

Appendix 2 Grant Thornton Recommendation Responses November 2024

	Grant Thornton Improvement Recommendation	Action ref	SMBC Response:	Director/ Lead
	Improvement Plan			
1	The Council has not yet concluded introducing a “golden thread” that aligns corporate plans to individual’s annual performance reviews, and this approach should be progressed to include the behaviours set out in the One Team Framework, so that expected values and behaviours can be monitored and measured.	Commentary	2024 update: The Oracle Fusion Module called Talent will become the system for completion of annual reviews and employee/manager check-ins. This will take effect from the new performance cycle April 2025; values and behaviours are in scope to be part of the review process. In addition, values and behaviours have been incorporated into all core corporate learning and development activity including induction and management training. The recent Sandwell Awards ceremony was based on Values and behaviours which showcased the success stories from a values perspective. A large Manager conference is being planned for 18 November 2024 which is centred on the key expectations on all managers and leaders in ensuring values and behaviours are role modelled and embedded in Teams.	Assistant Director for HR & OD/ Learning & OD Manager
		CO.G1.5	2024 update: New Council plan agreed at Cabinet and launched at council showcase in September 24. This is being embedded across the council and within performance management.	Assistant Chief Executive / Service Improvement

Medium-Term Financial Planning				
2	The senior leadership team should make time to agree clear objectives for financial planning, and the financial, organisational and behavioural actions required to achieve these objectives.	SD.D1.3	2024 update: The MTFS/MTFP is updated throughout the year and reported to Cabinet during the Autumn and in February as part of the Budget Report. The MTFP includes the forecast budget deficit for each year over the following five-year period.	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place
		SD.D1.4	2024 update: MTFS/MTFP refreshed in October 2024 and was presented to Cabinet on 16 th October. The Capital Strategy is refreshed annually, following a process of reviewing capital project requests for the following financial year. The updated Capital Strategy will be published in February 2025.	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place
		SD.D1.5	2024 update: As of 2023, the MTFS process includes a series of Star Chamber meetings being held across the summer each year, whereby each directorate's financial position, including delivery of existing savings and new savings proposals, is thoroughly scrutinised. Directors are fully engaged with this process, which is used to formulate a suite of savings options to balance the budget for the following year.	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place
Corporate Transformation				

3	As part of the new transformation arrangements the Council should ensure there is corporate oversight of the use of external consultants, including how such commissions align to the Council's transformation strategy.	Commentary	2024 update: Consultancy Approval Panel was established to ensure appointment of consultants across the council aligned to the council's priorities. CAP is managed by the Corporate Transformation Office and continues to oversee all requests for external commissions across the council. Updates are provided Bi-monthly to the Strategic Leadership Team, ensuring collective oversight.	Corporate Transformation Manager
		CO.E1.5	Assurance Action: Reports presented to Leadership Team on a bimonthly basis on commissioning of consultants. 2024 update: Updates are provided Bi-monthly to the Strategic Leadership Team, ensuring collective oversight	Executive Director-Finance & Transformation
Commercial Strategy				
4	The Council should consider developing an agreed definition of commercial as a way of revitalising the progress of the commercial strategy. Once the strategy has been adopted it will need to align the Council's transformation strategy and MTFP assumptions.	SD.A5.0 Action to be closed	2024 update: Much work is being carried out within the council to strengthen the procurement and contract management arrangements, including increasing resources across the council with further developments planned. Continued progress is being made on how big contracts are managed with partnership working and collaboration central to the approach, examples of this can be seen with the work carried out with the Sandwell Children's Trust.	Executive Director-Finance & Transformation

		<p>Whilst no definitive Commercial Strategy has been drawn up Sandwell has been building a strong base with a business management approach across the council, encouraging business thinking throughout and the use of Business cases to evidence the clear flow of value.</p> <p>The MTFP acknowledges the need to organise many of its activities along a more commercial line including the adoption of the Corporates Landlord Model for the management of its property estate.</p> <p>We have enhanced the business case documentation for the MTFS. We have also revised fees and charges to increase cost recovery and address market forces.</p> <p>A transformation strategy (Design Principles) has been prepared, and the Corporate Transformation Board has been established to guide and control the transformation approach in the years ahead. The benefits of the transformation endeavours are to develop better value for service users and enhance customer journey.</p>	
Customer Journey			

5	<p>The Council should consider enhancing customer journey metrics to measure its performance through full customer journeys including the customer experience and satisfaction.</p>	<p>Commentary</p>	<p>2024 update: Customer satisfaction metrics are captured at the One Stop Shop; Community Hubs; Corporate Contact Centre & on MySandwell. This work is on-going and we are also looking at introducing a 'customer effort' metric.</p> <p>2024 update: The Customer Service standards remain in draft form and are being reviewed as part of the 2nd phase of the Customer Journey/Customer Focus programme.</p> <p>2024 update: Customer Service Training Procurement was successful, and the training commenced September 2024, the feedback so far has been very positive.</p> <p>2024 update: There are now the following metrics included in the Corporate Performance Monitoring: O7 – Corporate Contact Centre – Call Satisfaction O16 – One Stop Shop – Customer Satisfaction O17 – MySandwell – Satisfaction from process submissions O18 – MySandwell – Satisfaction following enquiry closure</p>	<p>ACE/ Strategic Improvement Manager</p>
<p>Asset Management Strategy and Database</p>				
6	<p>Ensure that appropriate decisions are taken on proposed asset</p>	<p>SD.D1.6</p>	<p>2024 update: Delivery of asset rationalisation savings against the budgeted value is</p>	<p>Head of Finance</p>

	disposals to ensure the savings targets are realised.		monitored monthly along with all other savings in the MTFS/budget. Outstanding savings (not yet delivered) are reported monthly to Leadership Team and quarterly to Cabinet.	Business Partnering - Place
KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust				
7	Greater emphasis is required by the Council and SCT on progressing area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership.	PR.A1.11	<p>2024 update: Assurance action has been monitored and is on track with Family hubs being firmly embedded across Sandwell in the last year. With an increased reach to over 4000 parents and children being engaged in universal activities. Q1- family hubs 209 families supported, 189 without need for escalation.</p> <p>Partnership working is improving, and this has been recognised at the six monthly DfE Review Meetings.</p> <p>The DCS and the Chief Executive of SCT have worked with other senior leaders across Sandwell to strengthening governance in the children's system and now co-chair a new Family Help Board with a focus on improving early/family help. The relationship between the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership and the Children and Families Strategic Partnership is being clarified, and four strategic priorities have been identified</p>	Director of Children and Education

			by the CaFSP which will feed into a Children and Families Plan.	
8	The Council should continue to monitor the vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates.	Commentary	2024 update: The vacancy rate is reported to the Operational Partnership Board on a monthly basis, it is also reported to SPB quarterly and included as part of the quarterly performance monitoring framework. An interim review of the Sandwell deal was undertaken in June 2024 and showed a positive impact on both the overall vacancy rate but also a reduction in the percentage of the workforce that were agency. Final review due November 2024 TBC.	Director of Children and Education
9	Realising the planned Invest to Save savings will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget and the invest to save payments being repaid to the Council.	PR.A1.12	2024 update: The assurance action is monitored quarterly, in Q1 it was noted that there was a delay due to a change in s151 officer but that the procurement was now taking place to identify a suitable organisation to undertake the work. Contract Sum negotiations have commenced with SCT, alongside this a third party has been engaged to work with both SCT and SMBC to support in the development of a MTFP.	Director of Children and Education
KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust				
10	The Council should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure	PC.A1.6	2024 update: SLT's operational and financial performance will be checked at end of year	Assistant Director – Contracts,

	that SLT meets is 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is line with the Council's MTFP assumptions.		2024/25. Quarterly reviews with Sandwell Leisure Trust indicate Medium Term Financial Strategy assumptions will be met in 2025/26.	Projects, Strategy & Policy
11	The Council should ensure that Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) builds on its more commercial approach and sets out a plan for the timeframe when the Trust's financial position requires no subsidy from the Council, including a clear and deliverable plan for eliminating the forecast losses at the aquatics centre.	PC.A1.3	2024 update: Presented to Quarterly Performance Board and Leadership Team in Quarter 2.	Assistant Director – Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy
		PC.A1.7	2024 update: Quarterly performance monitoring takes place and is presented at Performance Board to Leadership Team.	Assistant Director – Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy
KLOE A4: SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Transport				
12	The next SEND Transport procurement should consider how services can be commissioned to manage ongoing significant and ongoing budgetary pressures,	Commentary	2024 update: Children & Education Transformation Board will continue to maintain oversight of the SEND programme, with the operational group ensuring cross council support for continuous improvement which includes robust contract monitoring, reform of the EHCP process through to the travel assistance application, review of the	Director of Children and Education

			<p>Post 16 Transport offer and use of the council fleet.</p> <p>The successful introduction of SEND 3, a flexible purchasing system has already helped to reduce the average cost per passenger through increased competition with more operators, many of whom are SME's, multiple contracts, and varied contract periods</p>	
		PC.B3.6	<p>2024 update: Children & Education Transformation board meet monthly to review progress and ensure the programme stays on track and providing support & challenge where needed.</p>	Director of Children and Education
		PC.B3.7	<p>Assurance action: Check MTFS Autumn update how is SEND being built into future programme.</p> <p>2024 update: The introduction of SEND3, has already enabled projected costs to be reduced using the base cost at the start of the new contracts. The costing model will be used to monitor the cost per passenger and ensure that any adverse changes in cost can be addressed quickly. Robust cost monitoring includes the projected increase in passenger numbers.</p> <p>A SEND Transport Operational Group has been established to maintain oversight of the</p>	Director of Children and Education

			continued delivery of transport related activity across the Council.	
KLOE A7: Waste Service				
13	The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council.	PC.A5.3	2024 update: Monthly Fleet Steering Group continues to take place.	AD – Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy
		PC.A5.4	2024 update: Specification for new integrated Fleet Management System being developed as part of Corporate Fleet Review.	AD – Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy
14	The Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.	PC.A5.5	2024 update: Lessons learned captured in updated Business Continuity Plan drafted with Serco. Agreed in September 2024.	AD – Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy
		PC.A5.6	2024 update: Industrial Relations now an agenda item in monthly Senior Management Meetings with Serco. 2024/25 pay settlement resolved with no threat of industrial action.	AD – Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy
KLOE A8: Governance and Legal Support to DPH				
15	The Council should conclude its plans to introduce a policy for	OC.E2.8	2024 update: Following the General Election, Sandwell has 4 new MPs which provides an opportunity to reset the relationship. A	Comms and Corporate Affairs Manager

	working with local MPs and associated guidance.		meeting has been arranged in November 2024 with all of the MPs, and as part of this a discussion is being held about how best to share information and a protocol can be agreed.	
KLOE A10: Introduction of new ERP system				
16	The Council should ensure it responds effectively to the recommendations set out in our separate Oracle Fusion implementation report before the go live date.	Commentary	2024 update: Oracle Cloud Implementation report was presented to Audit Committee on the 18 July 2024 detailing Responses to the recommendations set out in the separate Oracle Fusion Implementation report.	Executive Director-Finance & Transformation
17	The Council should continue its work on defining financial and non-financial benefits, and that benefits identified and agreed are measurable, and can be effectively tracked and the transformational opportunities of the new system are fully realised.	CO.A1.11	2024 update: The Benefit Realisation process remains in progress and will be defined by the end of 2024.	Executive Director-Finance & Transformation
KLOE B2: Senior Leadership				
18	The Chief Executive should ensure that the Monitoring Officer continues to be a standing member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a permanent basis	Commentary	2024 update: The Monitoring Officer is a member of and attends all meetings of the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). A Statutory Officers Group (SOG) has also been established providing an additional monthly forum for discussion between the Chief Executive, S.151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, and Assistant Chief Executive on	Assistant Director Legal & Assurance

			matters of significance, sensitivity, or emerging governance.	
KLOE B4a: Officer and Member Relationships				
19	This maturity of senior officer and member relationships will need to continue, with further difficult decisions inevitably being required, and this approach to must be sustained following future changes to those in senior officer or senior member roles	OC.C4.1	2024 update: Regular scheduled meetings take place between individual portfolio holders and Executive Directors/Directors/Assistant Directors with clear arrangements for communication and areas for discussion, adopting a no surprises principle. Regular weekly meetings between SLT, the Leader and Cabinet ensure clear communication and a shared strategic space within which open, frank and constructive decisions can be had without fear of loss of confidentiality and with appropriate forms of challenge being demonstrated.	Assistant Director Legal & Assurance
		OC.C4.2	2024 update: Regular engagement and feedback meetings held to develop shared space operating arrangements between SLT, Wider Leadership Team and officers with Cabinet and the wider membership of Council. Member and officer surveys testing health and maturity of relationships, control, effectiveness of no surprises approach and communication being used to inform development of approaches.	Assistant Director Legal & Assurance

		DS16	<p>Review of Constitution</p> <p>2024 update: A comprehensive review of the constitution is in progress, designed around delivering a new model constitution able of ensuring clear structural, governance and operating frameworks and a clear balance of controls and transparency. Core sections of the new constitution are at an advanced stage of development, and subject to co-design with key stakeholders – whilst ensuring key statutory controls and assurance content is maintained, this ensures the presentation of information is clear, unambiguous, and owned by officers and members collectively. The form and format of the constitution has been designed to aid understanding and ease of application, with a logical and structured approach adopted ensuring consistency of form and requirement whilst being easier to navigate. The substantive work on the new constitution will be completed by June 2025 with a series of reports due to Senior Leadership Team, relevant member bodies and Full Council in the intervening period as key gateways and milestones to full adoption.</p> <p>A concurrent review of internal structural boards is underway designed to ensure clear</p>	Assistant Director Legal & Assurance
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		internal governance structures operate without duplication and introducing clear lines of accountability. On completion of this work an internal Governance Board is proposed to oversee and monitor the ongoing effectiveness of arrangements, feeding into SLT, SOG and acting as a mechanism for both assurance, collective development of Annual Governance Statements and feeding into planned audit work.	
	DS11	2024 update: The Council continues to work closely with LGA colleagues on the co-design of member development arrangements, and on the hosting and delivery of workshops for members, officers and jointly for both groups on respective roles, communication, understanding and engagement. These will become a regular feature of development programmes for members and officers, ensuring a mutual awareness and understanding of respective responsibilities, shared space area of operation, and clear separation of functions.	Assistant Director Legal & Assurance
	Local Action	2024 update: Member Induction arrangements redesigned for the May 2024 intake, structured around an initial induction day. A detailed programme of core knowledge areas informed the induction day	Assistant Director Legal & Assurance

			<p>and subsequent session, ensuring component knowledge requirements are addressed both incrementally and through reinforcement of messages. Session materials are made available in the event of absence and repeat/one-one sessions offered to maximise engagement.</p> <p>A separate development programme focused on executive and cabinet has been produced. This combined shared learning and substantial components of session delivery and best practice through the use of LGA support networks and similar frameworks.</p> <p>Additional development needs identified through feedback gathered during the induction process then feed into development of the wider annual development programme.</p>	
20	<p>Whilst pathways are being put in place for succession planning, further work is required to conclude these plans, including the provision of appropriate training and development so that these changes become fully embedded</p>	<p>Commentary</p>	<p>2024 update: Member Induction arrangements redesigned for the May 2024 intake, structured around an initial induction day. A detailed programme of core knowledge areas informed the induction day and subsequent session, ensuring component knowledge requirements are addressed both incrementally and through reinforcement of messages. Session materials are made available in the event of</p>	<p>ACE/ Assistant Director Legal & Assurance</p>

			<p>absence and repeat/one-one sessions are offered to maximise engagement.</p> <p>A separate development programme focused on executive and cabinet has been produced. This combines shared learning and substantial components of session delivery and best practice through the use of LGA support networks and similar frameworks.</p> <p>Additional development needs identified through feedback gathered during the induction process then feed into development of the wider annual development programme.</p>	
KLOE B4b: Performance management and other matters				
21	The Council should conclude the member PDP roll out, and in particular ensure these are in place for members who are in positions of special responsibility or are aspiring to hold such roles.	Commentary	<p>2024 update: The council's Member Development Officer, working closely with the Assistant Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer has worked to develop an expanded and improved member development offering. A draft strategy and programme plan has been prepared, informed by competency requirements, ongoing feedback, areas of national and local practice improvement as well as the developing PDP process. Engagement with individual members remains ongoing to identify and address specific knowledge and</p>	ACE/ Assistant Director Legal & Assurance

			skills needs, with a combination of internally and externally facilitated sessions having been scheduled or delivered to meet these development objectives.	
22	The Council should develop a business case for a performance management system, to appropriately consider this investment.	PC.C1.1	2024 update: A business case has been developed. The joint procurement of a performance management and complaints/governance software was explored, but it was resolved that this would result in a system that did not fully meet need. Therefore, procurement of a performance management system is the best solution. However, this is on hold, awaiting approval before it can be progressed	ACE / Service Improvement
KLOE B7: Financial reporting				
23	The Council should ensure that all recommendations from CIPFA's follow up review are fully implemented.	Commentary	2024 update: All recommendations from CIPFAs follow up review will be addressed once there is additional capacity in place in the Finance structure and once Oracle Fusion has been implemented and are up to date with outstanding accounts	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place
24	The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production	CO.D4.6	2024 update: Draft accounts 2022/2023 have been published. Final accounts will be published by 13/12/24	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place
		CO.D4.7	2024 update: Draft accounts 2023/24 will be published in December 2024. Final accounts will be published by 28/02/25	Head of Finance Business

				Partnering - Place
25	The Interim Director of Finance should review finance team capacity, capability and training needs to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation	CO.D1.3	2024 update: Proposed structure formulated. New job descriptions are currently being evaluated.	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place
		CO.D1.4	2024 update: Proposed structure to be launched with staff during Autumn 2024.	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place
26	The Council must ensure a successful implementation of phase 2 of the new asset management system, including effective alignment with Oracle Fusion, so that the benefits planned to support accounts production are realised.	Commentary	2024 update: Data being uploaded into Asset Management system and system being tested. We will commission an output report (to produce journals to go into Oracle Fusion) from Civica imminently.	Head of Finance Business Partnering - Place