

Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday 11 September 2024 at 3.30 pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Carmichael (Leader of the Council and Chair);
Councillor K Allcock, S Gill, Hartwell, Hughes, Moore, Smith,
and Uddin.

In attendance: Councillor E M Giles.

Officers: James McLaughlin (Assistant Chief Executive); Alex
Thompson (Executive Director - Finance and Transformation);
Alan Lunt (Executive Director – Place); Mike Jones (Assistant
Director – Legal and Assurance); Sally Giles (Director –
Children and Education); Mandip Chahal (Interim Assistant
Director Commissioning; Partnerships and Improvement); Ian
Dunn (Revenue and Benefits Service Manager); Matthew
More (Communications and Corporate Affairs Manager);
Claire Tate (Interim Commissioning Manager); Kelly Harris
(Skills and Employability Service Manager); Suky Suthi-Nagra
(Democratic and Member Services Manager) and Connor
Robinson (Democratic Services Officer).

86/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Taylor,
Dhatt, Fenton and Lewis.

87/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

88/24 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024 are approved as a correct record.

89/24 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider as a matter of urgency.

90/24 **Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring 2024/25**

Cabinet received the financial monitoring position as at 30 June 2024 and approval was sought for the budget virements and additional budget allocations related to the General Fund Capital Programme.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources stated that the financial situation remained challenging, he however, was happy with the Council's present financial situation. The quarterly report enabled the Cabinet to identify any shortfalls and pressures within the budget to consider if any corrective action was required and was an integral part of the transparency and accountability of the Council and its finances.

Reason for Decision

Section 151 of the 1972 Local Government Act required the Chief Financial Officer to ensure the proper administration of the council's financial affairs. Budgetary control, which included the regular monitoring and reporting of budgets, was an essential element in discharging this statutory responsibility. The reporting and analysis of financial performance versus budget supported the financial sustainability of the Council.

Alternative Options Considered

Value for money and vacancy management expenditure controls were in place across the Council at present. No further cross-council management action was proposed at this stage. Mitigations would be considered within specific budget areas to address overspends locally.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Cabinet receives the financial monitoring position as at 30 June 2024 (Quarter 1) and refers the report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment;
- (2) that in respect of the Revenue Budget, approval is given to the following budget virements above £1m in line with the revised delegated limits for Cabinet Members and Directors: -

Virements above £1m for approval by Cabinet		£'000	£'000
Place - Housing	Transfer of budgets relating to supported housing contracts (now to be administered and delivered by Housing)	1,233	
People - Adult Social Care	Transfer of budgets relating to supported housing contracts (now to be administered and delivered by Housing)		1,233
TOTAL		1,233	1,233

- (3) that in respect of the Capital Programme, approval is given to the allocation of £3.906m additional budget to the General Fund Capital Programme in relation to the Oracle Fusion project;
- (4) that in respect of the Capital Programme, approval is given to the allocation of £2.000m additional budget to the General Fund Capital Programme in relation to the Haden Hill Leisure Centre project.

91/24

Council Tax Reduction Consultation for 2025-26

Approval was sought for the Council Tax Reduction Consultation for 2025-26. To support the Council's duty to provide a balanced budget, the Council was proposing to make changes to its working age Council Tax Reduction scheme for the financial year 2025/26. If the proposed changes were made to the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2025/26, Sandwell would still have a generous scheme compared to other local authorities both regionally and nationally.

The Council was unable to make any changes to the scheme for pension age applicants. A further report would be considered by Cabinet following the consultation.

Reason for Decision

Council Tax Reduction was introduced by the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and placed a duty on all billing authorities to create a local scheme for all working age applicants.

Each year the Council was required to review its Council Tax Reduction Scheme in accordance with the requirements of the schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to either maintain the scheme or replace it. Any new scheme must be approved by Full Council no later than 11 March prior to the new financial year.

Alternative Options Considered

Any changes to Council Tax Reduction were difficult and clearly affect the households with the lowest incomes.

The Council could keep the Council Tax Reduction scheme the same as it is for 2025/26 but it would have to make service reductions or find alternative funding for services from elsewhere.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given for the Council to consult with the major precepting authorities and to undertake a six-week public consultation (and other affected parties) on the proposed changes which the Council will consider to the Working Age Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2025/26 as follows:
 - to introduce a minimum payment (limiting the level of support available to working age applicants);
 - to remove the carer allowance disregard;
 - to remove the earnings disregard; and
 - to cap the Council Tax band used to calculate Council Tax Reduction.

- (2) that the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation submit a further report on the outcome of the consultation referred to above in Resolution (1) above prior to the adoption of a final Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2025/26.

Approval of Property Compliance Policy

Approval was sought for the Property Compliance Policy. The Council operated in the spirit of co-regulation with the Regulator for Social Housing. The Council also have important working relationships with some of the local regulators such as other departments within the Council and local fire services as well as national regulators such as the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive. The Policy set out the landlord's approach to ensure it remained compliant with current and any future legislation.

Reason for Decision

As a social landlord, the Council operated in a unique regulatory environment whereby the effect of any non-conformance with regulatory requirements could be amplified through the impact on the Council's relationship with the Regulator for Social Housing, and notably their assessment of the Council's governance arrangements and the performance in meeting the Decent Homes Standard.

Alternative Options Considered

The Council could not have a Property Compliance Policy, however this would not be an appropriate option as the Council needed to demonstrate the approach to being a regulatorily compliant landlord. As a result, this option had been discounted.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to the Property Compliance Policy for Sandwell's Housing Stock;
- (2) that the Executive Director – Place be authorised to make any necessary amendments to the Property Compliance Policy for Sandwell's Housing Stock to ensure it remains compliant with regulatory requirements.

Funding for Major Capital Projects

Approval was sought for Funding for Major Capital Projects. The projects related to the refurbishment of the low and high blocks including Alfred Gunn House, Darley House, The Lakes and Thorn Close.

Following a robust review and analysis of the projects in question by the Place Directorate management team now responsible for delivery of the schemes, the requirement for additional resources to ensure completion and to enable the letting of all 349 affected dwellings involved, had been identified. Having considered alternative courses of action, the option to continuing to invest in these assets represented better value for money to the Council than alternative options.

It was recognised that historically, the Council's approach to the approval of major capital projects had been based on budget estimates rather than contractor tender returns. This in turn had resulted in budget approvals not reflecting the prevailing market conditions and realistic project costs.

Reason for Decision

The Cabinet decision of 18 October 2017 approved the Housing Revenue Account Investment Programme, which included the proposed refurbishment of 13 high rise blocks not already refurbished under the decent homes programme. This included proposed improvements to Alfred Gunn House and Darley House. Subsequent Cabinet decisions of 29 September 2022 and 23 March 2022 approved the refurbishments of The Lakes and Thorn Close respectively.

A review of scheme development, contractor procurement and project management in respect of these four projects had been undertaken and several areas of concern identified. These included inadequate project management practices, avoidable delays, and the subsequent requirement to instruct contractors to undertake additional works, all of which had led to significant additional cost. This was despite the lowest tender submissions being selected for appointment in all four cases.

Officers would ensure that all future expenditure was rigorously managed and that claims submitted by contractors were thoroughly assessed to ensure that only justifiable claims were approved.

Alternative Options Considered

Option 1 - Make no further investment and allocate the resources to other capital projects.

Option 1 was considered not to represent best value on the basis that the projects would be left incomplete. This option was therefore dismissed.

Option 2 - Termination of contracts with the current contractors and re-tendering the remaining works was also an option.

The implications of not completing the works would be that the projects were left unfinished, and it would be both challenging and expensive in procuring the services of a contractor to complete the project. The accommodation would also not be lettable, resulting in void rent loss. Option 2 was therefore dismissed.

Option 3 – Making Further Investment and Completing Refurbishment

The implications of not completing the works would be that the projects were left unfinished, and it would be both challenging and expensive in procuring the services of a contractor to complete the project. The accommodation would also not be lettable, resulting in significant void rent loss. There was also a continuing cost of decanting, with affected tenants being entitled to home loss and disturbance payments reflecting the disruption caused. The Council did not currently have sufficient vacant units to re-house decanted tenants into permanent accommodation. Given current rates of turnover in the general needs housing stock, it would take a considerable period of time to re-house permanently all temporarily displaced tenants if refurbishment were not completed. Completing refurbishment works and letting all units would negate these issues.

More than £55million had already been spent on refurbishment, the cost of which would be irrecoverable if schemes were not completed. Completing the refurbishment on the other hand would result in 349 fully refurbished, high-quality units being available for letting, for which there was significant demand, providing good quality safe and well-maintained accommodation.

On this basis, Option 3 was considered to represent best value.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given for an additional budget allocation totalling £17.768m to complete the refurbishment of the following low and high blocks:-
 - Alfred Gunn House - £6.904m
 - Darley House - £5.289m
 - The Lakes - £4.783m
 - Thorn Close - £0.792m

- (2) that Council be recommended to increase the 2024/25 Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme by £17.768m to reflect the reprofiling of the capital budget and the increased costs of delivery in relation to Resolution (1) above;
- (3) that the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation, is authorised to remodel the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Investment Programme to accommodate the increased costs set out at (1) above;
- (4) that the Executive Director Place, in consultation with the Executive Director, Finance and Transformation and the Monitoring Officer/Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance, is authorised to appoint a suitably qualified and experienced construction professional to undertake a detailed post completion review of the projects identified and to make such recommendations for improvement in the management of major capital contracts as they may see fit.

94/24

Approval to publish the Sandwell Local Plan

Approval was sought for the publication of the Sandwell Local Plan under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The Sandwell Local Plan resulted from extensive work which had taken place since 2016 when the process of producing the Black Country Plan began. A significant body of technical evidence had been produced for the Black Country Plan and this had been used to inform the Sandwell Local Plan. The evidence included Sandwell's future housing need, the employment land need and supply, and studies of town centres, waste, minerals and environmental studies including flood risk and greenbelt.

Following the initial Issues and options consultation in early 2023, the Council had consulted on a Draft Sandwell Local Plan in November/December 2023. Organisations, consultants, landowners, developers, the public and anyone else were invited to make representations on the draft plan between 6 November and 15 December 2023. The Council received 653 representations from

66 individual respondents. The main issues arose from the consultation were reported to the Cabinet on 26 July 2023.

Reason for Decision

It was a statutory requirement of every Local Planning Authority to have an up-to-date Local Plan. Following the demise of the Black Country Plan in 2022, Sandwell had produced its own plan – the Sandwell Local Plan. The previous Government had expressed a desire to see full Local Plan coverage across England by December 2023, with the last date for submitting a revised local plan under the current system being 30 June 2025. Consequently, officers had been working to a timetable that would enable the Sandwell Local Plan to be submitted prior to that date.

It was imperative that the Council sought to consult on and submit the emerging Local Plan for examination as quickly as possible to take advantage of the transitional arrangements.

Should the Local Plan be found 'sound' at examination and adopted by the Council, the consultation version of the National Planning Policy Framework would require the Council to commence a review of the Local Plan at the earliest opportunity. This was because the housing requirement within the emerging Local Plan was more than 200 dwellings lower than the proposed mandatory housing target for Sandwell.

Alternative Options Considered

The preparation of a Local Plan was a statutory requirement under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The process for preparing a Local Plan was set out in additional legislation and guidance. As a result, there were no alternative solutions to the preparation of a new local plan for Sandwell, which was a matter of increasing urgency.

Resolved:-

- (1) that, in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, approval be given to the Publication of the Sandwell Local Plan, Sustainability Appraisal Reports and other material required for the publication (attached as appendices), for a period of six weeks commencing on 23 September 2024;

(2) that Council be recommended to authorise the Executive Director - Place to submit, following publication and consultation, the Sandwell Local Plan, Sustainability Appraisal and all other appropriate documents, including any duly made representations, to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for Examination in Public under Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012;

(3) that the Executive Director - Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Infrastructure, is authorised to make minor and other necessary amendments, if required, to the Sandwell Local Plan and its associated documents, prior to its Publication and Submission.

95/24

A4123 Bus, Cycle and Walking Corridor

Approval was sought for the A4123 Bus, Cycle and Walking Corridor. The A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor project formed part of the West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport programme for funding period 2022-27.

Approval in principle for the A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor project had been granted at Cabinet on 7 February 2024.

Three options had been investigated in the initial feasibility stage of the scheme of which two were presented to Cabinet in February 2024. These were;

Option B – This option included junction improvements at key locations to improve safety and operation, with limited bus priority measures along with a fully segregated bi-directional cycle track along the full length of the route; and

Option C – This option included full bus priority (bus lanes) along the entire corridor as well as junction improvements at key locations to improve safety and operation, and a fully segregated bi-directional cycle track along the full length of the route.

A further minimum interventions option (Option A) was discounted prior to the project being reported to Cabinet as it did not meet the project's aims and objectives.

Reason for Decision

It was recommended that Option B be approved as the preferred scheme to be further developed through detailed design and to Full Business Case stage.

The modelling work showed that service 126 (Dudley to Birmingham) would benefit from a reduction in journey times of approximately 7 minutes southbound and 4 minutes northbound. Whilst these were not insignificant savings per journey, the service only operates at a 15-minute frequency so only four buses per hour would derive this benefit, and only at peak times. Off-peak journey times would reduce only by 30 seconds or so.

It was therefore recommended that the bus priority measures that make up Option C were not progressed and that the project proceeds along the lines of Option B with a full segregated bi-directional cycle route and some of the junction improvement measures, as set out in that report. Junction improvements would include cycle and pedestrian facilities, safety improvements and, where modelling demonstrates that benefits are derived, bus priority measures.

All junction improvements were subject to further detailed design and modelling analysis before final approval could be sought.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative options were set out in the report to Cabinet on 7 February 2024. This report dealt with the outcome of the resulting analysis to finalise the preferred option.

Resolved that approval is given to the A4123 Bus, Cycle & Walking Corridor Option B (Cycle route and limited bus priority) as the basis for detailed design and Full Business Case preparation.

96/24

Recommissioning of NHS Health Checks

Approval was sought for the recommissioning of NHS Health Checks. A report had been taken to Cabinet in July 2022 for approval to procure a contract for two years. Although the wish had been to contract with GP practices, it had not been permissible at that time to restrict the tender to GP practices. The report therefore had recommended a procurement for the service for two years, which would also allow for changes in the local health economy to take place, as the Integrated Care Partnership was established.

With the introduction of the Provider Selection Regime on 1 January 2024, there was now more flexibility to contract with GP practices and the initial 2-year term of the current contract was due to come to an end on 13 February 2025.

Preliminary engagement with the Primary Care Collaborative, a group comprising of Clinical Directors of Primary Care Networks had indicated that there was general support among GP practices for this service to be delivered from primary care.

Reason for Decision

NHS Health Checks was a programme for people aged 40–74 without pre-existing conditions. It aimed to support the early identification of conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure to reduce the risk of ill health and early death. It also provided an opportunity for individuals to receive lifestyle advice and onward referral for support, such as to smoking cessation services.

Local authorities had a statutory responsibility to arrange for eligible individuals to be offered an NHS Health Check once every 5 years. The service was funded from the ring-fenced Public Health Grant that Sandwell Council receives from central government; NHS Health Checks was a 'prescribed function' of the grant.

Alternative Options Considered

Extend the current service for up to 12 months and recommission a new service to begin after this date. The current contract allowed for an extension of up to 12 months (until February 2026).

This option was not recommended. Due to the introduction of the Provider Selection Regime on 1 January 2024, Sandwell Public Health team work more closely with GP practices in Sandwell. This would mean that there was improved integration between NHS Health Checks and GP practices, supporting overall health outcomes. This was not stating that this was the only option; however, procurement processes had changed nationally and this was now an option available.

Cease provision of the service at the end of the current contract.

This was not a viable alternative as this was a statutory function of the Public Health Funding as stipulated in the grant requirements. This decision would be subject to national scrutiny. It may also lead to challenge on the Council's use of the Public Health Grant. It

would also miss the opportunity for the early identification of health risks and provision of personalised lifestyle advice to Sandwell residents.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to recommission NHS Health Check services;
- (2) that the Interim Director of Public Health be authorised to undertake a procurement exercise for the provision of NHS Health Check services to commence on 1 April 2025 for a period of 3 years, with an option to extend for up to a further 2 years, with a budget of up to £320,000 per year, with a maximum total of £1,600,000 funded from the Council's annual Public Health Grant over the entire permissible contract term;
- (3) that in connection with Resolution (2), the Interim Director of Public Health be authorised to award and enter into a contract(s) with the successful bidder(s), on terms to be agreed by the Interim Director of Public Health, for the provision of NHS Health Check services, to commence on 1 April 2025;
- (4) that approval is given to make an exemption to rule 8.8 of the Council's contract procedure rules, which requires that three tenders are obtained for contracts over £100,000;
- (5) that approval is given to make variations to the contract(s) up to a maximum of 10% of the contract value, should they be necessitated, and that authority to approve such variations be delegated to the appropriate Director of Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing;
- (6) that the Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance enter into and execute, under seal as may be required, any contracts or ancillary documentation necessary to give effect to the proposals in these recommendations for the provision of NHS Health Check services.

Transforming SEND Home-to-School Transport Services

Approval was sought for the Transforming SEND Home-to-School Transport Services. Nationally, spending and demand on and for home-to-school transport was escalating. Sandwell was no exception and had been experiencing this pressure from demand and in 2024/25 had increased the budget from in the region of £7m in 2023/24 to £19m in 2024/25, to accommodate the transport needs of young people and their parents / carers. The purpose of the diagnostic had been to identify a range of approaches to achieving efficiencies and reducing spend.

SEND transport formed a part of the Corporate Transformation Programme, Newton Europe had been appointed through the Corporate Transformation Team to support the Council for a 10-week period from 29 April 2024 to 5 July 2024, working with teams across services to deliver the key output of the diagnostic report on time in July 2024. The diagnostic assessment highlighted several key issues and opportunities for improvement within the current system.

Whilst it had focussed on SEND transport, the diagnostic process and report had acknowledged the interdependencies and interrelationships with broader end to end SEND statutory processes, also currently subject to transformation.

Delivering the required level of change while maintaining business as usual would necessitate a range of skills, sector-specific knowledge, and additional capacity. Procuring an experienced implementation partner would provide sustained capacity, consistent experience, and proven models of change delivered at scale.

Reason for Decision

National spending on home-to-school transport was forecasted to reach £2b by the financial year 2027/28. Sandwell, like many councils, had been experiencing increasing budget pressures. Local benchmarking indicated that Sandwell's home-to-school transport trend may be up to twice the expected level at current demand levels.

Demand for home-to-school transport in Sandwell had significantly increased from 600 to just over 1000 students annually, with this trend expected to continue.

Work was initiated in 2023 within children's services teams to address these pressures, with progress reports regularly provided to the Strategic Leadership Team and other key stakeholders, this had formed the platform and basis for the appointment of external diagnostic support to underpin the transformation work in this area.

The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy had identified £700k savings for 2024/25 and there was a potential budget pressure of up to £7m. A diagnostic exercise undertaken by Newton Europe had supported the Council to identify potential areas of efficiency and delivery changes which spanned the period from 2025/26 and 2028/29.

Alternative Options Considered

Do Nothing – This option was not viable as the Council had a statutory duty to provide home-to-school travel for eligible children and young people. The diagnostic forecasting model indicated that costs could increase significantly under a 'do nothing' scenario.

Deliver Transformation Within Existing Teams - Delivering the transformation without an external partner would likely extend the delivery timeframe, impacting the ability to realise identified savings. An external partner's experience with tried and tested models of change was essential for timely and effective implementation.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the findings of the diagnostic undertaken by Newton Europe in relation to Transforming SEND Home-to-School Transport Services;
- (2) that the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation is authorised to identify appropriate one-off funding to specify, appoint and procure further external support to progress the identified transformation opportunities within the Council's SEND services to deliver a quantum of the identified savings within this diagnostic report, aligned to the requirement to demonstrate value for money and return on investment;
- (3) that the Director of Finance and Transformation works with the Senior Leadership Team and members to align key strategic efficiency and transformation opportunities for SEND end to end services to the Council Plan,

statutory provisions and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, in particular where the impact of these changes is likely to result in significant impact for children and young people, their parents or carers schools and transport operators.

98/24

Extension of contract for a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust board

Approval was sought for the extension of contract for a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust board. The terms of appointment of the independent non-executive directors was a reserved matter as per the Article of Association. Following the completion of the required process to consult the Secretary of State, and to take into account their response, the Cabinet was recommended to agree the recommendations for the extension of contract.

Reason for Decision

The appointment of the non-Executive Director Linda Sanders took effect from 1 November 2017 and was for an initial term of 5 years. This had been extended in November 2022 for a further two years. The Board wished to secure some continuity of non-executive director following a period that had seen a number of changes to the Board over a short period.

The Council had written to the Secretary of State requesting consent to extend this appointment for a period of up to three years from 1 November 2024. DfE officials had confirmed via email that the Secretary of State for Education had not raised any objections to the extension.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative option would be to reject the recommendation. However, in line with the Governance Side Agreement with the DfE and the Trust's Articles of Association there would be a vacancy on the Board that would still need to be filled. An alternative candidate would need to be identified via a competitive process and the process of consulting with the Secretary of State would need to be undertaken again. This would leave a potential gap in the governance arrangements of the Trust for a period.

Resolved that Cabinet, on behalf of the Council as the sole owner of Sandwell Children's Trust:

- a) receives the completed sequence of events that are contractually required to extend the contract of a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust board;
- b) receives and takes into account in its decision-making, the response from the Secretary of State for Education;
- c) agrees the extension of contract of Linda Sanders as a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust for a period of up to three years from 1 November 2024; and
- d) agrees a 6% uplift in remuneration for the independent non-executive directors.

99/24

Deed of Extension and Variation - Funding Agreement for Adult Education Budget and Free Courses for Jobs

Approval was sought for the deed of extension and variation for the funding agreement for adult Education budget and free courses for jobs. Sandwell Adult Family Learning (SAFL) currently delivered the adult education offer that was funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). The funding received from WMCA paid for the whole of the SAFL service. Around 1,500 learners choose to learn with SAFL each year and take part in a wide range of courses in English, Maths and ICT. English and Maths were offered up to Functional Skills Level 2, which was recognised as equivalent to a GCSE for employment purposes; Level 2 in Digital Skills was also offered. Funding from WMCA was confirmed annually, with the allocation for 24/25 being set at £1.33m.

Reason for Decision

The WMCA first devolution deal was formally agreed by the Combined Authority Shadow Board on 17 November 2015. The agreement included the transfer of adult skills funding (Adult Education Budget) to the WMCA and the subsequent Order establishing the Combined Authority contained details of a number of Adult Education powers although it did not deal with the devolution of funding.

The devolution of the Adult Education Budget was completed in 2018 with the WMCA having the duty and responsibility to deliver the government's commitment to statutory entitlements for fully funded qualifications at Levels 2 and 3, English and Maths and the future digital entitlements for learners, free of charge.

The WMCA had offered Sandwell £1.33m for 2024/25 for the provision of adult education. Approval was required to enter into grant agreements with the WMCA to accept this funding and future funding for the provision of adult education.

Alternative Options Considered

The Council could choose not to accept the funding offered by WMCA, however, given that if fully funds the Sandwell Adult Family Learning service, the Council would need to close this service, this would create a budget pressure for the Council. There would be significant impact on residents as they would no longer be able to access the courses provided by Sandwell Adult Family Learning.

Resolved that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education and the Director of Children and Education in conjunction with the Executive Director - Finance and Transformation be authorised to accept grants from West Midlands Combined Authority under the Terms and Conditions contained in the Grant Agreements for the provision of adult education.

Meeting ended at 4.00pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk