

# Report to Cabinet

**15 January 2025**

<b>Subject:</b>	Performance Management Framework – 2024/25 Quarter 2 Monitoring
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Leader, Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
<b>Director:</b>	Assistant Chief Executive – James McLaughlin
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Kayleigh Walker – Senior Lead: Service Improvement

## 1. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that Cabinet:-

- 1.1 note and endorse progress on the further development of the Corporate Performance Management Framework and approve the 2024/25 Quarter 2 monitoring reports;
- 1.2 approval is given for the changes to the event-related Performance Indicators set out in Appendix 3 to the report.

## 2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Council approved a Corporate Performance Management Framework (PMF) on 12 April 2022, to address the recommendations of the Governance Value for Money Review by Grant Thornton and as a key element of the Council's Improvement Plan. Since then, the Council has come out of intervention and the corporate PMF has been further refined and built into business processes.

2.2 The new Council Plan was approved by Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024.  
The strategic themes in the new Council Plan are: -

- Growing up in Sandwell
- Living in Sandwell
- Healthy in Sandwell
- Thriving Economy in Sandwell

*All underpinned by One Council One Team*

- 2.3 Performance measures for 2024/25 have been aligned against the outcomes under each strategic theme, which, along with the updates to the business plan actions, will allow the Council to understand if it is delivering against the Council Plan (reported on a quarterly and annual basis through the Corporate Performance Report).
- 2.4 A two-tiered approach to performance measures has also been developed:
1. Council measures that are within the gift of the Council and that it can set a meaningful and ambitious target for. In total there are 175 of these measures.
  2. Contextual measures that are important for the Council to monitor but are not solely influenced by the Council and that it would not set a target for. In total there are 37 of these measures.
- 2.5 In total there are 212 Corporate Performance indicators. Of these, 86 are annual measures and 126 are quarterly measures.
- 2.6 This report sets out the Council's performance against the Corporate Performance Indicators for Q2 of 2024/25 (attached in **Appendix 1**), and a summary of Assistant Director Business Plan that contribute towards delivering the Council Plan rated 'red' (attached as **Appendix 2**).
- 2.7 Performance of key contracts is included in the quarterly performance reports to provide oversight of the performance of these services and assurance that contract management mechanisms continue to be in place and effective (see paragraph 11).

2.8 The information collected is used to enable the authority to better understand the impact of its work on local people, and where necessary, target actions and resources.

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

Growing Up in Sandwell	The corporate PMF includes measures under all strategic themes in the Council Plan to monitor progress in these key areas. The PMF also includes elements that measure the council's use of its resources to ensure delivery of the strategic objectives.
Living in Sandwell	
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	
Healthy in Sandwell	
One Council One Team	

### 4. Quarter 2 Corporate Performance Report – key messages

#### Corporate Performance Indicators

4.1 In Q2, the number of Quarterly PIs, excluding contextual measures, was 114.

4.2 Of the 114 indicators this quarter:

- 23 PIs (20.18%) are RAG rated 'red'
- 18 PIs (15.79%) are rated 'amber'
- 46 PIs (40.35%) are rated 'green'
- 27 PIs (23.68%) have no RAG rating or there was no outturn available this quarter.

4.3 There are also 14 annual PI's included in the report this quarter. Of these 7 are 'green', 5 are 'amber', 1 is 'red' and 1 has no RAG rating.

4.4 The highest number of 'red' PIs are under the Living Strategic theme (9), 8 of which relate to Housing, and under the One Council One Team Strategic theme (8).

## **Council Plan**

- 4.5 In total, 87.21% of all actions in Assistant Director Business Plans are on track, with only 7.54% of actions experiencing delays. A further 4.59% of actions have not been started but this is in line with expectations.
- 4.6 Of those actions delayed, the majority sit within Healthy Sandwell (5), Thriving Economy in Sandwell (8) and in One Council One Team (5).
- 4.7 The red actions in Healthy in Sandwell generally relate to delayed contract start dates. Progress is expected in Q3.
- 4.8 The delayed actions in Thriving Economy generally relate to areas in which factors external to the council are impacting upon progress. Commentary for each of these actions can be found in Appendix 2.
- 4.9 The delayed actions within the One Council One Team theme broadly relate to delays in the transition to a new telephony system together with other digital improvements to front facing services. Again, full details can be found in Appendix 2.

## **5. Our achievements in Q2**

- 5.1 The Council Plan (with Monitoring Framework) and the People Strategy were approved by Council on 23 July. The Council Plan outlines the new strategic themes, sets out the vision for the future, and details the actionable steps the Council will take to achieve these goals. The People Strategy ensures that the workforce is aligned with the Council's vision, values, and strategic priorities.
- 5.2 The Council was accepted onto the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities & Communities programme, the start of a three-to-five-year programme where Sandwell will demonstrate that it is a place where the local council and its partners are committed to advancing children's rights and have worked with UNICEF UK to put them into practice.

- 5.3 The Social Value team (who worked alongside the Business Growth Team, Planning, Regeneration, Procurement, Employment and Skills teams) were shortlisted as nominees for the Social Value Awards 2024 in two categories – Public Sector Leadership and Excellence in Planning. Over 270 submissions were received across 11 categories.
- 5.4 The Wednesbury Masterplan was launched in September as part of our wider Levelling Up Partnership programme which will kick-start improvements in Wednesbury Town Centre as well as help deliver much needed new homes, improve green spaces and expand the Millennium Centre to provide a space so that more can be done to give people the skills they need to secure better jobs.
- 5.5 Looking at our contextual measures and new data that has become available this quarter, Smoking Prevalence has reduced from 21% to 17.7%. This is good progress towards our SmokeFree Generation ambitions and evidence that our interventions, such as our stop smoking support service (ABL) who deliver quit support (the service is targeted at priority groups who have higher proportion of smokers and ill health) and our digital app are having an impact, as well as increased communications and campaigns. The work is supported by a strong enforcement offer who do lots of work around tackling cheap illegal cigarettes and vapes.
- 5.6 The drug related death rate has reduced from 2.1 per 100,000 per population (2020-2022) to 1.6 per 100,000 population (2021-23). This is much lower than the regional and national rates (6.3 and 5.5 respectively). We have a range of outreach projects that support those most vulnerable (especially those not currently engaged in drug treatment services), which includes treatment options and recovery support. Our continuity of care rates (ensuring those who use drugs when released from prison are picked up and engaged into community treatment services) is also better than the national average (68% versus 53% nationally). This success has been possible due to the additional funding we have received from central government and it is hoped this allocation will continue into 2025/26.

## **6. Performance Monitoring Areas for Improvement – Growing Up in Sandwell**

- 6.1 There is 1 'red' PI in Q2 for this Strategic theme. There were 4 PIs that were amber this quarter and were 'amber' or 'red' last quarter.
- 6.2 The measurement of the 'Number of children and young people engaging in council led activities across the Youth Service' is split into 3 parts, the first 2 of which are 'red' this quarter; the 'Reach of Young People', 'Reach of Declared SEND Young People' and 'Engagement of Young People through Detached Youth Work'. Whilst the reach for young people within the target 11-19 age range is lower than expected, the Service saw an overall increase in the 8-25 age range (801). In addition, retention rates of young people from Q1 have been sustained, which has an impact on capacity for engaging new young people. There are dedicated activities for children and young people with SEND however there was slightly reduced delivery during the summer. In addition to this there will be other children that access youth service provision who may have SEND but do not declare it and therefore it is not recorded. The Youth Service is currently exploring with the Meadows School operating a second night of provision, as well as promoting the offer in the Local SEND Offer and working with SCT to raise awareness of provision with the Children with Disabilities Team.
- 6.3 The 'Rate of Children on a Child Protection Plan at period end (Rate per 10,000)' continues to reduce, now at a rate of 46.6 per 10,000 against a target of 45, below the Statistical Neighbour Average (51.7) and in line with the national average of 46.53. The number of children subject to Child Protection plans are being monitored closely by both the operational teams and safeguarding unit.
- 6.4 The 'Rate of Children in Care at period end (Rate per 10,000)' has stabilised since the start of the quarter at 817 and it is below the same period in the previous year (827). The current rate of children in our care is now at 95.2 which is below Statistical Neighbour Average of 96.7

(updated March 2024) and the West Midlands Average of 101 per 10,000.

- 6.5 The new redesigned model for Children we Care for and Care Experienced young people went live on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024. Part of the model focuses on exit from care, permanence and transition to adulthood. All of these centre on the long term plans for children and moving onto permanent arrangements outside of care where this can be achieved. The adoption services have also been brought into these services as a further permanence outcome for children we care for. There are also a hubs for separated children (UASC) and accommodation to consider how young people can transition out of care into independence.
- 6.6 Elsewhere across the Trust, the front door and Assessment and Intervention teams are improved, with a sharper focus on preventing children needing to come into our care. When care is required, then there continues to be a focus on what needs to happen for children to return home or what alternative kinship/connected arrangements could be in place.
- 6.7 The Trust continues to be part of the National Transfer Scheme (established to move children from the area where they are first identified to care placements around the country), taking separated children in a more planned way. There is more work to do with our Housing colleagues to look at the support and arrangements for those separated young people post 18 years who are still waiting for asylum applications to be determined.
- 6.8 The work of exiting children from care continues and is now part of the new Children we Care for Service. Progress is tracked between Service Managers, Fostering Team Managers Principal Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This is ensuring that there is a continued flow of children exiting. An increase of 29 children have moved out of the system onto Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) than this time last year with 43 between October 2023 to September 2024, compared with 14 between

October 2022 and September 2023. During the same period, we had an increase of 89 children exiting Care (146 now up to 235).

- 6.9 The '% of CYP that have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months' is 10.6% against a target of 9%, a slight reduction from 11.7% in Q1. Not all placement moves are negative with planned moves, as some children positively move to live with parents or family members. These positive moves are aligned with effective care planning. The ongoing project between the Children's Trust and Barnardo's is focusing on those children where there are signs of instability and offers intervention with carers and the child to see where support can be provided, or where moves are needed, to ensure this is done in a planned and positive way.
- 6.10 Joint 'surgeries' are now taking place with Intervention services and Barnardo's to identify children/carers who may be experiencing difficulties and Home Stability Meetings are co-ordinated on a multi-agency basis. This is reducing the number of unplanned moves and offers greater opportunity of minimising moves outside of the effective care planning for children.
- 6.11 The Step Aside project continues to promote the use of the BERRI tool to track children in residential placements and to identify those children who can step down into alternative care arrangements. Again, the focus is ensuring that children are moved but in a planned way. Whilst this promotes a more effective care arrangement for children, it also impacts financial effectiveness.
- 6.12 Alongside this is the work being undertaken within the Trust to develop greater sufficiency of resources, including home, to enable Sandwell children to be cared for in Sandwell, by Sandwell carers. Fostering recruitment/marketing; Big Fostering project; Foster Friendly principles all assist in looking at how we can continue to build the number of homes available for children. Joint working with the Council to look at future residential options owned/run by Sandwell is also an area being considered as future options for our children.



6.13 'Out of the total number of open Single Assessments, the percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days' is 73.3% against a target of 85% in Q2. Since the start of the quarter, 225 of 307 assessments were in timescale, in September 2024 this means that 82 assessments were over 45 working days (although still within contract tolerance). Of the 82 assessments outside of timescale, 32 (39%) of those were within two teams within the localities. Excluding these two teams' performance would increase to 81%. Of the Single Assessments (SAs) that were out of tolerance (45 days), 40.2% (33 assessments) were completed between 46-48 days, just outside the timeframe.

## **7. Performance Monitoring Areas for Improvement – Living in Sandwell**

- 7.1 There are 9 'red' PIs under this strategic theme in Q2, which are set out below.
- 7.2 The targets for 'Improved street and environmental cleanliness' have not been met in the first period (this PI is measured over 3 periods throughout the year). There are issues with sweeper age and availability in addition to issues with weed spraying and growth trapping detritus. Serco are aware of the issue and have redirected crews to manually remove weeds across the borough following a weed spray.
- 7.3 The new indicator, '% of PRS disrepair cases processed to formal notice, civil action/prosecution or closed with positive outcome within processing times' is below the target of 75% at 46.15% for Stage 1 and 50% for Stage 2. The service has improved significantly since its redesign in 2022 and has seen recruitment to new posts and some turnover during late 2023 into 2024. The recruitment of housing standards professionals is a very competitive market and as such, the service introduced a career graded role to train and develop staff for these roles after two unsuccessful rounds of recruitment. To that end, five of the eight staff have had to be trained from the start in all required fields of expertise. This has taken some time and as such, three of these staff are only now able to progress cases in full from start to end. This means that performance against this measure will improve gradually over 2024/25 and we expect to fully achieve target in early 2025.

- 7.4 The ‘% of responsive repairs completed in timescale’ was 90.06% for emergency repairs and 72.88% for non-emergency repairs, against a target of 95%. We have realigned the current Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) workforce by moving a number of multi-trade operatives from our Void department into our Repairs department. This has resulted in performance around emergency repairs improving significantly but is having little impact on the backlog. We are currently exploring options to bring in additional resource to address the backlog. Whilst we manage the backlog, the measure will look worse before the improvement is shown, as we will be completing work that is already identified as overdue. Whilst we will continue reporting this measure, we will also identify the performance of the new jobs with the backlog excluded to give some assurance of the improvements being made. This additional information will be available in Q3.
- 7.5 The ‘Number of long-term empty homes brought into use’ is 10 against a target of 20 for Q2. The outturn fell short of target due to a number of those brought back in to use to date being long standing complex cases (spanning 3 years). The team have an additional 143 in progress at various stages, so we expect this number to increase and recover in line with target during the remaining two quarters. There is more than sufficient scope within the active cohort to hit this year and future years targets, however, with all empty properties there is a lead in time from the point of the officer's initial involvement to any relevant actions delivering outcomes, be these through positive interventions or through enforcement activity. The outturn for 2023/24 was previously reported incorrectly (2). The correct figure for the annual outturn was 30, meaning the cumulative figure to date is 40 properties brought back in to use. More information about how the Council is tackling Empty Properties is available here [Empty properties | Sandwell Council](#).
- 7.6 ‘Housing Compliance Health Check (Over 6 key areas): Gas safety checks’ is 99.48% against a target of 100%. All non-compliant properties are in the legal/access process where access will be achieved once completed - currently 134 are out of date. To achieve top quartile performance, forced entry on date of expiry is being explored which will mitigate any compliance issues caused by no access.
- 7.7 ‘Housing Compliance Health Check (Over 6 key areas): Fire safety checks’ is at 94.41% against a target of 100%. Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) are in a catch-up programme due for completion in March 2025. This is on track and improving month on month. All high-risk buildings

have a valid FRA and there are other visits made to the lower risk blocks throughout the year, where any urgent concerns would be escalated.

- 7.8 'Housing Compliance Health Check (Over 6 key areas) Asbestos safety checks' is 19.58% against a target of 100%. Whilst a management survey is in place for all blocks required, there are still gaps in the evidence for re-inspection surveys based on an annual review. The data analysis is underway to identify the blocks that require these reinspection's (where asbestos containing materials, has been identified). Circa 50% of the surveys have been reviewed and a programme of inspections has been initiated using in-house resource. The remaining 50% are being continued to be reviewed and any further inspections required will be added to the programme. The target for completion of this exercise is March 2025.
- 7.9 'Housing Compliance Health Check (Over 6 key areas): The percentage of properties with a domestic electrical installation condition report (DEICR) under 5 years old (or in legal resolution)' is at 96.02% against a target of 100%. There is an ongoing issue with customers allowing access for the EICR checks to be carried out. There are proactive communications being created with adverts in the Herald for autumn as well as bitesize versions to put on the Sandwell social media feeds to ensure tenants understand the importance of these checks. The access process has been reviewed and will align with the gas process resulting in legal intervention. There have been unforeseen delays with the legal aspect of signing and mobilising the new contractor which has resulted in additional delays to reduce the backlog. Work is ongoing to ensure the contractor has scaled up their resources to support in the delivering EICR compliance.
- 7.10 Total households in Temporary Accommodation at the end of Q2 was above the target of 223 at 236 and is RAG rated 'red'. Due to the demand increases on homeless approaches, the number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) increased by 69% over 2023/24 when compared to the previous year.
- 7.11 As of mid November 2024, the numbers in TA has increased to 239 households. Whilst the service has seen an increase of 19 households between August and November, this is a slower rate of increase over the three months. The August 2024 position was a 61% increase on the previous year, compared to the November 2024 position which has seen the increase reduce to 33.5%. A number of interim controls have slowed

the rate of increase, including more thorough approval processes for agreeing TA by management and improved negotiation with families who are no longer able to accommodate the person(s) presenting as homeless. Homelessness demand from Q1 of 2022/23 to Q1 of 2024/25 saw demand increase by 77.7%. This has increased by a further 15.3% between Q1 and Q2 of 2024/25.

- 7.12 It is important to note that whilst Sandwell's number of households in TA is increasing, the borough is now a quarter of the national average rate per 1000 households in TA when compared to all England rates. This has further reduced from a third of the rate at Q1. A range of activity is underway to limit the need to use temporary accommodation, including securing an intended 100 properties in the private rented sector for use as longer term accommodation through a targeted support model to increase affordability.
- 7.13 Of the 6 Annual measures reported this quarter, one was 'red' which was '% of residents who have are aware of the availability of Social Tariffs' from our Resident Survey. This was a sub question, based on the 53 individuals who stated they faced barriers or difficulties in accessing the internet due to the cost of broadband packages.
- 7.14 Looking at contextual measures, the number of domestic abuse-related crime incidents in Sandwell has been on a downwards trajectory but have increased in Q2. Non-crime incidents have remained stable, suggesting consistent reporting and continued need for support services.
- 7.15 The latest MARAC data shows 171 referrals this quarter, with 19% (32) being repeat cases. 2023/24 saw several changes within MARAC, including a regional review by West Midlands Police called 'Operation Willowbay'. This review was put into place as a response to the growing demand within MARAC and the increasing waiting times, which at times in Sandwell would exceed 12 weeks. Operation Willowbay reviewed Police referrals and found that there was a requirement to quality assure (QA) and threshold test these at the point of referral. This QA evidenced that thresholds for referrals were unmanageable and enabled some referrals to be re-directed to established local multi-disciplinary partnerships for case management. This has resulted in a significant reduction of MARAC referrals from Q4 2023/24 which has been sustained in Q1 And Q2. In Q2 last year there were 358 referrals.

## **8. Performance Monitoring Areas for Improvement – Healthy in Sandwell**

- 8.1 There are 3 quarterly PIs rated as 'red' in Quarter 2 under this strategic theme.
- 8.2 'ASCOF 3D Proportion of people using social care who receive self-directed support, and those receiving direct payments' is 17% against a target of 22%. Performance is below target, this time last year and benchmarking stats. We have commenced a transformation project, with one strand looking at our Direct Payment pathways which will help us to ensure we are supporting citizens to purchase their own support. This includes the appointment of a consultancy to review our provision of Direct Payments to ensure that we support people to make informed choices around their provision of care. It is not anticipated that short-term performance in this area will improve, however, we should start to see an improvement in 12 -18 months when new practices are embedded.
- 8.3 'ASCOF 2A The proportion of people who received short-term services during the year - who previously were not receiving services - where no further request was made for ongoing support (Oflog)' was 48% against a target of 60%. Performance is below target, last quarter and benchmarking stats. We currently have a programme of work in progress to improve our internal and externally commissioned reablement services. This includes providing more informal advice and support at the front door and having a strength-based approach in our conversations with customers (which means working with customers to understand what they can do themselves or with the support of others (e.g. family) and what they need support with) so that we provide the services and interventions they need to remain healthy and independent in their own homes. Improvements to performance should be seen the next 6-12 months.
- 8.4 The number of 'NHS Health Checks' is 732, below target of 1,500 in Q2. Instead of letters (given the cost per letter was £1.35), the decision was taken to send a second invite via text message. However, there was then an error on the side of the provider and this meant that the second text wasn't sent. This is being rectified, and we are going to have more events before February (when the contract ends) to improve the numbers. This contract is on a payment by results model, with a target of 6,000 Health Checks per year (over 2 years) prior to any PBR being

claimed. Approval has been granted by Cabinet to recommission this service, to begin on 1 April 2025, using a different delivery model.

- 8.5 Looking at new data for some of the contextual measures, the percentage of households in fuel poverty increased for 2022 to 22%, up from 20.6% in 2021. This is significantly higher than the figure for England which is 13.1% and higher than the regional figure which is 19.6%.
- 8.6 Data for vaccine uptake has also become available. For 2023/24 in Sandwell vaccine rates for MMR, HPV Virus and Meningitis are all below the figure for England. However, for HPV and Meningitis they are *significantly* below the figure for England.

## **9. Performance Monitoring Areas for Improvement – Thriving Economy in Sandwell**

- 9.1 There are 2 quarterly PI rated as 'red' in Quarter 2 under this strategic theme.
- 9.2 The 'Value of grants administered through the start-up grant programme' is £11,956 at the end of Q2, significantly below target of £30,000. The Start-Up Support Programme currently has 35 participants at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey. An additional £24,000 in grants has been approved in principle, with a further £15,000 allocated to participants who have been given a passcode to apply. The slower uptake of these grants is primarily due to businesses requiring additional time to prepare their business plans and complete the application process. We will review the grant expenditure over the next quarter and determine whether any underspend should be reallocated to the regional SME grant funding programme.
- 9.3 'Ratio of diesel to lower emission vehicles in fleet (Serco & Corporate)' performance was 2.5% for the Council and 1.9% for Serco, against a target of 7.5%. Council fleet transition is pending the Corporate Fleet Review, this is well underway and will be at Leadership early November. Serco fleet transition is expected to remain the same until (Serco) decisions are made regarding the replacement of their light goods vehicles - Serco's delay may impact year-end outturn.

## **10. Performance Monitoring Areas for Improvement - One Council One Team**

- 10.1 There are 8 quarterly PI rated as 'red' in Quarter 2 under this strategic theme.
- 10.2 The Revenues and Benefits Contact Centre Average Wait Measure and Abandonment Rate measure are both above target at 7 minutes 52 seconds and 10.15% respectively. Performance was affected by staff absence due to leave, sickness, and training. A report on this indicator was taken to Finance DMT on 15<sup>th</sup> October where the reasons for poor performance were explored and a number of options to improve performance, presented.
- 10.3 Whilst telephone demand has not increased in Q2, demand for digital contact (emails, contact us form/live chat) has increased compared to the previous year (for example 726 more emails were received in Q2 this year compared to 2023/24). The staff also cover the counter at Oldbury Council House where there have been 5,300 enquiries to date for 2024/25 and manage the stakeholder line (for Landlords and Voluntary organisations). This reduces the available resource for answering telephone calls, which is approximately 60% of staff time.
- 10.4 In terms of solutions, the service has taken on one member of staff and are currently trying to recruit two further customer advisors. Other options to improve performance include digital reminders for payment (e.g. text, email) both before a payment is due (a proactive approach) and after a payment has been missed. This would stop the cost of sending a reminder in the post and would allow us to phase texts/emails to contact residents, which would also spread the contact to the call centre, rather than a large volume at any one point. Another option is to reduce the number of recovery documents/requests sent over the summer period (but with a risk this could affect income) and recruiting additional staff and/or pooling resources with other teams to increase capacity. These options will be reviewed and an update provided through the Q3 report.

- 10.5 The 'Adult Contact Centre Average Wait measure' was 1 minute 1 second, above the target of 30 seconds, an increase of 20 seconds since Q1 (when the wait was 41 seconds). This is due to staff vacancies and sickness. We are continuing with the ASC Transformation Programme which will review the demand and resource in the contact centre. The contact centres across SMBC are due to have the new system implemented in Q4 2024/25, subject to testing and sign off. ASC is also commencing a digital pilot called 'AskSarah'. This digital tool enables our customers to provide information in relation to 'aids and adaptations they require – the information then puts them through to the correct service, e.g. Occupational Therapists or the Joint Equipment Store, reducing the number of calls that go through the Call Centre. There are currently on average 50 calls a day about equipment, so the potential to reduce demand on the call centre is significant.
- 10.6 'SARs compliance with timescales' was 75% against a target of 95%. This is a decrease from Q1 when the outturn was 82%. A breakdown by directorate is as follows: Assistant Chief Executive - 100% (7), People 61.54% (15), Place 76.09% (50) and Finance 71.43% (11). The Council is working to increase the compliance rate and achieve the 95% target.
- 10.7 'FOI compliance with timescales' was 85% against a target of 95%, the same as in Q1. A breakdown by directorate is as follows: Assistant Chief Executive 88% (8), Finance & Transformation 90% (63), Place - 88% (124) and People 69% (48). Again, the Council is working to increase the compliance rate and achieve the 95% target. The Governance Team are doing a number of things to help including regular (often weekly) meetings with teams, providing advice and guidance and undertaking the internal reviews when responses are challenged. There are plans to shortly publish statistics on the intranet and the internet so this should also help improve performance.
- 10.8 The 'Average working days to respond to MP enquiries' is above the target of 10 days at 10.58 days. This may be attributable to new MP's being elected during July and increased pressures on providing timely responses. Across all Directorates, timely responses to complaints, Member and MP enquiries continues to be a priority. The Service Areas



that are above 10 days are Adult Social Care (12.20) in the People Directorate, Environment (12.18) and Housing (10.75) in the Place Directorate and Revenues and Benefits (13.17) in the Finance and Transformation Directorate.

- 10.9 In the People Directorate, ASC now has a single point of contact for all MP enquiries which are monitored and overseen at AD level and reviewed on a weekly basis and any issues are escalated as appropriate. This process will be reviewed but should ensure performance improves in Q3.
- 10.10 In the Place Directorate data relating to responses that are due or overdue are provided to the Executive Director Place each Monday and the issue is now a standing agenda item on the Directorate Management Team Agenda every fortnight. The message is being cascaded through all teams within Place, of the importance of timely and comprehensive responses to MP inquiries. The Executive Director is monitoring progress closely and the expectation is that Q3 performance demonstrates a significant improvement in this measure.
- 10.11 In Revenues and Benefits, Performance was impacted in August due to staff leave/sickness and fell below the SLA. For the months of July and September the SLA was achieved 100% of the time and the average number of days was 8. Performance at the start of Q3 is currently reading as 100% and the average days is currently 6. MP enquiries continue to be closely monitored and are given priority.
- 10.12 With regards to measures relating to Care experienced Young People (CEYP), 'Care experienced young people 19-21 in Employment, Education and Training (EET)' is below target at 43.50% against a target of 45.5% and is RAG rated 'amber'. However, 'Care experienced young people 19-25 in Employment, Education and Training (EET)' is above target RAG rated 'green' (42.80% against a target of 42.60%). There are a number of young people who are unable to engage in EET due to physical disability, mental health and being young carer/parents and pregnancy.

10.13 Work is underway as part of the corporate parenting board strategy to improve Education, Employment and Training offers for our Young People, including support for mental health and emotional well-being. In addition to what has been reported previously, actions this quarter include:

- Corporate Parenting week took place between 9th-13th Sep, which included an employability attended by young people and employers.
- Work experience tasters in housing are being utilised for CEYP to support progression to potential vacancies in the directorate. Work experience tasters are also taking place in the Creche, Housing Stores, Employment and Skills and the Youth Service for CEYP opportunities.
- Engagement of CEYP has increased for apprenticeship opportunities, following increased awareness of PA's and other officers. Networking and attending communication meetings have also resulted in higher engagement. There are now more CEYP interested/committed to apprenticeship opportunities than we have budget available. A paper is being prepared for Leadership Team to review this issue and the options available to increase apprenticeship opportunities.
- A video to raise awareness of the pathways on offer to CEYP and increase participation is being explored. The Council's graduates will be working on this.
- The Skills and Employment Strategy has been launched and there will be further work with growth employers in November to raise awareness and the opportunities on offer. Addressing Youth Unemployment including Care Experienced Young people is a focus and the Strategy encourages a multi-agency approach to the challenge with shared responsibility to improve accessibility to opportunities.

10.14 The Percentage of vacancies filled was 38.50% against a target of 77%, a reduction from Q1 when the outturn was 83.30%. However, the Q1 (baseline) performance for this indicator included vacancies which were recruited to in Q1 but were actually advertised in the previous financial

year. Performance will continue to fluctuate between quarters until the baseline is revised and for this reason there is currently medium confidence in the method of calculation used for this indicator.

- 10.15 The 'Average working days lost per employee due to sickness absence (FTE)' at the end of Q2 was 5.81 against a target of 3.86, which is marginal increase compared to the same period last year. However, the switch over to Fusion had prevented managers from updating sickness absence records from the 23-Aug to go-live date. Occupational Health were also unable to add new absences from the 17-Sept. Therefore, the Q2 outturn and the trend will need to be treated with caution. Access has now resumed for managers/ Occupational Health to update sickness records directly in Fusion, which will be reflected in Q3 monitoring.
- 10.16 Managers will need to ensure that sickness absence records for their direct reports are kept up to-date in Fusion including adding the Return To Work (RTW) interview promptly. This is because the actual working days lost will be picked up from the RTW record in Fusion. Sickness absence summaries by directorate have been shared with the Executive Directors and this will be followed by Directorate Dashboards.

## **11. Contract Governance**

- 11.1 Reports on contract governance have been provided for Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT), Serco, Places Leisure and Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) and assurance of governance arrangements has been provided through these reports. A summary for each one is detailed below.

### **Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT)**

- 11.2 Since April 2018, children's services have been delivered by Sandwell Children's Trust on behalf of the Council. The Trust delivers the following range of services:
- Children's Social Care
  - Fostering
  - Targeted Early Help

- 11.3 The contract with Sandwell Children’s Trust has a comprehensive programme of governance arrangements. The contract requires that the Director of Children and Education, together with council senior officers from finance and legal services, and the Chief Executive of the Trust meet on at least a monthly basis to consider performance and operational matters. In addition, each quarter, the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Executive of the council meet with the Chair of the SCT Board and the Chief Executive of SCT, at a Strategic Partnership Board.
- 11.4 The contract requires SCT to provide regular performance updates for consideration by the Operational Partnership Board, the Strategic Partnership Board and then by the Cabinet. Progress against the performance indicators, together with information about financial, workforce, and other performance areas is reported.
- 11.5 The composition of the Board of Sandwell Children’s Trust is laid out in the Articles of Association. It includes a requirement to have non-executive directors (NEDs) who will provide independent challenge to the executive team but also offer advice and guidance based on their experience and knowledge. The term for one of the independent NEDs, Linda Sanders was due to end in October 2024. Approval was sought from Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> September to extend the appointment of Linda Sanders as a NED for a further period of up to 3 years.
- 11.6 Following the appointment of Rt Hon Jacqui Smith as a Minister in the new government, she resigned from her role as Trust Board Chair with immediate effect. While the appointment of the Trust Board Chair is a matter for the Council under the Articles of Association for the company, there is a side agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) that gives them the power to direct who we should appoint while the statutory direction continues to be in place. Discussions took place with officials from the DfE and they agreed for the appointment of Linda Sanders as Interim Chair of the Board. This appointment will continue while the DfE undertake an open recruitment for a new Trust Board Chair.
- 11.7 As of 1st April 2024, a set of new contract KPIs have been introduced, which included 3 existing KPIs, and 12 new ones. At the end of Q2, SCT reported that 7 KPIs were within tolerance (amber) and 7 KPIs were ‘green’, with 2 remaining ‘green’ for the whole of Q2.
- 11.8 The rate per children we care for per 10,000 has decreased from, 96.8 at the end of quarter 1 to 95.2 per 10,000 at the end of quarter 2 (see

paragraph 6.4). This equates to 817 children at the end of Q2. There has been an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors in care since June 2023, rising from 20 to 34 as at the end of September 2024.

- 11.9 The number of children on a child protection plan decreased from a high point of 526 (January 2024) in the last 12 months to 400 in September 2024. This translates to a rate of 46.6 per 10,000 children in September 2024 compared to 61.1 in January 2024 (see para 6.3). Although we do not have a like for like comparator (since data for statistical neighbours runs one quarter in arrears due to the process of collection), Sandwell's rate is lower than our statistical neighbour rate for the previous quarter.
- 11.10 Councils have a responsibility to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) who are identified in their area. As this disproportionately affects port authorities, the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was established to move children from the area where they are first identified to care placements around the country. This was first established in 2016 and refreshed in June 2021 to incorporate a UK-wide voluntary rota, to encourage more councils to participate. Since February 2022, all councils have been expected to accommodate UASC on a rota system, with the rota taking into account various issues including numbers of children in care and wider asylum pressures. Councils already at the UASC cap do not have to accommodate more children, but are able to if they wish.
- 11.11 There is currently a threshold applied to the numbers of UASC a council is expected to support. Government changed the threshold from 0.07 per cent of a council's child population to 0.1 per cent on 24 August 2022. Sandwell's estimated child population has increased to 85,824, 0.1% of the total population figure would be 86 children. In line with the national transfer scheme the expectation is that we can accept up to a further 45 children.
- 11.12 Kent County Council have requested that LA's that are below the 0.1% threshold accept transfers outside of the rota. Sandwell has been requested to take an additional 2 UASCs to date. The Council wants to take a proactive approach to accepting young people out of the rota, in doing this we can agree general parameters of who we are able to support at this time. If we wait until allocated under the rota we would be expected to take any child who is nominated.
- 11.13 Looking at the budget, the current forecast for 2024/25 indicates an outturn overspend of £4.2m compared to the contract sum received.

This is mainly due to increased costs in residential/external foster placements/external PA support (£4.5m) and under-18 supported accommodation (£1.5m).

- 11.14 Placement costs remain a significant risk to the Trust. The MTFP requires reduction in both the number of children in care and their provision costs, emphasising alternatives to residential placements like foster care, supported accommodation, or returning to family. The Step Aside programme, expected to save up to £1.5m in 2024/25, leads this effort.
- 11.15 The Council and Trust are in the final stages of a feasibility study on opening 'internal homes' (provided through SCT rather than a provider). An update on this will be provided as part of the next quarterly report.
- 11.16 The Council and SCT have both been recognised as Foster Friendly Employers by the Fostering Network and are now working with other Statutory Partners to consider if they are also able to apply for recognition and if not what they might need to do to achieve foster friendly employer status.
- 11.17 As of September, there has been an increase of permanent social workers. Although there has also been a slight increase in interim social workers, the permanent-to-interim ratio of our Social Workers is now 82.9% permanent and 17.1% agency. The vacancy rate decreased from 8.8% in September 2023 to 4.85% in September 2024.

## **Serco**

- 11.18 The council's contract with Serco was awarded in 2010 and runs until 2035. It has a contract value in the region of £34m per annum. The contract covers services including waste and recycling collection, household recycling centre management, street cleansing and fleet management and renewal.
- 11.19 The contract has a set of regular meetings in place with standard agendas relating to the contractual requirements from key outcome targets (KOTs) to operational issues. These meetings are supported by regular cross channel communications between the SMB and Serco teams. Leadership Team also receive regular contract reports that provide oversight and issues are raised as appropriate.

- 11.20 The contract contains the requirement for the provision of regular data from the contractor to be provided, there is also an associated requirement for SMBC to provide information to Serco, relating to Council priorities annually and fleet maintenance through a set of KPIs. In addition, there is an integration with the Council’s My Sandwell reporting tool.
- 11.21 Overall service performance in Q2 has been good, with fewer penalty points awarded than most quarters last year. Penalty points over a certain threshold result in a deduction from the contract payment.
- 11.22 The Council have successfully recruited a Waste Contract and Operations Manager to directly manage the Serco contract. The new post holder started on 1 August 2024.

### **Places Leisure**

- 11.23 The Council has a 25-year contract with Places Leisure to operate West Bromwich Leisure centre. The contract is a Design, Build, Operate and Maintain contract which ensured value for money by reducing design and build costs as well as ongoing maintenance liabilities.
- 11.24 Monthly operational reports are provided to update on performance, – operational and technical. Quarterly contract management meetings are held to ensure the ongoing monitoring of the contract and performance. These cover Operational Performance, Health and Wellbeing outputs and Customer Feedback.
- 11.25 In terms of participation, Places Leisure’s performance is returning to pre-pandemic levels. Participation levels are continuing to rise, and memberships are significantly above 2019/20. Only swim numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels. This could be due to the opening of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre in July 2023.

<b>Current Year to Date Participation vs FY24 and FY20</b>			
	<i>FY25</i>	<i>FY24</i>	<i>FY20</i>
April	36,477	34,239	39,911
May	38,667	36,924	38,520
June	37,504	37,815	37,968
July	39,749	39,078	40,288
August	35,678	37,606	38,285
September	35,261	31,445	39,988
<b>Memberships at Q2 FY25 v FY24 &amp; FY20</b>			

<i>Membership</i>	<i>FY25</i>	<i>FY24</i>	<i>FY20</i>
Fitness Club Live	2,823	2,606	2,088
Swim Only	76	92	144
Learn to Swim	1,187	1,362	1,577
Basketball Club Live	34	50	16

- 11.26 Based upon projected operational, and therefore financial performance a business plan was agreed for the duration of the contract. The business plan results in an annual management fee payment to the Council of circa £28k
- 11.27 There is also a utility benchmarking arrangement included in the contract, whereby PL own the risk on consumption and the Council are liable for the risk on tariff. Pre-pandemic operations resulted in a net gain for the Council – Management Fee minus Utility Benchmarking Payment. This is calculated and paid at the end of each financial year. In 2022/23 the utility benchmark resulted in a payment from the Council to PL of £239k. Modelling for 2023/24 indicated that the utility benchmarking will require a payment from the Council to PL of £202k, the actual amount is circa. £127k.

### **Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT)**

- 11.28 Work continues between Council Officers, Bevan Brittan solicitors and SLT's solicitor to finalise the Deed of Variation (DoV) to the Management and Funding Agreement (MFA). This DoV will extend the termination and subsequent period of operation to 31 March 2027 and refine the partnership as agreed and signed on 13 July 2023. This position was confirmed by Cabinet on 18 October 2023.
- 11.29 Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) manages the following leisure centres in Sandwell:
- Haden Hill Leisure Centre
  - Hadley Stadium
  - Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre
  - Portway Lifestyle Centre
  - Sandwell Aquatics Centre
  - Tipton Leisure Centre
  - Tipton Sports Academy
  - Wednesbury Leisure Centre



11.30 With regards to operational performance, the headline figures are below. However, these are not directly comparable with last year because Langley and Smethwick swimming centres closing and Sandwell Aquatics centre opening on 24 July 2023 (this will impact Q2 2023/24). Also, as with effect from Q3 2023/24, concessionary memberships are no longer included due to their subsidy.

11.31 Headline figures for Q2 include:

- 624,840 attendances July to September 2024. **8.7%** up on Q2 FY24 (574,886)
- From July 2023 to July 2024, total memberships decreased by **1.4%** but will be skewed in comparison to previous years (as referred to above)
- 6,250 enrolled on Learn to Swim (children) – **25.5%** up from Q2 FY24 (4,978)

11.32 Sport & Leisure, Public Health and SLT worked together at the start of this year to develop improved reporting for the free-swimming element as funded by Public Health. Previously, other than free swimming visits, there was no agreed reporting mechanism. SLT have provided Public Health with figures for Q1 and Q2 for an agreed set of 11 KPIs. A reporting structure has also been agreed with regards to other Public Health re-directs which help to fund concessionary memberships and outreach work, particularly at Portway Lifestyle Centre.

11.33 Following the reconciliation of Q2, SLT's accounts are projecting a surplus for 24/25, as long as the business continues to perform the same as in Q1 and Q2.

11.34 Council Officers are working with SLT's Leadership Team to further develop the Strategic Leisure Review. This work looks at the future options for 3 of the SLT run leisure facilities:

- Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre
- Hadley Stadium
- Tipton Sports Academy

11.35 A report will be presented to Leadership Team prior to Leaders Meeting and a Cabinet decision. This will specifically outline the proposals for Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre and Hadley Stadium. A report will also be

developed to explore options for the settlement of leisure management after the expiry of the current agreement with SLT – from 1 April 2027.

11.36 Sickness is part of a priority list of policies that are under review by SLT. The average days lost in Q2 has decreased by 38% and costs decreased by 5.5% in comparison to Q1 (In Q2 the Average days lost was 1.38 days per FTE, compared to Q1 where the Average days lost was 2.21 days per FTE). To manage sickness and support staff, workshops are to be held with managers to reinforce best practice and ensure proactive management.

11.37 Staff turnover has increased since last year by 0.46% (from 5.8% in May 2023 to 6.3% in June 2024). However, this is much lower than the Chartered Institute of Personal Development (CIPD) average turnover rate of 28.6% and the average rate for the industry at 29.9%.

## **12. Strategic Risk Register**

12.1 Effective risk management is a key element of good corporate governance, as noted in the council's [Code of Corporate Governance](#), and is essential to the overall performance of the council in meeting its council plan objectives. Good risk management will ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively, and that assets and resources are protected against risk in the most efficient way.

12.2 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) receive the Council's Strategic Risk Register (SRR) on a regular basis for review and comment. The role of the ARAC is to provide assurance to the Council that it has a system of governance, risk management and internal control in place and that the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements continue to inform decision making.

12.3 The SRR does not include all of the risks faced by the Council. Other risks are captured within directorate, programme and project risk registers in line with the Council's risk management framework. The last version of the Strategic Risk Register was presented at the September meeting of the Council's Audit and Risk Committee and is attached as Appendix 4. At this meeting the Housing Transformation risk was categorised as Amber. However, following the Social Housing Regulatory Judgement it has been re-categorised as a red risk. All of the other current red risks have been confirmed with their respective risk owners.

12.4 The Strategic Risk Register is to shortly be subject to a wider review, with an updated version being presented to the Audit and Risk Committee meeting in January 2025.

### 13. Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	There are no direct financial implications to this report.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	A corporate performance management framework was identified as a key gap in the council's governance arrangements by Grant Thornton in 2021. The establishment of the corporate performance management framework was a key action in the council's Improvement Plan agreed by Council in January 2022 and updated in June 2022. The PMF will enable officer and political leadership to improve oversight and corporate grip of the council's performance.
<b>Risk:</b>	Should the council not implement a robust performance management framework, then it will not have the corporate oversight and intelligence to inform decision making and effectively manage risks, which is key to service delivery and the achieving strategic objectives identified in the Council Plan. These risks and the associated mitigations are noted in the SRR.
<b>Equality:</b>	Equality measures are included in the PMF, under the One Council One Team Strategic Theme.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The measures to track progress of the Council Plan include a series of health and wellbeing indicators. This enables the council's leadership to see at a high level the direction of travel of the borough's health and wellbeing and seek to continue good practice or identify mitigating actions to address issues.
<b>Social Value:</b>	Social value measures are included in the PMF
<b>Climate Change:</b>	There are measures related to Climate Change in the PMF, including Air Quality (Number of sites that are non-compliant with the National NO2 air quality objective) and a number of measures under the

	outcome 'Sandwell will be a net zero council by 2030 and a net zero borough by 2041'.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	There is an outcome in the Council Plan under 'One Council One Team' for Corporate Parenting: 'An outstanding corporate parent, with all of the young people in our care reaching their full potential' and there are a number of Performance Indicators to measure this. There are also performance measures under 'Growing Up in Sandwell' that cover educational attainment of Children in care.

## 14. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Corporate Performance Indicators Q2 2024/25

Appendix 2 – Council Plan Exception Report Q2 2024/25

Appendix 3 – PIs to be removed or amended

Appendix 4 – Strategic Risk Register (August 2024)

## 15. Background Papers

List source/background documents

Performance Management Framework – Q1 Monitoring - The report is available here:

<https://sandwell.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s23525/Performance%20Management%20Framework%202024-25%20Quarter%201%20Monitoring.pdf>

The appendices to this report are available here:

<https://sandwell.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MId=6962&Ver=4>

Report to Council 21 April 2022:

[Performance Management Framework for the Council](#)