provide useful data to support neighbourhood working and priority setting forward plans.
- The adverse comments are less about the system but about culture and capacity in Directorates and failure to respond.
- Further and continuous improvements are both planned and necessary for ease of access and use by both members and officers.
- Directorates may need to review team structures, collaborate more corporately to support MyCouncillor/ MySandwell casework as part of any neighbourhood working model.

- While Councillor casework may be multi-channel (the *no wrong front door* concept), the portal infrastructure is key to successful casework monitoring and robust data collection for priority setting.

6.3 Role of Councillors

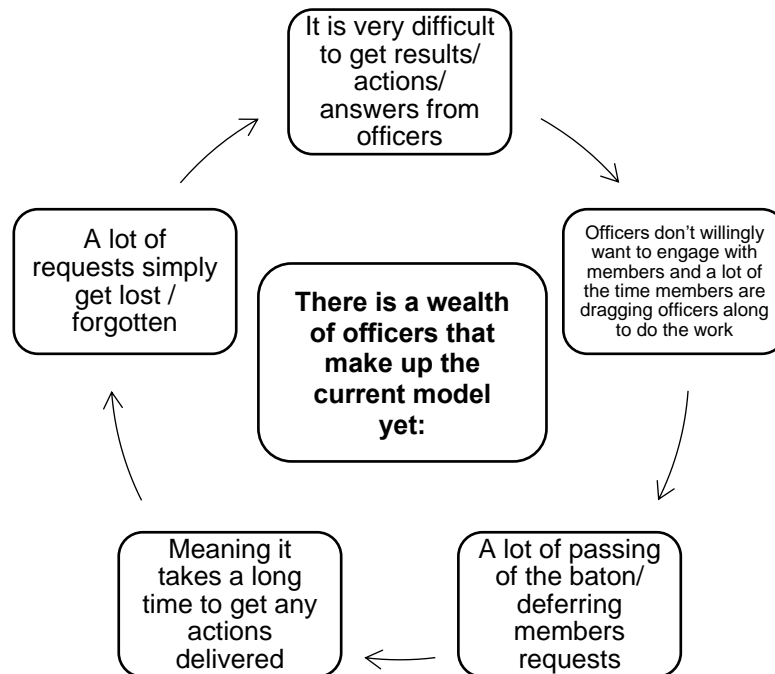6.3.1 Councillors have provided input into the review in a number of ways:

- Through membership of the Steering Group
- Individual member meetings/ written submissions/phone calls
- Attendance at ward meetings
- Cabinet members briefing

6.3.2 We thank the following members for their feedback and involvement:

Councillor Kerrie Carmichael
Councillor Bob Piper
Councillor Suzanne Hartwell
Councillor Caroline Owen
Councillor Julie Webb
Councillor Farut Shaeen
Councillor Abid Hussain
Councillor Luke Giles
Councillor Pam Randhawa
Councillor Peter Hughes
Councillor Nicola Maycock
Councillor Syeda Khatun MBE
Councillor Charn Singh Padda
Councillor Laured Kalari
Councillor Claire Mayo
Councillor Rizwan Jalil
Councillor Ashley Lewis
Councillor Simon Hackett
Councillor Paul Moore
Councillor Luke Davies
Councillor TirathSingh Dhatt
Councillor Jackie Taylor

6.3.3 Councillors have provided detailed feedback which has been captured in the review. A recurring dissatisfaction is about securing answers/ responses. A significant number of members who participated reflected as follows:

It is very difficult to get results/ actions/ answers from officers

A lot of requests simply get lost / forgotten

There is a wealth of officers that make up the current model yet:

Officers don't willingly want to engage with members and a lot of the time members are dragging officers along to do the work

Meaning it takes a long time to get any actions delivered

A lot of passing of the baton/ deferring members requests

6.3.4 In addition, the table below summarises Councillors most common perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the current approaches at Sandwell.

Strengths	Weaknesses

• The new Ward Coordinators have:
 	
   - Provided a single point of contact for members
   - Brought structure to the ward meetings and are pushing for actions from officers to be delivered on
 	
• Some members have described long and established relationships with certain services/officers.
• One neighbourhood team has been described as being the team that steps in when no one else wants to and have been able to mitigate issues within the community.
	• The current neighbourhood model is set up to disenable members.
	• The members portal puts a block between members and officers.
	• The current model allows for the standard of delivery to be low for officers.
	• Poor communication between officers and members about ward/town activity (particularly the housing team).
	• There is a wealth of officers that make up the current model, however they aren't managed efficiently.
	• A lot of members are unsure of the purpose of certain teams and are unaware of the work they do.

6.3.5 The review has also found that Councillors do recognise pressures on services and the important role that front line officers play in neighbourhood working.

6.3.6 The role of Councillors as community leaders in the existing model is limited both by its design but also by historical organisational culture. This affects the ability to secure a meaningful and consistent elected member role in locality issues. Some officers are wary of historical poor behaviour and governance issues when designing systems and decision-making processes to limit member input. This is understandable but should no longer hold back the delivery of the Council's ambitions for a new neighbourhood working model. Evidential improvements in the Council's organisational culture and corporate governance are clear.

6.4 Costs and Budgets

6.4.1 Set out below are the current staffing costs (including on costs) of the 5 core teams that support neighbourhood working. The second table excludes the Housing team as it has not been feasible to accurately disentangle the proportion of time spent by housing officers on neighbourhood working as opposed to tenancy management. Nonetheless, the housing team do fulfil an important function in neighbourhood and community matters not only for tenants but the wider community. Their role in neighbourhoods is an important and integral one.

Housing Team	£2,612,000	50 FTE
Anti-Social Behaviour Team	£780,286	16.5 FTE
Neighbourhood Partnerships Team	£725,350	15 FTE
Neighbourhood Engagement Team	£358,522	8 FTE
Public Health	£295,768	6 FTE
Grand Total: £4,771,926		**95.5 FTE**

Anti-Social Behaviour Team	£780,286	16.5 FTE
Neighbourhood Partnerships Team	£725,350	15 FTE
Neighbourhood Engagement Team	£358,522	8 FTE
Public Health	£295,768	6 FTE
Grand Total: £2,159,926		**45.5 FTE**

6.4.2 The available budgets administered by the teams falls into three categories.

CIL – this is part (15%) Community Infrastructure Levy arising from new developments across the Borough and allocated to community projects and town centres in the areas that the specific development takes place. By its very nature the amount varies each year and has restrictions on usage. Nonetheless, it is a readily consistent source of funding and is administered by the Neighbourhood Engagement Team.

CIL	
The money available is £612,372.04 which has accumulated since 2015/16 and is rolled into the next year.	
Year	**Expenditure**
2020/2021	£40,804.83
2021/2022	£80,699.69
2022/2023	£58,170.92
2023/2024	£74,203.69
Grand Total: £253,879.13	
The funds remaining are £358,492.91	

LAB – This Local Area Budget is a budget administered by the Neighbourhood Engagement team and supports locality matters including events. The current budget is as follows.

Local Area Budget
£90,000 which includes:
Events budget £30K = £5K per town
Problem solving for members priorities £60K =£10K per town

Innovation Budget – This is a fund administered by the Neighbourhood Partnerships team supporting local groups and communities. It currently totals £76,500 per annum.

6.4.3 The total discretionary spend available at present varies per annum because of fluctuations in CIL but is in the range of £ 207K - £241K.

Innovation Grant Budget
£76,500 for distribution to community organisations as grants for projects

6.4.4 On occasions, teams can bid for ad hoc monies (both revenue and capital) from both internal and external sources for campaigns, local capital projects, targeted public health matters etc. A new more coherent model should allow for a more dedicated resource to target government and partner (such as PCC) monies for local communities.

6.4.5 The SVCO, following a review in 2020 administers grant monies which support local communities.

6.5 Summary of Feedback Received During the Review

6.5.1 There has been a broad cross section of views expressed during the review which have raised a number of consistent themes:

- Member commitment to **change** and adopt new model.
- Members don't feel empowered to deliver in their communities.
- Strong desire for enhanced **community leadership.**
- Evidence of officer service leadership and teams committed to their functions and **organisational change.**
- **Collaborative** working across Council needs improved – still signs of silo working culture.
- **Dispersed** and **inconsistent** leadership and delivery in locality working.
- Significant **resources** dedicated to working in neighbourhoods.
- No mechanism to set evidence based local **priorities.**
- Limited evidence of **outcome** focussed activity in some areas.
- Confusion and dissatisfaction with how residents and members **access** and monitor issues.
- **Performance** inconsistent in some service areas.
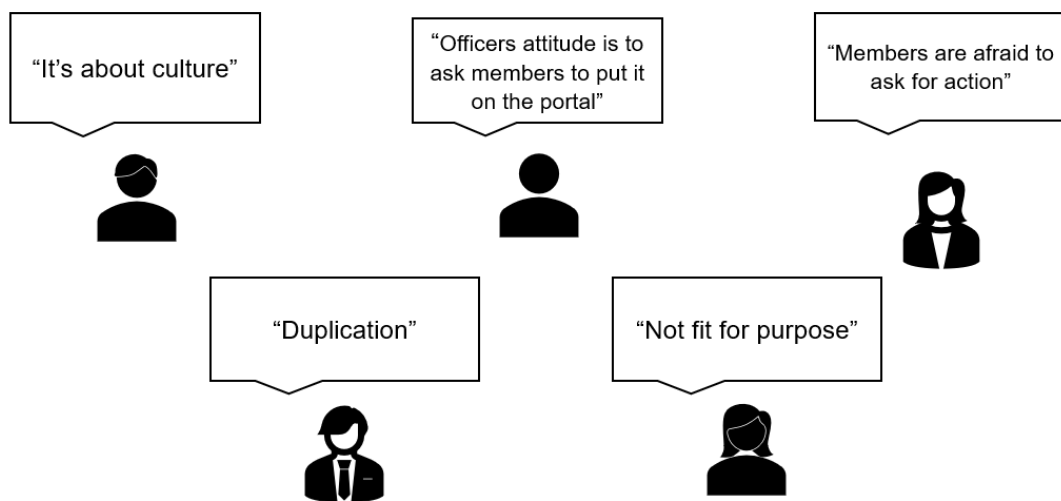
6.6 The Case for Change

6.6.1 The review has confirmed the need to address the current approach to working in neighbourhoods and move to a model which can be structured to deliver better outcomes in neighbourhoods with a truly local focus but concentrate not only on the place but the strengths of communities. While the review has demonstrated that at Sandwell there is much to build on and a genuine commitment to achieve better outcomes, the current approach is service led and in silos, more can more readily be achieved by a refresh and redesign in line with the One Council – One Team ethos. This includes cross-cutting issues such as reducing inequalities and any initiatives that could limit future demand on services.

7. Developing A New Model for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

7.1 In developing a new model, it needs to have regard to the 10 guiding principles set out above in Section 3.5. Moreover, the learning from the review process demonstrates it needs to have due regard to the following requirements:

- Be resident, tenant and member centric.
- Allow for better and more consistent governance.
- Include clarity over member and officer roles (such as Town Leads and ward members).
- Have consistent local engagement.
- Be realistic about financial constraints.
- Be set up to be outcome focussed.
- Be adaptable to change.
- Be implemented as soon as practicable.

8. The Recommended Model

8.1 Fundamentals of the Model

8.1.1 The Sandwell Plan and its Vision 2030 informs and is the driver for a new model and is the catalyst for the Council to be equipped to work in and help our communities achieve better outcomes. The model builds on existing knowledge and skill bases and work already undertaken in neighbourhoods and derives learning from models operating in other local authority areas.

8.1.2 The recommended approach is:

| A 'place' based approach.	A 'people' based approach	A 'strengths'-based approach	An 'opportunities'-based approach
• That has neighbourhoods that are safe and where residents are proud to belong. • That has clean streets and welcoming green spaces. • That has vibrant local town centres. • That have warm and secure homes and welcoming neighbourhoods.	• Where residents are happy and healthy. • That is inclusive and allows people to interact and meets the needs of diverse communities. • Where people are less lonely and isolated. • That offers the best start in life for our young people.	• Where we harness the skills and knowledge in communities. • That effectively uses the community leadership role of all our Councillors. • Where we work with communities collaboratively and with partners to problem solve. • Where we listen and build community capacity.	• Where data and insight informs decision making at town and ward levels. • That enables involvement and influence by residents in setting local priorities. • That allows for healthy lifestyles and prevention. • Where local assets are harnessed. • Where the focus can be on seizing tangible improvements to localities.

8.1.3 The Model will rely on organisational cultural and structural changes to achieve:

| |
|---|
| More effective joint working across the Council focussed on the needs of residents and localities. |
| More use of data, insight, and evidence at a neighbourhood level to build a better understanding of needs and opportunities, inform strategy development, local investment and service design and partner interventions where appropriate. |
| An inclusive approach to empower and engage residents and build community capacity for decision making and issues affecting their neighbourhoods. |
| A more efficient and more responsive but less dependent and less complex customer journey that can resolve local issues. |
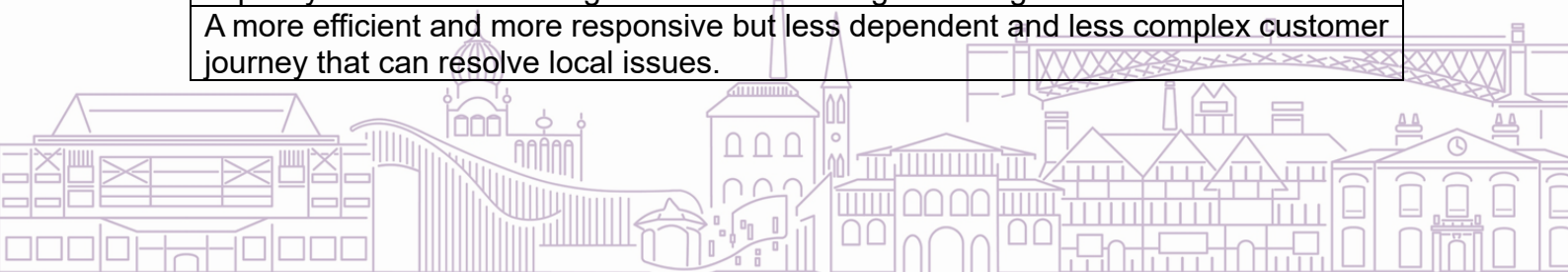
8.1.4 The Model will allow for positive collaborative and priority driven action in neighbourhoods as follows:

Theme	Action	How
Prioritise	Identify needs, priorities and issues in our wards and towns.	• Produce ward profiles. • Produce evidence based annual ward plans. • Schedule ward meetings. • Walkabouts and ward audits with action plans/ trackers. • Intelligent tracking of complaints and enquiries. • Publish service work programmes. • Analyse resident's surveys and seek resident and tenant's views. • Collaborate with partners priorities. • Utilise collective knowledge and resources at Town meetings.
Collaborate	Bring residents, community groups, partners and voluntary sector together.	• Support and influence community led events. • Organise ward based meetings and events. • Collaborate and convene partner events on cross cutting issues. • Inform residents and share issues using localised communications. • Tackle long standing, hard to solve matters collaboratively.
Lead	Problem solve and action planning.	• Ward Councillors, Town Leads intervening as appropriate. • Utilise Council neighbourhood team resources. • Utilise ward budgets and grant funding as appropriate.
Evaluate	Review outcomes, and report.	• Town Leads oversight on ward priority issues. • Annual ward reports. • Good news stories in wards.

8.1.5 To support the model and ensure it is operationally successful some key elements need to be incorporated into the implementation.

A blueprint for a model based on both wards and the six towns

8.1.6 The distinctive nature of the Borough and its six towns have traditionally formed the building blocks for many services. However, a neighbourhood model needs to operate at a very local level to allow for ward based community leadership to flourish.
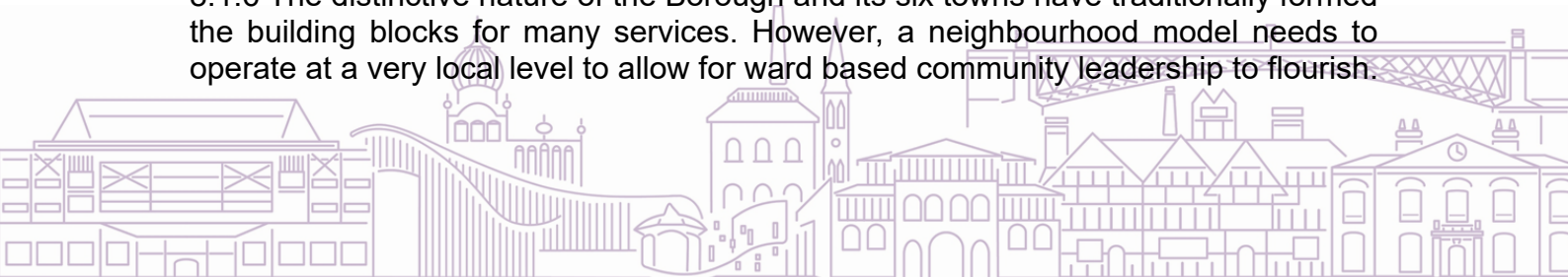
8.1.7 There is no significant obstacle to ward based activity combined with town based leadership and activities. This will require a refreshing and enhancing of the role of Town Leads with a strategic role being adopted and an audit of which functions should principally operate and report to Town level. Public Health matters for example may legitimately be considered at a multi ward level across the six towns. Each directorate should define what services can be delivered on a borough-wide, town and ward level.

8.1.8 The model would also require a refresh and rationalisation of meetings at both town and ward level to best direct limited resources and provide clarity to officers. Attendance of service areas at such meetings needs to be meaningful and could benefit from a clear cross-council protocol.

8.2 New Neighbourhoods Team

8.2.1 The refreshed approach relies on collaboration, reducing duplication and ensuring consistency of approach. The two teams that currently have the largest stake in neighbourhood working (Neighbourhood Engagement Team and Neighbourhood Partnerships Team) should be merged into a new Neighbourhoods Team under the Assistant Chief Executive's unit. To enable the transition, it is recommended that a senior officer appointment is made on an interim basis to steer and direct early implementation.

8.2.2 This would enable the function not to be just service based and also have a critical mass to be effective. New roles and responsibilities would be defined to support ward and town based working and by consolidation into one team there would also be scope for reducing the overall staffing costs by 20-30%.

8.2.3 While Housing, ASB and Public Health are organised on a six town basis and are locality based services, it isn't necessary for them to co-join the new central team. Nonetheless, the model relies on collaboration and close working, and this should continue and be enhanced.

8.2.4 In particular, the ASB team is very important to the success of the new model and the Council could consider the location of the team going forward to optimise the ability to work alongside the new Neighbourhoods Team.

8.3 Ward Based Budgets to Support Neighbourhood Working

8.3.1 As is outlined in Section 6.4.2 above, there are some existing budgets that are administered by service areas in support of neighbourhood working and community development matters.

8.3.2 It is recommended that these are revisited, and the Local Area Budget and Innovation Fund be deleted, and the following budget package is introduced to be administered by the new Neighbourhoods Team:

- **CIL** – no change to system proposed. Mechanisms for elected member involvement / bidding processes and decision making to be reviewed and disseminated.
- **Ward Budgets** – a new budget for each elected member to bid into for ward based issues and initiatives and delivery of ward plan priorities. Budgets can be combined with fellow ward members if desired. New protocol for probity and good governance should be adopted by Council to include a 'menu' of applicable uses of the new budget.
Recommendation initially is within the range £1500 – £2000 per member and is to be reviewed annually. To be funded partially from LAB, Innovation budget and a proportion of the savings from the creation of the new Neighbourhoods Team.
- **Events budget** – from the current LAB and remains at £30,000 (£5000 per town).
- **Neighbourhoods support grants** – for local ward or town based initiatives or supporting community groups relating to priorities in ward plans on a bidding and assessment process. Criteria and awarding process to be developed and approved by Council. Recommended total is £60,000.

8.3.3 Further financial details in Section 10.2 below.

8.4 Ward Plans and Ward Profiles

8.4.1 Findings from the other authorities that have been researched have used ward plans and ward profiles as tools to enrich neighbourhood working.

8.4.2 Ward profiles can be greatly assisted by the wealth of data from the team at Sandwell trends. It is recommended that ward profiles should be incorporated into ward plans.

8.4.3 Some preparatory work is currently being done on ward plans led by the Neighbourhood Engagement Team. As the process continues there needs to be a planned roll out and the template and constituent elements of ward plans needs to have wider corporate buy in from service areas and members.

8.4.4 Ward plans should be concise and set ward-based priorities which should be a mix of:

- Corporate priorities – ensuring the golden thread to corporate plans and service plans.
- Political priorities – such as those that may arise from walkabout action planning.
- Data and insight – evidence-based issues. This would also include the rich data from MyCouncillor portal and MySandwell to identify hotspots and be a basis for targeting resources.
- Resident's priorities – including any issues arising from resident's surveys.
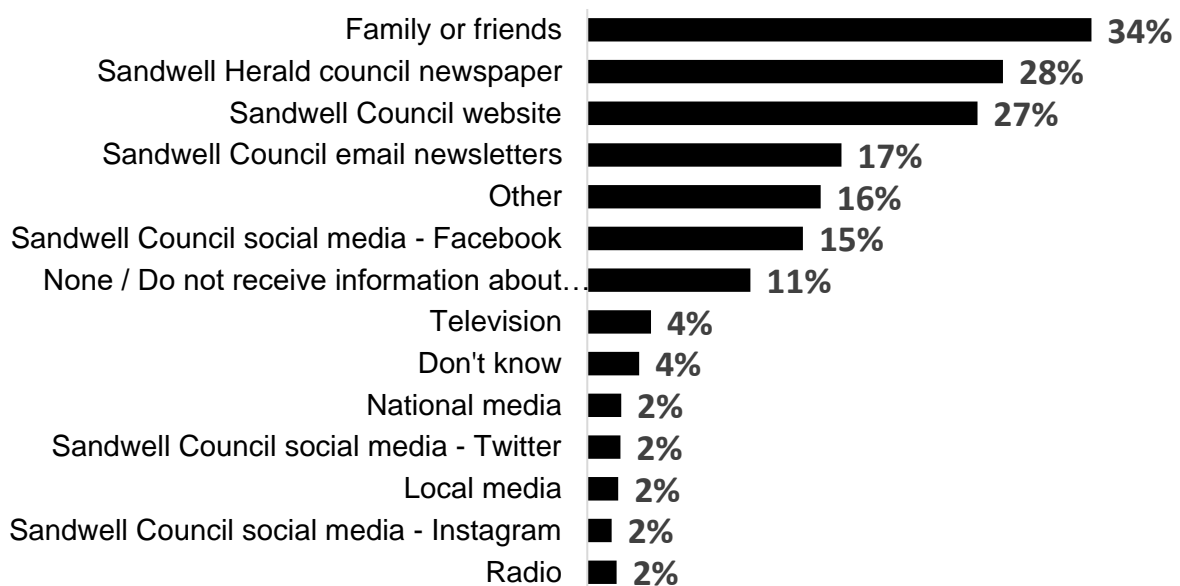
- Work programmes for key service areas detailed annual planned investment in wards.
-

8.5 Locality Communications

8.5.1 From the research into other Council's approaches to successful neighbourhood working, a common theme has been the use of targeted and effective communications to support and promote local matters and issues.

8.5.2 The Communications team have advised of the optimum channels to reach residents in localities. A web-based newsletter at regular frequencies is recommended. Debate has been had in the Steering Group about the merits of Town based newsletters versus ward based newsletters. The latter option is likely to better support the new model better. A good example is the Rotherham newsletter.

8.5.3 The charts below we produced as part of the Council Residents' Survey (Appendix 2) and show how residents get their news about what is happening in Sandwell and what the Council is doing.

Source	Percentage
Family or friends	34%
Sandwell Herald council newspaper	28%
Sandwell Council website	27%
Sandwell Council email newsletters	17%
Other	16%
Sandwell Council social media - Facebook	15%
None / Do not receive information about…	11%
Television	4%
Don't know	4%
National media	2%
Sandwell Council social media - Twitter	2%
Local media	2%
Sandwell Council social media - Instagram	2%
Radio	2%

8.5.4 The Council could consider what resources may be available from any savings to strengthen and supplement the communications resources dedicated to neighbourhood working.

8.6 Customer Journey and Customer 'Front Door'

8.6.1 There is a clear tension which emerged as part of the review between the drive for channel shift and use of the portal as the 'front 'door 'and self-monitoring tool for casework and the desire for less rigidity over the routes for casework to be reported.
8.6.2 One participant in the review perceptively observed that there should be 'no wrong front door' for residents, tenants, and Councillors.

8.6.3 The benefits of the portals (both resident and Councillors) are that they provide a readily accessible route to channel casework and monitor performance. They need to remain the front-line tools for caseload management, but the model needs to involve some flexibility. Many service areas have already recognised this, but this is not consistent, and the forthcoming review of the Customer Journey should assist with this.

8.7 Councillors in their Neighbourhoods

8.7.1 A clear advantage of the proposed new model is the creation of a single team to be the focal point for neighbourhood working matters. Councillors should be better supported to act as community leaders working with local people and communities to tackle identified priorities. The chart below is a visual expression of those community leadership behaviours for councillors.

8.8 Outcomes, Accountability and Governance

8.8.1 The implementation of the model will create a number of expectations.

8.8.2 In terms of measuring success of the Strong and Resilient Neighbourhoods Strategy it would be prudent to include measures as part of the corporate performance framework and service planning. This should demonstrate how neighbourhood working is contributing to delivery of the Sandwell Vision 2030.

8.8.3 Other actions should be considered and include:

- Annual ward and town reports- to be presented to Council.
- Quarterly updates on ward based activity to Cabinet.

- Publication of a Statement on annual ward budget, Events Budget and Neighbourhood Support Fund, detailing spending and how Councillors have invested in their neighbourhoods.
- An annual report to Cabinet and Council including a review of the Strategy and annual resource allocation.

9. The Strong and Resilient Neighbourhoods Strategy

9.1 The attached (Appendix 1) Strong and Resilient Neighbourhoods Strategy identifies and conveys what the Council wishes to achieve in its neighbourhoods and as a framework for implementing the new Neighbourhood working model.

9.2 It is recommended that the Strategy should be reviewed annually.

9.3 An integral element of the model would be to ensure that actions, requests and spending follows locally determined priorities and for 'knee jerk' actions to be avoided.
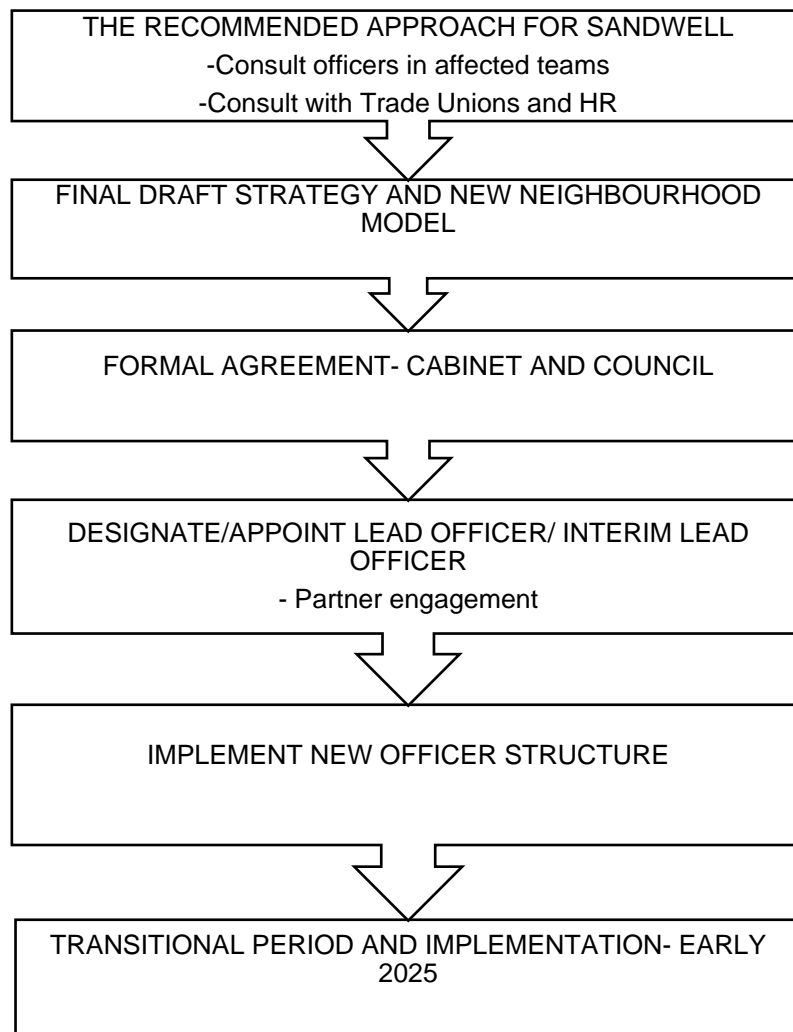
10. Implementing the Model

10.1 The Process

10.1.1 The implementation of the model will require a transitional period that will include some key aspects such as:

- Consultation with staff over new ways of working pursuant to the ambitions of the model for collaborative working.
- Detailed consultation with affected staff and unions over the implementation of the new Sandwell Neighbourhoods Team.
- Partner and voluntary sector engagement.
- Preparation and agreement of new documentation including ward profiles, ward plans.
- Setting up and agreement to the detail of new ward budgets and grant and associated governance arrangements.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      THE RECOMMENDED APPROACH FOR SANDWELL       │
│        -Consult officers in affected teams       │
│        -Consult with Trade Unions and HR         │
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                        ↓
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│  FINAL DRAFT STRATEGY AND NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD       │
│                    MODEL                          │
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│      FORMAL AGREEMENT- CABINET AND COUNCIL        │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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│  DESIGNATE/APPOINT LEAD OFFICER/ INTERIM LEAD     │
│                   OFFICER                          │
│              - Partner engagement                 │
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│         IMPLEMENT NEW OFFICER STRUCTURE           │
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│  TRANSITIONAL PERIOD AND IMPLEMENTATION- EARLY    │
│                     2025                          │
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10.1.2 Once embedded, the integration of further service areas could be considered as future phases of the model.

10.2 Financial Implications

10.2.1 The recommendations have financial implications. It is assumed that up to a 20-30% reduction in staffing costs could be targeted from the creation of the new single Neighbourhoods Team and workforce efficiencies which could be up to £300K p.a.

10.2.2 The annual CIL budget is variable depending on the available funds and housing completions in each town. No changes are proposed to the current system.

10.2.3 The other budgets currently available are Local Area Budget (£90K including £30K for events) and the Innovation Fund totalling £76500 per annum.

10.2.4 The creation of the new budget and grant package to support neighbourhood working would be as follows:

- CIL – no change (generally in recent years spend has been between £40K and £80K)
- Ward Budgets- £1500-£2000 per ward member. Maximum total cost per annum £144,000
- Events Budget – Retain existing £30,000 (£5K per town)
- Neighbourhoods Support Grant- new support grant totalling £90,000 per annum

10.2.5 The total cost of the new package (excluding CIL) would be £198,000-£234,000 to be met from salary savings in service restructure (up to 70k) and transfer of a proportion of funds from existing LAB (90k) and Innovation Fund (£76.5k). The funding mix would reflect the mix of available General Fund and HRA monies from any establishment savings.

11. Alternative Options Considered as Part of the Review.

11.1. Alternative options to the recommended model of neighbourhood working:

Option	For	Against
No Change	• The current services and structures would remain unaffected and without upheaval. • Links with partners and some community groups are strong.	• The Council would not achieve a more consistent governance of neighbourhood working and options for better outcomes would be limited. • Contrary to wishes of members for better working and outcomes at a locality level and improved customer journey. • The Council has corporate vision for strong and resilient communities. • Scope for improvement limited by current silo working.
Structural Matters		
A larger scale integration of the 5 identified teams involved in neighbourhood working	• Opportunity to create large integrated team to deliver outcomes for neighbourhood working.	• Complicated funding structures involving HRA, general fund and public health funding. • Scale would mean Implementation would be complex and slow. • No evidence that better outcomes would result (if collaboration ethos is adopted to mitigate silo working). • Teams are involved in other matters beyond neighbourhood working.

Involvement and integration of wider Council services	• Would enhance opportunities for casework resolution at locality level. • Would increase the accountability of service areas for performance and delivery at locality level.	• Would add to complexity of early implementation (future phased involvement could occur). • Some teams are already set up to work at locality level. • May cause some additional funding complexities.
Democratic Matters		
A Town based model	• Would build on the existing Town Lead and Town meeting model. • Would respect the strong town identities. • Many teams and partners are already set up at this level.	• Would limit the opportunity to work at a more local level. • Wards and neighbourhoods within towns can differ significantly in terms of needs, priorities and local issues. • Ward members would have a limited role. • Unlikely to achieve very locality-based outcomes.
A ward-based model	• Would enable a very local platform for neighbourhood working to be created. • Would build on some existing delivery and structures such as ward meetings and walkabouts. • Would give ward members a stronger community leadership role.	• Would dismantle town-based working and leadership. • Could reduce strong town identity across Sandwell. • Small scale may exclude some partner engagement and strategic service involvement in important matters.
A multi ward/ cluster model	• Would follow approach by some other Councils. • Would possibly reduce costs of support to model.	• Sandwell already has a multi ward model trough the town-based structures. • Would not create the ward-based

		community leadership for Councillors of a more localised model and may result in some tensions over local priorities.
	• Could enable adjacent wards to collaborate on matters of common interest when setting local priorities.	• No evidence that it would be a better structural approach than others. • Creates another set of 'building blocks and commensurate structures which are not needed in a Borough such as Sandwell.
Financial Matters		
Change funding model to general fund only	• Would simplify the funding of neighbourhood working. • Additional funding would allow for more staffing to support model or additional grant funding to support local initiatives and casework matters.	• Unlikely to be an affordable or sustainable approach. • HRA and general fund approach reflects the mixed tenure communities within Sandwell better. • No legal concerns over existing funding mix (subject to focus of any adopted neighbourhood working approach).
Use additional HRA funding to support a new model	• Could better reflect the focus of spending in localities.	• Services operate on a wider community level than just focus on the public sector housing stock. • Would create pressure on HRA budgets and tenancy services.
Increase overall funding to support a new model	• Will allow headroom for increased locality-based working and activity.	• The increased investment is likely to be unsustainable due to pressures on local

	• Could create larger grant and funding budgets for members ward budgets and community initiatives.	government funding and the MTFS. • A new model can be created by efficiencies in the current approaches without committing additional expenditure.