

Cabinet

Report Title	Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough (Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board)
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 4 February 2026
Report Author	Democratic Services Officer John Swann
Lead Officer	Assistant Chief Executive James McLaughlin
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods Councillor Suzanne Hartwell Statutory Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finances and Resources Councillor Paul Moore Cabinet Member for Business and Skills Councillor Syeda Khatun
Wards Affected	All wards
Is the report urgent?	No
Appendices (if any)	1. Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough Report

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report presents the final findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough, and requests that Cabinet Members respond to recommendations contained within.

2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

2.1 Consider and either approve all, approve in part or do not approve any of the recommendations of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board in respect of the Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough as follows:-

- 2.1.1 That the Cabinet Member for Business and Skills create a publicly accessible comprehensive directory of English for Speakers of Other Languages courses;
- 2.1.2 That the Statutory Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finances and Resources conduct a coordinated campaign to increase the profile and awareness of English for Speakers of Other Languages courses across the borough;
- 2.1.3 That the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods produce and develop a borough wide Community Asset Map of organisations, services, and resources by ward;
- 2.1.4 That the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods promote and support inclusive community events and cultural celebration days in public spaces, with family friendly activities provided free of charge.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 The Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board commenced the Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough in the 2023/ 24 municipal year.
- 3.2 The Board established a working group to conduct the review which undertook substantial research and efforts to understand the matter and produce recommendations to the Executive.
- 3.3 At the meeting of the Safer neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board in January 2026 the Board agreed range of recommendations based on the research and findings of the working group. These recommendations are now presented to Cabinet for consideration.
- 3.4 There is a strong evidence base demonstrating that cohesive, well-connected communities experience better outcomes across health, safety, education, and economic participation. Following the 2024 riots, members identified a need to examine how Sandwell could strengthen cohesion, improve communication, and support residents to feel part of their local area.
- 3.5 The review sought to understand these issues through a combination of quantitative data, qualitative engagement, site visits, and comparative research.
- 3.6 Through the evidence gathered, members found that cohesion is strengthened when residents can communicate effectively with services, when trusted messengers help bridge gaps in engagement, and when local assets are visible, accessible and easy to navigate. Opportunities for communities to mix, celebrate and collaborate also play a vital role, as does ensuring that information is clear, consistent and available in multiple languages.

3.7 In addition to the recommendations (above), it has been agreed, that a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the commissioned translation and interpretation service is submitted as a suggestion for scrutiny topics in the 2026/ 27 municipal year.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 There are no alternative options. The Cabinet may approve all, some, or none of the recommendations.

5. Consultation

5.1 Members of the Public and relevant Partners and Stakeholders were consulted as an ongoing basis as part of the Scrutiny review. As part of the ongoing Scrutiny review, stakeholders included third sector organisations, registered partners and other community leaders.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Any implications as a result of the recommendations will be considered by the Executive, should they be approved.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

7.1 Scrutiny Procedure Rules require the Board to prepare a report following a review and submit it to the Executive.

7.2 The recommendations fall within the Council's general powers under the Local Government Act 1972 and the Equality Act 2010. Compliance with statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, has been considered. Consultation with stakeholders and partners has been undertaken in line with governance requirements.

8. Risks

8.1 Any risk implications as a result of the recommendations will be considered by the Executive, should they be approved.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality)

9.1 The proposals aim to reduce barriers for non- English speakers and promote inclusion through accessible services and events. No adverse impacts identified; positive impacts include improved access to language support and cultural participation.

10. Other Relevant Implications

10.1 Any implications as a result of the recommendations will be considered by the Executive, should they be approved.

- **Social Value** – Promotes local engagement and opportunities for community organisations.
- **Health and Wellbeing** – Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities.
- **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** - Proposals support community safety by fostering trust and reducing tensions.

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 Report to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board entitled Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough (January 2026).
- 11.2 Report to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board entitled Interim Report of the Scrutiny Review into Communities (April 2025)

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

This report will support the delivery of the following Strategic Themes:-

- Living in Sandwell
- Thriving Economy in Sandwell

- 12.1 The review directly supports the Council Plan by strengthening community cohesion, improving access to information, and ensuring all residents can participate fully in Sandwell's communities. By addressing language barriers, improving translation and interpretation, and creating clearer pathways into English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), the recommendations help make Sandwell a more connected and accessible borough.
- 12.2 Developing a Community Asset Map and promoting inclusive community events will contribute to strong, resilient communities by increasing visibility of local support, encouraging social mixing, and building trust between residents and services. These actions also support health and wellbeing by reducing isolation and improving access to community-based opportunities.
- 12.3 Finally, improving English language skills and strengthening community networks contribute to a strong and inclusive economy, helping residents access training, employment and progression. Together, the recommendations reinforce the Council's ambition for a cohesive, confident and thriving Sandwell.