

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Thursday 13 March 2025 at 6.03pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Dhatt (Vice- Chair in the Chair);
Councillors Chidley, Cotterill, Davies, W Gill, Jeffcoat,
Rahman, A Singh and Tromans.

Present: Councillor J Singh.

Officers: Ben Percival (Assistant Director - Contracts, Projects,
Strategy and Policy), Nicola Leavy (Principal Officer –
Sport and Leisure) and John Swann (Democratic
Services Officer).

11/25 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lewis
(Chair), Iqbal and Ms Brown.

12/25 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Tromans declared an other registerable interest in
Item No. 18/25 (Leisure Management), in that her grandson
was an employee of Sandwell Leisure Trust.

13/25 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 6
February 2025 are confirmed as a correct record.

14/25 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

15/25 **Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Action Tracker**

The Board noted the status of actions and recommendations it had made.

16/25 **Cabinet Forward Plan and Board Work Programme**

The Board noted its work programme and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

17/25 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting. This is to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006 relating to the financial and business affairs of any person, including the authority holding that information.

18/25 **Leisure Management**

The Board received an overview of the Leisure services provided or funded by the Council.

The current contract with Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) for the management of eight Sandwell leisure centres was due to end on 31 March 2027.

It was acknowledged that there were broadly four options for the future operation of the current SLT operated leisure centres:-

- Continue with the current operating arrangements,

- Council to directly manage leisure centres,
- Transfer operation to a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC),
- Outsource to third- party provider.

It was noted that West Bromwich Leisure Centre was operated by a third- party provider (Places Leisure) who paid an annual management fee to the Council.

Local authority contracts in England were typically awarded to providers on a no–subsidy basis. In addition, Sandwell’s modern leisure estate was deemed to be attractive to providers within a buoyant market.

From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:

- Terms and conditions for staff employed by SLT were significantly above the leisure market norm.
- Operation of leisure services and centres was a discretionary service for local authorities to provide.
- Haden Hill Leisure Centre was undergoing development and due to be re- opened to the public in 2027 with new leisure, swimming and gym facilities on site.
- SLT was becoming more commercially attractive and generating more revenue than in previous years.
- Operating models different to the status quo could prove more sustainable and provide better value for money.
- An extension to the contract with SLT could be on revised and improved contract terms rather than under existing arrangements.
- Leisure centres provided a range of health and wellbeing services such as weight management on behalf of public health and adult social care directorates.
- Any future arrangements would need to secure outcomes from the service that supported the Council’s priorities.
- The Council would benefit from increased understanding of which operating model to pursue by September 2025.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities explore options other than the current operating arrangements of Leisure Services;
- (2) that the Assistant Director - Contracts, Projects, Strategy and Policy establish a task and finish group, comprising off officers and elected members including the directors of adult social care and public health, as well as members of the Safer Neighbourhood and Active Communities Scrutiny Board, to advise on which operating model and service specifications is most appropriate for Sandwell; with a view to reach a conclusion by September 2025.
- (3) that a timeline, planning arrangements and detail of service specifications for each of the four options for the provision of leisure services is provided to the Board to inform scrutiny arrangements.

(Councillor W Gill joined the meeting during consideration of this item).

Meeting ended at 7.44pm
(meeting adjourned between 7.23- 7.43pm).

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