

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**Thursday 12 October 2023 at 6.03pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Fenton (Chair),
Councillors Davies, Dhatt, Fisher, Lewis, Maycock,
Webb and Younis

Also present: Councillor Padda (Cabinet Member for Leisure and
Tourism)

Officers: Ben Percival (Assistant Director Borough Economy
Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy), Matt Huggins
(Assistant Director Green Spaces, Green Services,
Events), Robert Marlow (Senior Lead Officer), Anthony
Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer) and Connor
Robinson (Democratic Services Officer).

61/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Khan,
Shaen and Trumpeter.

62/23 **Declarations of Interest**

| Minute No. | Subject | Member | Interest |
|------------|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| 64/23 | Green Spaces Annual Report 22/23 and Programme of Works Progress 22/23 | Councillor Fisher | Chair of a Park Friends Group |

| Minute No. | Subject | Member | Interest |
|------------|---|------------------|---|
| 65/23 | Playing Pitch Strategy Action Plan and Prioritisation - Establishment of a Steering Group | Councillor Dhatt | Coach of a Children's Football Club in Sandwell |

63/23 Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

64/23 Green Spaces Annual Report 22/23 and Programme of Works Progress 22/23

The Green Spaces Strategy 2022-2025 set out an approach to approve and publish both an annual report and an annual programme of planned works for green spaces across Sandwell. This would ensure that the goal of improving the quality of green spaces in the borough remained a priority.

Of the planned works for 2022/2023, 90% had been completed within the municipal year. It was highlighted that where works had not been completed, the usual cause was contractor delays or slippage due to specific seasonal requirements, these works would be completed during the 2023/2024 municipal year instead.

In total, 41 play areas had been improved alongside the establishment of an additional play area. It was also highlighted that nine outdoor gym sites had been refurbished, six swing sets had been replaced, seven zip slides had been replaced and 33 allotment plots had been brought back into use. The pilot team, that had been created to refresh open spaces that were littered, fly tipped and overgrown, had improved over 160 sites. It was confirmed that the team was now permanent which had been supported by senior officers across various services to tackle open spaces with multiple issues. Members were also updated on the completion of the West Smethwick Park Pavilion and Café.

The biggest challenge faced by the Council was the lack of resources available to spend on Sandwell's green spaces. Members noted that the annual programme of works allowed the Council to be transparent with the public on what works were to be prioritised and why certain actions had been planned. The strategic approach allowed officers to utilise "quality scores" that helped prioritise green spaces that were the most in need of attention. It was acknowledged that better communications were required between officers and town leads to ensure that members were consulted on what works were important to residents in their respective areas. Community volunteer days were also theorised by officers as ways in which works could be carried out to ensure the maintenance and accessibility of local green spaces.

The Board discussed the information it had received and, as a result, the following points were made:-

- prioritisation of green space works were based on health and safety requirements as well as the funding available;
- funding, that wasn't available to the Council, was accessible to friends groups for their own usage;
- volunteer processes, policies and recruitment had been improved and work had been carried out on corporate social responsibility;
- contracts with friends groups detailed the exact commitments and obligations expected;
- a steering group would be established in November 2023 to help guide the clearance of hotspots that had experienced substantial overgrowth within the borough;
- pitch resurfacing would take place across the borough and the timelines of works would be provided to the Board when available;
- there would be a mix of free and paid bookable slots depending on the nature of the request;
- the open bike track was delivered on-time without additional costs;
- theft of park furniture had been experienced across several sites which were not due to installation failures but were instead due to organised crime;
- before projects were planned, the views of the local community were sought about specific sports to ensure that residents were getting the facilities that they wanted;

- a written briefing on the playzone project would be provided to Board members;
- the introduction of dog washing stations across Sandwell had been delayed however, the scheme was being piloted at West Smethwick Park;
- plans were in place for green space and forest schools activities for children to begin in 2024; visits to Forge Mill Farm would also be on offer.

Lessons had been learned as a result of the establishment of Cafes in Sandwell's parks. It was confirmed that any surplus revenue from the sites would be used to fund other green space works and any relevant discretionary services. A breakdown of green spaces spend by town would also be provided to the Board at a later date.

It was noted that although the Council's green spaces programme had been extremely ambitious, 90% of the works had been completed which was deemed a great success. Some projects had experienced slippage due to an insufficient workforce and therefore, local suppliers and other tenderers would also be considered for future works. Additionally, work would be undertaken to establish a plan to reduce costs and ensure that the Council were getting value for money.

65/23

Playing Pitch Strategy Action Plan and Prioritisation - Establishment of a Steering Group

The new Playing Pitch Strategy, which was to seek approval from Cabinet in October 2023, was developed in line with Sport England guidance. The strategy would address borough facility requirements including areas and sites in need of major regeneration as these facilities played an important role in maintaining and improving people's health. As playing pitches were costly to maintain, a reliable strategy was necessary to optimise resources and set out realistic aspirations.

Due to the importance of the strategy, it was highlighted that it would be prudent to form a working group to assist the completion, adoption and implementation of the playing pitch strategy.

Resolved that a Steering Group comprised of Councillors Lewis (Chair), Davies, Fisher, Maycock and Khan be established to assist with the completion, adoption and implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy.

66/23 **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.

67/23 **Work Programme 2023 - 24 and Cabinet Forward Plan**

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

Meeting ended at 7:26pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk