

Minutes of Council

**Tuesday 12 October 2021 at 6.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: His Worshipful The Mayor, Councillor M Hussain;
Deputy Mayor, Councillor R Jones;

Councillors Abrahams, Ahmed, Akhter, Ali, Akpoteni, Allen, Anandou, Ashman, Bhullar, Bostan, Carmichael, Chambers, Chapman, Chidley, Costigan, Crompton, Fenton, Fisher, E M Giles, E A Giles, L Giles, S Gill, W Gill, Hadley, Hartwell, Hinchliff, Hughes, M Y Hussain, Z Hussain, Jalil, Kaur, O Jones, S Jones, Kalari, Kausar, Mabena, McVittie, Melia, Millar, Moore, Owen, C S Padda, I Padda, Piper, Randhawa, Rollins, Rouf, Shaeen, Simms, Smith, R Singh, Taylor, Webb and Williams.

Officers: Kim Bromley-Derry – Interim Chief Executive, Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer; Elaine Newsome – Service Manager - Democracy; Suky Suthi-Nagra – Democratic Services Manager; Trisha Newton – Senior Democratic Services Officer and Stephnie Hancock – Senior Democratic Services Officer.

87/21 **Minute Silence**

The Council observed a minute silence to mark the passing of Honorary Freeman John Sullivan and Honorary Alderwoman Margaret James.



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John Sullivan had been a councillor in the Langley ward for more than 30 years and had served as Mayor in 1992/93. He had become an Honorary Alderman in 2005 before being given the Freedom of the Borough in 2007.

Margaret James had been elected in May 1996 and was councillor for Cradley Heath & Old Hill ward for 12 years. She had been Mayoress to her late husband former councillor Brian James when he was Mayor in 1998/99 and was Deputy Mayor herself in 2007/08.

Members paid tribute to John Sullivan and Margaret James and joined the Mayor in extending their condolences to their family.

88/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Akhtar, Allcock, Davies, Dhallu, Gavan, G Gill, M Gill, Hackett, Henlan, Khatun, Millard, Phillips, Shackleton, K Singh, S Singh and Tagger.

89/21 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

90/21 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of Council held on 26 July 2021 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

91/21 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business for consideration.



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92/21 **Mayor's Announcements**

Details of Mayoral engagements since the last meeting of the Council had been circulated to members.

93/21 **Petitions under Standing Order No. 5**

No petitions were received under Standing Order No. 5.

94/21 **Questions under Standing Order No. 6**

A question had been submitted, however, was withdrawn by the Member

95/21 **Corporate Plan 2020-2025 - Refresh 2021**

The Corporate Plan 2020-2025 – Refresh 2021 detailed the actions that would underpin the delivery of the strategic objectives that were required coming out of the pandemic. The pandemic had impacted Sandwell in different ways and the updated Corporate Plan sought to redress these, in particular reducing inequalities that had widened during the pandemic and the aim for a Fairer Sandwell.

The strategic objectives provided clear ambitions and areas of focus and these would now be combined with aspirations that would work towards creating a fairer Sandwell.

In response to questions, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the implementation of the Corporate Plan would be an open and transparent process and members of scrutiny would have the opportunity to review the Plan.

Resolved that the Corporate Plan 2020-2025 - Refresh 2021 be approved.



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96/21 **West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority Update**

Council received an update on the work of the Fire Authority from Councillor C S Padda, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority.

Following concerns raised with regard to the pay award for firefighters, Councillor C S Padda undertook to raise this matter.

97/21 **Transport for West Midlands Update**

Council received an update on the work of the Transport Authority from Councillor Akhter, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of Transport for West Midlands.

98/21 **West Midlands Police and Crime Panel**

Council received an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel from Councillor R Jones, the Council's representative on the Panel.

In response to questions raised, the Deputy Mayor requested that these be sent to him directly so that he could raise directly at the Panel.

The Deputy Leader also reminded members that they could refer questions at any point to the Police and Crime Panel team and contact details were provided in the report.

99/21 **West Midlands Combined Authority**

Council received an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Combined Authority from the Leader of the Council.



100/21 **Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee 2020-21**

Council received the annual report of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee for the 2020-21 municipal year. On behalf of the Chair the Committee, Councillor Allen presented the report and the work of the Committee.

The Committee had continued to undertake its function as a key component of the Council's corporate governance framework. A number of achievements had been set out which included:

- a continued good working relationship with the Council's internal and external auditors;
- additional assurance through a process of on-going independent review;
- the raised profile of internal control issues across the Council and of the need to ensure that audit recommendations were implemented;
- the consideration and review the Council's strategic risk register;
- continued detailed focus on actions being taken to combat fraud;
- building of the skills and knowledge of the Committee members through regular technical updates and the consideration of related guidance issued by CIPFA.

101/21 **Appointments to Vacancies on Committees, Boards and Other Bodies**

Council considered revisions to the appointments to committees, boards and other bodies.



Resolved:-

- (1) that the nominations for vacancies on committees, boards and other fora established by the Council, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved with immediate effect;
- (2) that the nominations for vacancies on outside/other bodies, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved with immediate effect.

102/21 Cabinet

The minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 7 and 21 July, and 1 September 2021 were received.

103/21 Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

The minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held on 21 July 2021 were received.

104/21 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The minutes of the meetings of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 18 March, 24 June and 29 July 2021 were received.

In response to a question regarding the release of the SEND Transport internal review it was noted that the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee was waiting for the external review report which was being undertaken by Grant Thornton.



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The Council considered the recommendations of the Committee on the following matter:-

104/21(a) **Code of Corporate Governance**

Resolved that the updated Code of Corporate Governance be approved.

105/21 **Motions under Standing Order No. 7**

The Council proceeded to consider motions received under Standing Order No. 7.

106/21 **Sandwell Herald**

It was moved by Councillor Abrahams and seconded by Councillor Kalari: -

“This council resolves to discontinue the delivery of 'The Sandwell Herald', which is printed and delivered at a cost of over £42,000 per year. The council instead resolves to install 150 new litter bins a year in parks and high streets across the Borough.”

In accordance with Standing Order No.7, Councillor Melia moved the following amendment to the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Randhawa:-

“This Council’s Sandwell Herald is printed and delivered at a cost of less than 11 pence per copy. The Council appreciates how important it is for Sandwell residents to be kept informed about vital services and notes the positive response to the readers surveys that was included in the latest edition. The Council recognises its duty to provide residents with access to accurate and important information. This council also notes that a programme to replace over 1,000 bins in parks and streets across the borough that will begin in the New Year”.



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The amendment, having been moved and seconded, was put to the vote and approved. The substantive motion was put to the vote and, having been carried, it was RESOLVED accordingly.

107/21 Houses of Multiple Occupation

It was moved by Councillor Fisher and seconded by Councillor Chapman:-

“This Council recognises the difficulties of monitoring Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) of under 5 occupants due to the lack of any requirements for these to be registered with Local Authorities.

Further, this Council resolves to request the Cabinet Member for Housing to bring forward a report outlining the feasibility of an Additional Licensing Scheme for all HMOs within the Borough of Sandwell to run simultaneously alongside the Mandatory Licensing Scheme, pursuant to Section 56 of the Housing Act 2004 and to release the findings of this Report.”

In accordance with Standing Order No.7, Councillor Ahmed moved the following amendment to the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Allen:-

“This Council recognises the difficulties of monitoring Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) of under 5 occupants due to the failure of Government to give Local Authorities adequate powers or resources to properly monitor and enforce standards.

Further, this Council resolves to request the Members of Parliament who represent constituencies in Sandwell to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to demand that he brings forward legislation that will give councils adequate powers and resources to act, and to protect tenants more widely in the private rented sector by setting up a national landlord register.



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In the absence of action by Government in this important matter, this Council requests the Executive to bring forward an Additional Licensing Scheme in West Bromwich as previously consulted on, pursuant to Section 56 of the Housing Act 2004 and to monitor the outcomes of that scheme with a view to extending if needed.”

The amendment having been moved and seconded was put to the vote and having been carried, the substantive motion was put to the vote.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 12, Councillor W Gill called for a named vote. The required support to the request was achieved and the motion as amended was put to a named vote as follows:-

For:

Councillors Ahmed, Akhter, Akpoteni, Allen, Ashman, Bhullar, Bostan, Carmichael, Chidley, Crompton, Fenton, E M Giles, E A Giles, L Giles, S Gill, Hartwell, Hinchliff, M Hussain, M Y Hussain, Z Hussain, Jalil, O Jones, R Jones, S Jones, Kaur, Kausar, Mabena, McVittie, Melia, Millar, Moore, Owen, C S Padda, I Padda, Piper, Randhawa, Rollins, Rouf, Shaeen, Simms, R Singh, Smith and Taylor.

Against:

Councillor Abrahams, Anandou, Chapman, Fisher, W Gill, and Williams.

Abstain:

Councillor Hadley and Webb.

The motion as amended was carried and it was **RESOLVED** accordingly.



108/21 Walker Grange Care Home

It was moved by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor W Gill:-

“This council welcomes the public engagement and scrutiny activity regarding the ongoing consultation on the future of Walker Grange Care Home.

Walker Grange is a precious council care home for Tipton. For many families in Tipton, Walker Grange is fantastic option for them to put their elderly loved ones in a local care home. This is due to the expensive cost of private care homes. It currently has 22 residents, some of which have been there for over 20 years. The care home has proved over the last 29 years that it can provide safe and effective service for its residents. It was given a good report by the Care Quality Commission in January 2020, there report stated that Walker Grange is a well-lead, responsive, caring and safe provider.

It is reasonable for the consultation to result in Walker Grange being upgraded or remaining open in its current condition. It is unthinkable for many families in Tipton including the residents of Walker Grange that it could possibly be closed. In recognising the community value of this facility, this Council urges the leader and cabinet to reconsider and remove the option of closure for Walker Grange Care Home”.

In accordance with Standing Order No.7, Councillor Hartwell moved the following amendment to the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor M Y Hussain:-

“This Council welcomes the public engagement and scrutiny activity regarding the ongoing consultation on the future of Walker Grange Care Home.



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Walker Grange is a precious care home for Tipton. For many families in Tipton, Walker Grange is a fantastic option for them to consider when seeking care for themselves or their loved ones. This is due to the expensive cost of private care homes. It currently has 21 residents, some of whom have been there for over 20 years. The care home has proved over the last 29 years that it can provide a safe and effective service for its residents. It was given a good report by the Care Quality Commission in January 2020, and their report stated that Walker Grange is a well-led, responsive, caring and safe provider.

It is reasonable for the consultation to result in a full range of options, including Walker Grange being upgraded or remaining open in its current condition. Council recognises that it is important to understand what that condition is. The consultation, full and confidential discussions with residents and their families, and an understanding of all the other implications, such as health and safety, will help ensure the Council arrives at an informed decision. In recognising the community value of this facility, this Council appreciates the importance of the engagement that is currently taking place. Accordingly, this Council resolves to continue the work being done to ascertain the condition of Walker Grange, the needs and wishes of residents and families, and the resources required so that the best decision can be made for the residents of Walker Grange Care Home”.

The amendment having been moved and seconded was put to the vote.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 12, Councillor Williams called for a named vote on the amendment. The required support to the request was achieved and the motion as amended was put to a named vote as follows:-



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For:

Councillors Ahmed, Akhter, Akpoteni, Allen, Ashman, Bhullar, Bostan, Carmichael, Crompton, Fenton, E M Giles, E A Giles, L Giles, S Gill, Hartwell, Hinchliff, M Hussain, M Y Hussain, Z Hussain, R Jones, Kaur, Kausar, Melia, Moore, Owen, I Padda, Piper, Randhawa, Rollins, Rouf, Shaeen, Simms, R Singh and Taylor.

Against:

Councillor Abrahams, Anandou, Chapman, Chidley, Fisher, W Gill, O Jones, S Jones, and Williams.

Abstain:

Councillor Mabena, McVittie, Millar, C S Padda, Smith, and Webb.

Having been carried, the substantive motion was put to the vote. In accordance with Standing Order No. 12, Councillor Abrahams called for a named vote. The required support to the request was achieved and the motion as amended was put to a named vote as follows:-

For:

Councillors Ahmed, Akhter, Akpoteni, Allen, Ashman, Bhullar, Bostan, Carmichael, Crompton, Fenton, E M Giles, E A Giles, L Giles, S Gill, Hartwell, Hinchliff, M Hussain, M Y Hussain, R Jones, Kaur, Kausar, Mabena, Melia, Miller, Moore, Owen, I Padda, Piper, Randhawa, Rollins, Rouf, Shaeen, Simms, R Singh and Taylor.

Against:

Councillors Abrahams, Anandou, Chapman, Chidley, Fisher, W Gill, O Jones, S Jones, and Williams.

Abstain:

Councillors McVittie, C S Padda, Smith and Webb.

The motion as amended was carried and it was **RESOLVED** accordingly.



109/21 Cuts to Universal Credit

It was moved by Councillor Bostan and seconded by Councillor Piper: -

“This Council recognises how hard last eighteen months have been for the people of Sandwell during the pandemic. They have dealt with the uncertainty of a local economy put on hold, the hardship of tens of thousands of Sandwell’s residents either furloughed or out of work, and in some cases personal tragedy. Many are reliant on Universal Credit.

The announcement of this government's plans to cut Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit will be devastating for many people.

This Council deplores the fact that food bank usage in the borough is soaring, and recognises that the increase in fuel prices as we wind down into the colder months will add to pressures on household budgets. Emerging research by the Local Government Association has shown that this will force thousands of families into severe poverty.

This Council has endeavoured to shield residents from the full impact of the economic downturn in recent years, particularly in anticipation of the furlough scheme ending.

These measures include but are not limited to the following:

- An emergency food hub to feed our most vulnerable which supported thousands at the height of the pandemic.
- Free school meals for our most disadvantaged children and young people, a provision which continues despite the failure of the Conservative Government failed in its basic duty to feed Sandwell's children during school holidays amid the pandemic.
- 100 % council tax reduction scheme taking another significant burden off the shoulders of our most vulnerable, despite the huge financial challenges of ever-increasing cuts to our core grant from government.



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Under Labour leadership, this Council has organised workfares across our towns supporting young people in to good jobs whilst working with our skills providers to help our residents affected by Covid-related redundancies, re-skill and train into alternative forms of employment.

In Sandwell, as of July 2021, there were 42,104 people claiming universal tax credits of which, 15,876 (38%) of people were in employment. 1,396 are aged between 16-19 and Sandwell ranks the 7th highest with number of people claiming universal credit in all English metropolitan boroughs.

Research carried out by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University in a report called 'Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2019/20' which covers the five year period from 2014–15 to 2019–20 shows an increase of child poverty in the borough of around 7%.

Council recognises the limits of its abilities to mitigate the economic downturn for its most vulnerable residents and calls upon the government to step up to its duty to protect those most at risk.

Families most at risk of deepening poverty will not benefit from the increases because they are subject to the benefits cap. Migrants without recourse to public funds, many of whom work in industries hardest hit by the lockdown, have also been left out in the cold and millions of families reliant on the legacy benefit system did not receive the uplift channelled through Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit.

This Council resolves for the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, calling upon the Government to:

- Continue the £20-a-week increase to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit early contributions which was brought in to help households deal with the impact of COVID-19.



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- Extend this to other benefit schemes to help residents who are most in financial need and have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- Support Councils through better funding to help them up skill and retrain residents at risk of unemployment as furlough ends.”

In accordance with Standing Order No. 12, Councillor R Jones called for a named vote. The required support to the request was achieved and the motion as amended was put to a named vote as follows:-

For:

Councillors Ahmed, Akhter, Akpoteni, Allen, Ashman, Bostan, Carmichael, Chidley, Crompton, Fenton, E M Giles, E A Giles, L Giles, S Gill, Hartwell, Hinchliff, M Hussain, O Jones, S Jones, R Jones, Kaur, Kausar, Mabena, McVittie, Melia, Miller, Moore, Owen, C S Padda, I Padda, Piper, Randhawa, Rollins, Rouf, Shaeen, Simms, R Singh, Smith, Taylor and Webb.

Against:

Councillor Abrahams, Anandou, Chapman, Fisher, W Gill and Williams.

The motion was carried and it was RESOLVED accordingly.

Meeting ended at 10.13pm
(following adjournment 7.24pm – 7.43pm)

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

