

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

**Thursday, 24 April 2025 at 6.00 pm
at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Fenton (Chair)
Councillors Dhatt, Hinchliff and Williams

Also present: Alex Thompson (Executive Director), Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead - Service Improvement), Kayleigh Walker (Senior Lead Officer), Laura Maitland (Programme Manager) and Vivek Krishnakumar (Operations Manager).

22/25 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E M Giles (Vice-Chair), Davies, Lewis and Rahman.

23/25 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Dhatt declared that, in connection with his previously declared employment at Oracle Corporation UK Limited, he would leave the room during the consideration of the matter referred to at Minute No. 32/25 (Procurement Board Update) should any detailed discussion on Oracle Fusion commence.

24/25 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025 are conformed as a correct record.



Urgent Additional Items of Business

There were no additional urgent items of business to consider.

Performance Management Framework - Quarter 3

The Performance Management Framework Quarter 3 report was brought to Board to provide an overview of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's performance for Q3 of the 2024/25 financial year, following the end of government intervention in March 2024.

The objective of the Performance Management framework report was to monitor and improve service delivery against its strategic objectives outlined in the Councils plan 2024-2027.

It was noted that:

- The vast majority of business plans are on track at 72.6%, with 12.7% complete. It was noted that some business plans had been delayed..
- The corporate performance indicator was at 44% green, 23% red and 7.8% Amber. It was also noted that there was a figure within the report that had no rating due to no target being set.
- In terms of achievements, it was noted that:-
 - The safe space scheme had officially launched in Wednesbury and Tipton, offering safe spaces for people who may feel vulnerable in town centres.
 - The Local services were meeting the needs of residents.
 - The launching of the five-year better health programme, which would help improve how research was conducted, how it would be used in decision making and how findings would be shared.
 - The launch of the Sandwell Better Health Strategy in October 2024, with the strategy outlining 12 recommendations aimed at the mental wellbeing of Sandwell residents.
 - Sandwell was performing significantly better than neighbouring authorities.

- The Housing Services were consistently exceeding benchmark positions for the successful number of homeless cases prevented
- Whilst temporary accommodation had been flagged up as amber in the report, homelessness cases were at a more positive green indicator.
- The Council was working with neighbouring councils around care experience as a protected characteristic.
- Growing up in Sandwell:
 - Provisional data for Key Stage 4 showed that students with EHCPs performed above the regional average, although still below the national average. However, students receiving SEN Support performed below both regional and national averages. It was explained that a contributing factor was the number of young people with EHCPs who had not yet been placed in appropriate educational settings that met their specific needs.
 - Available data indicated that Sandwell's KS4 performance in English and Maths at grade 5 or above remained below national figures, with an 11% gap like previous years. Performance in English was at 55%, while Maths was at 40%. English showed an improving trend, but improving attainment in both subjects, especially Maths, remained a priority.
 - It was noted that there was provision of the Inclusive learning service, that would be focused on work with primary schools, however they would be doing less work with secondary schools.
 - The Council had actively promoted the Priority Education Investment Area (PEIA) initiative, with 18 out of 20 eligible schools participating. However, engagement levels varied depending on the time of year and individual schools' priorities.
 - It was noted that there were 'maths hubs' in place across Sandwell, which were being utilised to try and bring the level of maths in the borough up, with 18 schools at the time of the meeting being involved with the scheme.
 - It was noted that Sandwell had a higher cohort of disadvantaged people at 36% compared to 26% nationally.

- It was noted that in relation to ECHP completion rate, Sandwell was below target for quarter 3 due to the number of ECHPs rising significantly over the last 12 months. It was further explained that this was a national rise as well as local.
- Childhood Obesity
 - The figures for childhood obesity were higher than the national average, with it being noted as a priority issue for Sandwell to reduce the figures overall.
 - To tackle childhood obesity, schools were putting on healthy eating and fitness programmes.
 - It was noted that Public Health Sandwell were carrying out various projects to tackle childhood obesity however it was a complex issue with several different elements including the number of fast-food outlets, deprivation and cost of living issues in the borough.
 - It was also highlighted that Sandwell was the highest in the region for underweight children, and work was ongoing with children's services to address this issue.
- Living in Sandwell:
 - In relation to Private Rental Sector disrepair cases that were being processed to formal notice, civil action/prosecution, or closed with a positive outcome within the expected processing times, it was noted that performance was steadily improving, with an average quarterly increase of 4.1 percentage points, though this remained below target. A large intake of new staff was undergoing comprehensive training, which was expected to boost performance as capacity grew.
 - It was noted that satisfaction with the overall service provided, had decreased by 7%. The timescale to complete repairs and outstanding repairs were most frequently cited as reasons for dissatisfaction.
 - Fire safety checks were less than 3% away from being compliant, with the hope to achieve 100% by quarter 4.
- One Council:
 - It was noted that the Council was below target in responding to Subject Access Requests, with the target of 95% being changed to 80%.

- It was noted that complaints could be complex, especially involving children, and could take over the standard 10 days for a complaint to be resolved.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were provided and issues highlighted: -

- In response to a questions concerning the difference between the gaps in disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children, children's retainment levels and levels of school engagement from both maintained and academy schools, further information would be provided to members.
- Public Health would provide the Board with further information the strategy of working with parents around obesity, as well as driving factors in children's weight (for example not being able to afford three meals per day).
- In terms of procurement, it was noted that there was a delay from September of 3-4 months; Sandwell Council was not the only authority experiencing such a delay.
- In response to questions about hazardous waste, it was noted that it would be difficult to access if located on private land.
- Members were informed that Officers were working on a fleet review, with there being a discussion around replacing vehicles, electric vehicle mandates and the size of fleets.
- The Chair expressed the interest of working with the Chair of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board, looking into different sets of data that may have relevance to both committees.
- It was noted that there had been communication breakdown due to the impact of Covid-19, which had put pressure on services across the Council.

27/25

Oracle Fusion - Lessons Learned and Continual Optimisation

The Board received and considered the Oracle Fusion Programme Completion Report. The Report outlined the delivery of the new Oracle Fusion system, which replaced the Council's legacy financial and HR systems. The report covered key implementation milestones, the challenges encountered, and the lessons learned throughout the transition.

The report also identified areas for continual optimisation, including system training, data quality improvements and user support.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were provided and issues highlighted:

- Further clarification would be provided to members about ensuring that Sandwell Schools may be able to view their budget.
- In terms of continual monitoring, it was noted that there would be a steering group in operation. Data driven checking to ensure Oracle works efficiently would also take place.
- There was discussion around progressing from stability to optimisation, with ongoing checks being in place to ensure consistency.
- There was no 'hard' deadline for the full implementation of Oracle Fusion, however other modules optimised by Oracle Fusion would become live in the next few months.
- Members of the Board were informed that the Council was no longer reliant on local servers, following the move towards a cloud-based system.

Meeting ended at 7:55pm.

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