

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-2024



Introduction

This report provides an overview of the work of Sandwell Council's five scrutiny boards over the 2023-24 municipal year.

Scrutiny is a vital part of the Council's governance arrangements; holding to account decision makers and helping to identify where improvements can be made in policy and service delivery.

In Sandwell there is a Scrutiny Management Board, which maintains oversight of the Council's finances and corporate functions (e.g. human resources) and four thematic boards with oversight of the Council's outward facing services (e.g. housing, health and social care, education and environmental services) to deliver the scrutiny function. There are also arrangements in place with Birmingham City Council for the joint scrutiny of health-related matters affecting residents that live in the area covered by Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust.

How does Scrutiny work?

Each board develops a work programme at the start of each municipal year to prioritise its work and ensure that there is sufficient focus on key issues affecting the Council and the people of Sandwell. Work programmes remain flexible however, to ensure that scrutiny has capacity to respond to any new issues.

The boards carry out scrutiny activity in a variety of ways including in-depth reviews, receiving reports and presentations on singular items/decisions, undertaking site visits, conducting surveys, reviewing existing national/local data, and hearing evidence from expert witnesses.



A particularly effective type of scrutiny is called “pre-decision scrutiny” which is where a Board looks at an important strategy decision before Cabinet makes any decision on it. This allows early involvement and the potential to influence the decision to make sure it is the best it can be.

Scrutiny boards also have ‘Call-In’ powers to scrutinise Cabinet decisions after they have been taken by the Cabinet, but before they are implemented, and can make recommendations to the Cabinet that it must consider before the decision can be actioned.

Scrutiny Chairs 2023-2024



Councillor Paul Moore
Budget and Corporate
Scrutiny Management Board



Councillor Elaine Giles
Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board/
Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny
Committee with Birmingham City Council



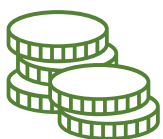
Councillor Nicky Hinchliffe
Children's Services and Education
Scrutiny Board



Councillor Ellen Fenton
Safer Neighbourhoods and Active
Communities Scrutiny Board



Councillor Jackie Taylor
Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board





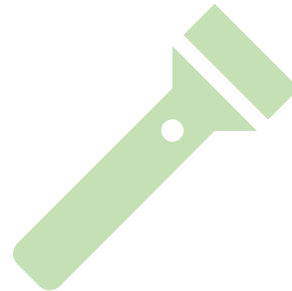
38 meetings

4 In-depth Reviews



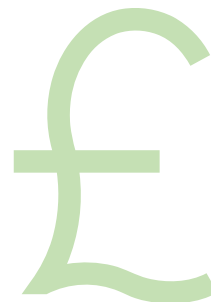
3 Visits to speak to partners and service users

1 Spotlight Session



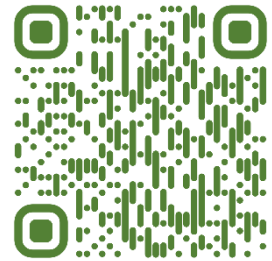
5 Working Groups

1 Budget All-Day Scrutiny Session



Case Studies

All of the minutes of the Scrutiny Boards can be found on our [modern.gov website](https://www.modern.gov), but to give everyone an idea of the kinds of work undertaken during 2023/24 here are a few examples.



One Council, One Team

Budget Scrutiny Day

The Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held a full day meeting to look at the Council's budget proposals for 2024/25. This included all directors and cabinet members attending to speak about the proposals for their portfolio areas and to answer questions from the Board. The Board was assured on the budget proposals but still identified some recommendations, such as requesting a review of contracts and agreements including contract monitoring processes. These were agreed by the Cabinet and will help the Council to ensure that its contracts are as good as they can be.

Performance Management

Throughout 2023/24 the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board has maintained oversight of the Council's performance management framework. This has allowed the Board to identify areas and issues and look more closely at what is being done to make the improvements needed.

Scrutiny Review – Customer Journey

The Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board concluded its review into the experience of Sandwell residents accessing or requesting Council services. A range of recommendations were identified, which were welcomed by the then Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.



Best start in life for children and young people

Sandwell Children's Trust

The working relationship between the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board and Sandwell Children's Trust continues to grow with member visits taking place in addition to the contractually required scrutiny sessions.



Voice of Sandwell and Forum for Independent Young Adults

The Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board has continued to foster links with Sandwell's care experienced young people. Members visited the Voice of Sandwell and Forum for Independent Young Adults groups, and this practice will continue. Overview and Scrutiny in Sandwell has a renewed drive and commitment to amplify the voices of these young people.

People live well and age well

Scrutiny Review on Loneliness and Isolation

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board completed its review of Loneliness and Isolation. These are key issues for a lot of people across Sandwell; it is not limited to one age group or background. The Board considered the evidence it had gathered from local, regional and national sources and made recommendations to help reduce loneliness and isolation in Sandwell.

Midland Metropolitan University Hospital

The Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee with Birmingham City Council has continued its oversight of the development of the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital. This joint working arrangement will be re-established in 2024/25, with the Hospital due to open, so that Scrutiny can continue to challenge and seek assurances on the service provided to the people of Sandwell and West Birmingham.



Strong resilient communities

Public Space Protection Orders

Prior to approval the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board reviewed the proposals for public space protection orders in Sandwell relating to alcohol consumption, dog fouling and BBQs/fires. The Board felt these continued to be important powers for the Council in enhancing quality of life for our residents, but also asked for consideration of dedicated BBQ places as part of the ongoing review of Sandwell's green spaces.

Sandwell Community Safety Strategy

The Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board reviews the work of the Safer Sandwell Partnership and the Sandwell Community Safety Strategy. The Chair of the Safer Sandwell Partnership, and Chief Superintendent for Sandwell Policing Unit, attended the Board to answer questions from members about the multi-agency work of the Partnership.

Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

Tenant Satisfaction

The Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board reviewed the outcomes of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey. Housing services were at the outset of a transformation journey, which will remain a key strand of work for Scrutiny into 2024/25.



Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 - 2029

The Housing Asset Management Strategy was considered as a pre-scrutiny item by the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board. Members stressed the importance of suitable measurements of performance being included in the Strategy.

A strong and inclusive economy

Long Term Plan for Towns – Smethwick

The Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board conducted pre-decision scrutiny on the Long Term Plan for Smethwick and recommended increased consultation with young people, taking in learning from successful local Business Improvement Districts.



Sandwell Local Plan

A key document in driving the future development of the borough, the Sandwell Local Plan was reported to the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board during its consultation stages. Members acknowledged the importance of the Local Plan, and its associated underpinning documents, and highlighted aspects such as land remediation, co-operative ownership models and wider infrastructure demands of developments.

A connected and accessible Sandwell

Cycle Paths

Arising from a petition about a specific cycle route proposal, the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board conducted a site visit and held a working group to look at consultation and communication of cycle route developments. This piece of work identified recommendations around internal communication as well as the diversification of consultation and communication methods with local residents. This work has continued into a wider piece around Active Transport Networks, which include cycling and walking, which will continue in 2024/25.



Strategic Road Safety Plan Review

At the request of Council, the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board carried out a review, alongside officers, of the Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030. The new Plan will continue to use the successful “Sandwell Safe System”, with targets stretched to complement regional and international aspirations of no road deaths or serious injuries. The Board endorsed the proposed Plan to Cabinet.

Scrutiny on a page – everything we looked at in 2023-2024

Council Improvement Plan **Oracle Fusion Implementation Progress** 2022-23
Financial Outturns **Scrutiny Review – Customer Journey** Sickness Absence Outturn
2022-23 **The Use of Call-Ins** Quarterly Budget Monitoring **Quarterly
Performance/Improvement Plan Monitoring** Section 106 Spotlight Session **Lion
Farm – Secondary Option Agreement** West Midlands Combined Authority –
Devolution Deal **Medium Term Financial Strategy** Draft Budget 2024-25 **West
Midlands Combined Authority Scrutiny Annual Report** West Midlands Combined
Authority Activity in Sandwell **Impact on Registration Related Services when the
Midland Metropolitan University Hospital Opens** Corporate Parenting Week
Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2022-23 Sandwell Children’s Trust Performance
Update **Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area
Developments** Post 16 Pathways **Sandwell Virtual School** ASEND Inspection
Outcome and Next Steps **The Effectiveness of the Sandwell Children’s
Safeguarding Partnership’s Response to Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents**
Child Friendly Sandwell **Health and Wellbeing of Students** Sandwell Children’s
Trust Performance Update **Residential Sufficiency and Audit of Planning
Applications for Children’s Homes** Corporate Parenting Board Update **Sandwell
Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022-23** Europa Avenue Cycle
Route Towns Fund Scheme **Town Fund Programme Update** West Midlands Local
Transport Plan **Sandwell Local Plan** Long Term Plan for Towns – Smethwick
Towards Zero HIV Transmissions 2030 – Sandwell Action Plan Progress Joint
Health Scrutiny Arrangements **Sandwell Winter Booklet** Public Health Towns Plan
Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2022-23 Primary Care Access
Patient Involvement in Primary Care Department of Health and Social Care
Consultation – Creating a Smoke-free Generation **WorkWell Vanguard** National
Institute for Health Research – Health Determinants Research Collaboration **Scrutiny
Review of Loneliness and Isolation** Preparation for Care Quality Commission
Assurance of Adult Social Care in Sandwell **Building Wellness and Wellbeing**
Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy **Houses in Multiple Occupation –
Additional Licensing and Article 4 Options Appraisal** Neighbourhood Partnerships
Team Update **Haden Hill Leisure Centre Rebuild Options** Future Provision of
Leisure Services **Green Spaces Annual Report 2022-23 and Programme of Works
Progress 2022-23** Playing Pitch Strategy Action Plan **Sandwell Leisure Trust Fees
and Charges** Sandwell Valley Master Plan and 10-year Business Plan
Implementation of Three Boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders Heritage
Strategy Update **Fishing Policy** Housing Regulatory Framework **Implementation of
Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022-26** Private Sector Housing Assistance
Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing **Midland Metropolitan
University Hospital Update** Update on Changes to Day Surgery at Sandwell and
West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust **Patient Experience at Sandwell and West
Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust** Update on Changes to Stroke Services in
Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust