

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

26 September 2023 at 6.00pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Fenton (Chair),
Councillors Davies, Dhatt, Lewis, Maycock, Trumpeter,
and Webb;
Phillippe Brown (Co-opted Member and Chair - Tenant
and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group).

Officers: Sarah Ager (Assistant Director - Asset Management
and Improvement), Louis Bebb (Housing policy &
Strategy Lead Office), Trisha Newton (Deputy
Democratic Services Manager) and Anthony Lloyd
(Democratic Services Officer).

54/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors
Fisher, Khan, Shaeen and Younis.

55/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

56/23 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 11
July 2023 are approved as a correct record.

57/23 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

58/23 **Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 – 2029**

The Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024-2029 was presented to the Board.

The Housing Asset Management Strategy was vital in setting out the Council's priorities in meeting the housing needs of Sandwell's communities. Although not a statutory requirement, the strategy was deemed best practice in maintaining and improving the Council's housing stock. Further work was needed to review the strategy to provide a more detailed financial forecast which could then be used to create a consistent and transparent approach on how funds from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) were used.

The Council's housing stock contained 28,098 properties, consisting of 1567 bungalows, 653 maisonettes, 14,916 houses and 10,962 flats. Additional assets included over 2700 garages, 15 commercial properties, 69 play areas and a vast amount of vacant land.

The previous strategy, which had been published in 2017, was out of date, especially following the investment of over £170m in the Council's stock. The new strategy would be formally adopted by the Council in November 2023 and would cover a period of 5 years. Public consultation regarding the strategy would take place over a five-week period until 13 October 2023.

An action plan would accompany the strategy and would detail the activities required to deliver on its evidence-based strategic outcomes. Limited data was available to the Council on the condition of its stock and assets and therefore, more work was needed to obtain information. A condition survey of around 5000 properties had commenced; the data would be used to provide a revised baseline which could then project future demand and investment needs. Regular reviews of the stock would take place, including the commissioning of a borough-wide condition survey, to ensure that data remained up-to-date and would never be no older than five years old.

The strategy set out how the Council intended to address the key asset management challenges affecting Sandwell communities. It would guide future strategic property decisions to make sure that the Council's portfolio was managed sustainably and efficiently, ensuring that investment was used appropriately so that properties remained fit for both current and future tenants. Sandwell's carbon net-zero initiative would also be addressed via the strategy. Building safety, regulatory standards and the social housing white paper 2020 all had a major impact on the formation of the strategy to make certain that legal obligations were adhered to.

Members raised concerns around the lack of defined standards or key performance indications (KPIs) in the document and asked if the document be more appropriately named as a policy document. Officers confirmed that the strategy document was a high-level document and would include KPIs and other metrics once the required data had been obtained.

Following questions from members, the following points were made:-

- information obtained via home checks were recorded and stored, however, the volume of information was not high enough to conclude a full assessment;
- an officer had been recruited who would review the information that the Council held to help build a picture of the Council's housing stock;
- the strategy would constantly be under-review, and a further report on the strategy would be brought to the board in the 2024-25 municipal year;
- a digestible summary document would be produced to accompany the main strategy document;
- external funding may be required but no details were available at that stage;
- repairs were carried out on an estate-by-estate basis however; the new strategy would take into consideration life cycle components;
- off-the-shelf software was available to use whilst the procurement of a bespoke asset management system commenced, if required.

Resolved:-

- (1) that a further report on the Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 – 2029 be brought to the Board in the 2024/25 municipal year;
- (2) that a summary document of the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 – 2029 be created to display the information in a more digestible manner;
- (3) that further clarification be provided to the board on the consultation methods being used in relation to the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 – 2029 and that the methods include encompassing digitally excluded individuals;
- (4) that a central database be created to store all information, including information obtained from home checks, to help assist in the data collection process;
- (5) that, in relation to the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 - 2029, a report on the external funding strategy be presented to the board including how much funding is required, where the funding will be obtained from and any relevant associated timeframes.

59/23

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Action Tracker

The Board noted the status of actions and recommendations it had made. Further updates would be reported to future meetings of the Board.

60/23

Work Programme 2023 - 24 and Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board noted its Work Programme for 2023 - 24 and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

The Chair suggested a new item be added to the work programme in relation to confectionary stands in parks.

Resolved that an item detailing the utilisation of confectionary stands based in Sandwell Parks, including associated revenues, is added to the work programme.

Meeting ended at 6.58pm

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