

# Report to Council

**12 December 2023**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Council Improvement Plan
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Leader of the Council, Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
<b>Director:</b>	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
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## 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council receive a recommendation from Cabinet (subject to Cabinet’s consideration on 6 December) that the Improvement Plan Progress Reports (included at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) and an accompanying letter (Appendix 3) be submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities to form the Council’s six-monthly update on progress against the Improvement Plan.
- 1.2 That Council note the significant progress against the Council’s Improvement Plan.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 On 22 March 2022 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced an intervention package and a set of Directions to ensure the council was able to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. These Directions were in-part influenced by the Grant Thornton report following their Value for Money Governance Review of December 2021.
- 2.2 A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022.
- 2.3 Under the Statutory Directions, the council is required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months following approval of the Plan. Reports have been submitted in December 2022 and June 2023. The next report is due in December 2023.
- 2.4 Cabinet considers the progress of the Improvement Plan on a quarterly basis and will receive their next quarterly progress report on 6 December. The publication date for Council papers takes place prior to Cabinet’s consideration of the quarterly progress report and therefore the Leader will provide an update to Council on Cabinet’s recommendation to Council.
- 2.5 Significant progress has been made in delivering the actions contained within the Improvement Plan and this is summarised within the quarterly reports to Cabinet.

## 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

		<p>Sandwell Council’s Improvement Plan focuses on the governance arrangements of the council and areas of improvement across the organisation. The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure that the council is able to deliver on the aims and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The deliverables set out in this Improvement Plan will achieve long-term sustainable improvements in how the council operates and is able to make effective decisions focused on improving outcomes for residents and experiences of service users.</p>
		
		

		Therefore, this impacts on the council's ability to deliver all the objectives in the Corporate Plan.
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### **3 Context and Key Issues**

#### **3.1 Background**

- 3.1.1 A single Improvement Plan was agreed by Council on 7 June 2022 to address recommendations from a Value for Money Review into the council's governance arrangements, a CIPFA financial management review, an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, and Statutory Directions from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The single Improvement Plan replaced the Governance Review Improvement Plan which was approved by Council in January 2022.
- 3.1.2 To ensure that senior officers and members have oversight of delivery against the Improvement Plan, Council approved that progress will be monitored by Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet quarterly. This will continue until all actions have been completed, or changes have been embedded into business as usual.
- 3.1.3 The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. The Improvement Plan report to Council in June 2022 set out that changes (which may include the addition of new workstreams or objectives, or the amendment of timescales for delivery of actions) will be tracked through programme management mechanisms and that Cabinet will retain oversight of changes through regular formal reporting. A summary of changes is provided in the quarterly reports to Cabinet and provided in full as an appendix.
- 3.1.4 Cabinet have considered quarterly updates on progress of the Improvement Plan in September 2022, December 2022, March 2023, June 2023 and September 2023.
- 3.1.5 The fifth quarterly update on progress of the Improvement Plan was considered by Cabinet in September 2023. The sixth quarterly update on progress of the Improvement Plan is being considered by Cabinet on 6 December 2023. These reports are included at Appendix 1 and 2. They set out:

- Progress against each of the six Improvement Plan themes including an outline of key achievements this quarter, and a summary of any progress issues
- Progress against the three statutory recommendations made by Grant Thornton in their Value for Money Governance Review, 2021
- An outline of the governance arrangements including the regular review of the Improvement Plan from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Scrutiny, and monthly monitoring from Leadership Team
- Responses to the findings from the Grant Thornton, LGA and CIPFA follow-up reviews and associated revisions to the Improvement Plan
- Alignment of the improvement plan activity to the Corporate Plan and business plans, as appropriate
- The current status of risks associated with the Improvement Plan
- Details of changes to the Improvement Plan as per the agreed change control process

### **3.2 Reporting to Secretary of State for Levelling up Housing and Communities**

3.2.1 Under the Statutory Directions, the council is required to report progress against the Improvement Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities every six months. Reports were submitted in December 2022 and June 2023. The next report is due in December 2023.

3.2.2 The draft letter to the Secretary of State at Appendix 3 sets out:

- the significant progress made to deliver the actions within the Improvement Plan
- the achievement of key milestones including moving up a level following a recent SEND inspection, the signing off of the 20/21 accounts and the implementation of our Asset Management System.
- acknowledgement of the amount of work ahead to continue the council's improvement and our focus on organisational culture, customer journey, transformation and delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy

3.2.3 The Commissioners report progress to the Secretary of State every six months and these reports are published in line with the Secretary of State’s response. The Commissioners will be making their next report in December 2023.

#### 4 Alternative Options

4.1 Alternative formats for reporting to the Secretary of State could be adopted, however the proposal to submit a covering letter along with the quarterly reports made to Cabinet makes use of existing reports. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities confirmed that this would be an acceptable format to them and contains the information that they require.

#### 6 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p>Resources to deliver the Improvement Plan have been allocated from within existing commitments in majority of cases. Where one-off funding is required to deliver improvements, this will either be funded from the Improvement and Capacity Fund or from earmarked reserves created from 2021/22 underspend position. Where funding is required for longer-term change, this will be incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.</p> <p>There are no land or building implications of this report.</p>
<p><b>Legal and Governance:</b></p>	<p>On 22 March 2022, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued Directions under Section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (the 1999 Act) in order to ensure that the council can comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the 1999 Act. Failure to comply with these Directions may lead to further intervention measures for the council.</p> <p>One of the Directions included that the council should report progress to the Secretary of State on a six-monthly basis. This report outlines the contents of this six-monthly report.</p>

	<p>The delivery of the Improvement Plan and achievement of the desired outcomes will meet the remainder of the Directions.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively deliver its strategic priorities and ensure it is delivering value for money for Sandwell.</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>If the Council fails to take appropriate action to meet the requirements set out in the government Direction, or the Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State do not have sufficient confidence that appropriate actions are being taken to implement and sustain the required improvements, then the council risks not having appropriate arrangements in place to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the 1999 Act. This could lead to further government intervention, increased costs and damage to reputation.</p> <p>A risk register is being maintained for the duration of the Improvement Plan which will underpin the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). This is reported monthly to Leadership Team and quarterly to Cabinet.</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>The successful delivery of this Improvement Plan will require the development and review of many of the council's policies and procedures. These changes will build in consideration of the impact on equalities throughout the development and will include an Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate.</p>
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	<p>The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities focus on improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way. Therefore, any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to deliver services that will improve the health and wellbeing of Sandwell.</p>
<b>Social Value</b>	<p>Within the Improvement Plan, the council is committed to developing its Social Value Policy in conjunction with the refresh of the Procurement &amp;</p>

	Contract Procedure Rules. Through strengthening our asks of contractors through this Social Value Policy and linking them to the Corporate Plan objectives, the council will be able to maximise its social value return
<b>Climate Change</b>	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. 'Green in everything we do' is one of the Fairer Sandwell principles running throughout the Corporate Plan. Any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to embed this principle and further the climate change agenda.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities include being a good Corporate Parent for the children in our care and supporting young people once they leave care. Therefore, any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to be a good Corporate Parent.

## 7. Appendices

1. Improvement Plan Progress Report to Cabinet December 2023
2. Improvement Plan Progress Report to Cabinet September 2023
3. Draft letter to Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

## 8. Background Papers

- [Sandwell Council Improvement Plan](#)
- Approval of Sandwell Council Improvement Plan [Report to Council 7 June 2022](#)
- Reports to the Secretary of State for Levelling up Housing and Communities:
  - June 2022 Reports
  - [Sandwell Council Report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities](#), June 2022

- December 2022 Reports:
  - [Sandwell Council Report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022](#)
  - [Sandwell Council Commissioners: second report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022 \(published March 2023\)](#)
  - [Ministerial response to second letter \(March 2023\)](#)
  
- [June 2023](#)
  - [Sandwell Council Commissioners: third report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, June 2023 \(published July 2023\)](#)
  - [Ministerial response to third letter \(July 2023\)](#)
  
- Improvement Plan Progress Reports:
  - To Council:
    - [13 June 2023](#)
    - [13 December 2022](#)
  - To Cabinet:
    - [September 2023](#)
    - [June 2023](#)
    - [March 2023](#)
    - [December 2022](#) including LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report Nov 2022
    - [September 2022](#)
  - To Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
    - [September 2023](#)
    - [June 2023](#)
    - [March 2023](#)
    - [January 2023 \(External Review Reports\)](#)
    - [November 2022](#)
    - [September 2022](#)
    - [June 2022](#)
  - To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
    - [September 2023](#)
    - [June 2023](#)
    - [March 2023](#)
    - [November 2022](#)
    - [September 2022](#)
  
- External Review Reports
  - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report 2022](#)

- [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review December 2021 – reissued October 2022](#)
- [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report 2022](#)
- [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report February 2022](#)
- [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2023](#)
- [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2022](#)