

Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday, 9 April 2025 at 3.30pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Carmichael (Leader of the Council and Chair);
Councillors Allcock, Hartwell, Hughes, Moore, Smith, Taylor
and Uddin.

In attendance: Councillors Bhamra, Fenton, Jeffcoat, Lewis Rahman,
N Singh and J Singh.

Officers: Shokat Lal (Chief Executive); Sally Giles (Director of Children
and Education); Liann Brookes-Smith (Interim Director of
Public Health); Rashpal Bishop (Director Adult Social Care)
Matthew More (Head of Communications); Kate Ashley
(Strategic Lead – Service Improvement) and Suky Suthi-
Nagra (Democratic and Member Services Manager).

39/25 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies and E
M Giles.

40/25 **Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interests were made:

Minute No. 44/25 (Corporate Review of Voluntary and Community
Care Sector Grants - Councillor Hartwell declared a pecuniary
interest on the basis that she worked with the voluntary. She did
not take part in the discussion and left the room during
consideration of the matter;

Minute No. 44/25 (Corporate Review of Voluntary and Community Care Sector Grants - Councillor Allcock declared a pecuniary interest on the basis that he was a member of the Tanhouse Community Centre Management Committee. He did not take part in the discussion and left the room during consideration of the matter.

41/25 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held 12 March 2025 are approved as a correct record.

42/25 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider as a matter of urgency.

43/25 **Q3 Corporate Performance Report 2024/25**

Consideration was given to the Quarter 3 Corporate Performance Report 2024/25, setting out the Council's progress in delivering the Council Plan 2024-2027.

Performance measures for 2024/25 had been aligned against the outcomes under each strategic theme, which, along with the updates to the business plan actions, would allow the Council to understand if it was delivering against the Council Plan (reported on a quarterly and annual basis through the Corporate Performance Report). The information collected was used to enable the authority to better understand the impact of its work on local people, and where necessary, target actions and resources to improve progress in achieving the Council's strategic objectives.

Reason for Decision

Performance would enable the Council to track progress in delivering the strategic outcomes in the Council Plan, improve services through identifying poor performance and sharing good practice, celebrate our achievements and where things were going well and provide a strong evidence base for improved decision making and the efficient use of resources.

Alternative Options Considered

Through enabling us to identify opportunities for continuous improvement, the Performance Management Framework was a key component in our journey to becoming an outstanding organisation, there were therefore no alternative options to consider.

Resolved:-

- (1) that progress on the further development of the Corporate Performance Management Framework be received;
- (2) that approval is given to the 2024/25 Quarter 3 monitoring reports;
- (3) that the changes to the Performance Indicators, as now submitted at Appendix 4 is approved.

44/25

Corporate Review of Voluntary and Community Sector Grants

As part of the budget setting process for the 2024/25 financial year, the Council had committed to undertake a corporate review of voluntary community sector (VCS) grants funded through the Council's General Fund and identified an efficiency target of £250k to be achieved from the review.

Consideration was now given to recommendations made by an externally conducted review of how the council funds the VCS in Sandwell, and how the Council intends to respond to them. This included proposing changes to the Voluntary and Community Sector Funding Protocols to improve clarity of approach to all stakeholders. In endorsing the recommendation within the review, the Governance and Constitution Review Committee would be recommended to consider any resultant changes to the Constitution.

Reason for Decision

The external review of how the council funds the VCS in Sandwell was commissioned as part of the council's ongoing improvement journey and to ensure that council resources were allocated in line with the Council Plan 2024-2027 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The review engaged with a wide range of stakeholders from the local VCS, as well as council officers and elected members.

Alternative Options Considered

Approval was sought to receive the findings of the review and endorse the action taken by the council to date and planned for the future, therefore there were no alternative options to be considered for this matter. Should the council not seek to address the findings in the review, this would reduce the opportunity for improvement in the way we fund the VCS in Sandwell as well as negatively impacting the council's relationship with the local sector.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the findings of the external review of voluntary and community sector grants be received and approval is given to endorse the council's response;
- (2) that the draft Voluntary and Community Sector Funding Protocols as set out in Appendix 1 be considered by the Governance and Constitution Review Committee.

45/25

UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Growth Budget 2025

Approval was sought to the acceptance of the proposed offer of £4.067m additional grant funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for 2025/26. The funding primary goal was to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, with three key investment priorities around Community and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills.

The key areas where it was anticipated the additional funding would be utilised across the 2025/26 financial year was proposed as follows:-

Communities & Place (allocation £820,000)

- Borough-wide approaches to greenspace improvements
- Site specific improvements for facility improvements and infrastructure
- Improvements in the Sandwell Valley

People and Skills (allocation £1.65m)

- SMBC Delivery (Employment & Skills)
- VCS delivery (Employment and Skills)
- Youth Service – Hybrid Centre
- NEET provision

Business Support (allocation £1.483m)

- Business Advisors/support
- Business Wrap Around Support • Start Up Hub
- Business School
- Start-Up Grants
- SME Grants

Reason for Decision

The grant was provided on an allocation basis to all authorities across the UK, with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) being the lead authority and accountable body for the West Midlands. This also ensured a strategic, joined-up approach across the region. Initially, a three-year UKSPF programme of funding totalling £88.4m for the West Midlands Region was allocated in 2022. The Sandwell proportion of this funding amounted to £4.71m for local spend devolved to Sandwell, with a further £2.28 million in grants and business advice being retained by the WMCA but used in the Sandwell area. The original three-year programme of £6.99m of UKSPF funding was approved at Cabinet in November 2022 (Minute 196/21 refers). A further top-up allocation of £160,000 was provided for Sandwell Business Support Grants in December 2024, increasing the total received over the period 2022-2025 to £7.13m.

Alternative Options Considered

Option 1- accept the grant funding allocation. UKSPF funding was based on an allocation rather than a bidding basis, with every local authority in the UK receiving an allocation. In terms of the proposed reduction in the allocation of funding, the proposed mitigations identified were considered appropriate to ensure the continuation of the programme, albeit on a reduced basis. This option was preferred as this would continue to deliver tangible benefits across Sandwell.

Option 2 – Start afresh and develop a series of new projects. Due to the positive outcomes and momentum of existing work, it was not recommended to do this. Timescales would prohibit this option on the basis that there is one year to deliver the programme.

Option 3 – Do Nothing. Hand back the funding and do not provide opportunities for the district that were outlined. This could cause a reputation challenge for the Council.

Resolved to approve the acceptance of the proposed offer of £4.067m additional grant funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for 2025/26, and set out proposals for how this used across Sandwell.

46/25

Approval of Asset Management Policies

Approval was sought to four Housing Asset Management related policies, namely, the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy, Complaints Compensation Policy, Rechargeable Repairs Policy and Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy.

The policies set out Sandwell Housing Service's commitment to delivering responsive repairs and maintenance (including passenger lift maintenance and breakdowns), recovering the cost of rechargeable repairs, and offering compensation to those who have been affected by failures in service.

Reason for Decision

These policy documents would provide clarity for the Housing Service as to the standards that we should hold ourselves to. This also allowed Sandwell Council to hold ourselves to account as a housing provider, providing the best possible service to our customers and residents. By enacting these policies, we aim to maintain council-owned assets to a high standard, investing in homes and communities and fostering an environment where residents can thrive.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative option was to not seek adoption for the four policies, however, if this were to be the process followed, it would not be possible to deliver the objects of the Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy and therefore, would result in the sub-optimal management of our housing assets.

Resolved that approval is given to the following policies:-

- Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy
- Complaints Compensation Policy
- Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy.

Housing Capital Delivery Update

Consideration was given to progress in relation to the current housing capital programme and proposed expenditure during 2025/26.

Approval was also sought to the procurement activity required in order to deliver the 2025/26 housing capital programme.

Reason for Decision

This programme of delivery and associated award of contracts would enable the council to conduct capital investment to its social housing stock, ensuring compliance with Building and Fire Safety Regulations, whilst also supporting the council's goals for decarbonisation, reducing fuel poverty, and aligning with the councils adopted Asset Management and Compliance Strategy.

The housing capital programme was funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and addressed the need to invest in the council's housing stock, in line with the council's priorities, and ensured that properties remained compliant with the regulatory framework for social housing.

Alternative Options Considered

Option 1 would be to not deliver the programme. This would lead to a degradation in the quality of the council's housing stock and a failure to comply with the regulatory framework for social housing and relevant fire and building safety requirements. This option was considered inappropriate.

Option 2 would be to deliver the capital investment in 2025/2026 via 'ad hoc' arrangements rather than procured contractors. This could lead to dissatisfaction amongst tenants, disrepair, and potential sanction or further regulatory downgrading from the Regulator of Social Housing. Furthermore, the council could not demonstrate that value for money has been achieved. This option was considered inappropriate.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to the housing capital programme 2025/26 as now submitted;

- (2) that the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation, be authorised to prepare tender documentation, conduct appropriate procurement processes and to award contracts in relation to the following as attached at Appendix 1 and in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023 and the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules, in relation to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Repairs and Maintenance service:
- Fire and Building Safety
 - Major capital works and structural integrity
 - Decent Homes and property improvement
 - Retrofit and Decarbonisation
 - Estate and Infrastructure improvement
- (3) that the Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance be authorised to enter or execute under seal any contract documentation to give effect to the Resolution (1) – (2) above.

48/25

Approval of Main Modifications to the Sandwell Local Plan

Approval was sought approval to submit Main Modifications to the Examination in Public for the Sandwell Local Plan. These proposed modifications had arisen as a result of public consultation into the Sandwell Local Plan during October/November 2024. The modifications would be addressed by the Planning Inspector appointed to oversee the Examination and would be subject to further public consultation.

One of the main modifications involved the allocation of an additional housing site that did not appear in the submitted plan. Therefore, it was possible that the Inspector may ask the council to undertake consultation on this site as a separate process, before the schedule of Main Modifications was agreed. This would enable the Inspector to consider the representations on the additional site, and if necessary, hold further hearing sessions to discuss it, before consultation on the other Main Modifications took place. No further consultation on the additional site would usually be necessary unless subsequent substantive changes to it were also proposed.

Reason for Decision

Representations received during the consultation period identified potential changes to the Sandwell Local Plan (SLP) which could help to resolve any soundness and legal compliance issues with the plan, including a residential site allocation. However, any change to the submitted plan that would materially affect one or more of the plan's policies can only be made as a main modification (MM) recommended by the Inspector. Therefore, it was possible that the Inspector would identify further main modifications to the SLP throughout the Examination. All proposed MMs must be subject to public consultation.

Alternative Options Considered

The Main Modifications were identified as a result of representations received during a formal consultation exercise. There are no alternative options to consider.

Resolved that approval is given to the submission of the Main Modifications to the Examination in Public into the Sandwell Local Plan.

49/25

Cross City Bus Package 3 Dudley to Druids Heath via Oldbury and Smethwick

Approval in principle was sought to the proposed Cross City Bus Package 3 – Dudley to Druids Heath project being promoted by Transport for West Midlands.

The Dudley to Druids Heath project was a Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) led scheme being delivered using Department for Transport (DfT) funding allocated directly to the West Midlands Combined Authority through the Better deal for Bus Users fund, along with some funding, for the Birmingham sections, allocated by Birmingham City Council. It formed part of a wider programme of cross-city corridor upgrades identified in the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) and the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The proposals consisted of a series of bus priority interventions along the corridor that would offer passengers improved journey times and a more reliable service for routes including the 50, 82 and 87 services in Birmingham, Sandwell and Dudley.

Approval of the final proposals at each location would be jointly delegated to the respective Cabinet Members for Environment & Highways and Regeneration & Infrastructure at Decision Making Sessions as required.

Reason for Decision

In Sandwell, the nature of the roads along which the route runs meant that opportunities for full bus priority were limited either by road width, or capacity constraints. Therefore, the project consisted of interventions at the following locations;

- Burnt Tree (A4123/A461) Junction, Tipton
- A457 Dudley Road/Oldbury Ringway Junction, Oldbury
- A4092 Cape Hill/Waterloo Road/High Street Junction, Smethwick

Alternative Options Considered

The corridor was chosen by the Department for Transport based on bus patronage levels and thus the number of passengers likely to benefit from improvements to the service. The funding was allocated to TfWM/WMCA on a geographically restricted basis. No alternative routes were offered.

At each of the intervention locations, alternative layouts had been, or would be considered, through the design process with the option providing the most benefits to bus users whilst not disadvantaging other road users, particularly pedestrians and cyclists.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval in principle is given to the proposed highways modifications within Sandwell that form part of the Cross City Bus Package 3 – Dudley to Druids Heath as shown at Appendix 2;
- (2) that the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Infrastructure, be authorised to approve final scheme designs at a Decision-Making Session(s) following public consultation carried out by Transport for West Midlands;

- (3) that approval in principle is given to appropriate as highway maintainable at public expense any council-owned land that is required to enable the scheme to be delivered, subject to Resolution (2) above, and to approval by the Executive Director – Place under existing delegated powers.

50/25

Digital and TEC (technology enabled care) Strategy

It was reported that the demand for adult social care was increasing due to an ageing population and resource constraints. Digital and Technology Enabled Care (TEC) provided an opportunity to improve care outcomes whilst reducing pressure on frontline services.

Approval was now sought to the TEC Strategy for Adult Social Care and partners, covering 2024 to 2028 which outlined plans to integrate digital and TEC solutions into care pathways to enhance efficiency, improve quality, and empower residents to live independently.

The strategy aligned with Sandwell's Vision 2030 and the "What Good Looks Like" (WGLL) framework to create a digitally inclusive and accessible care model.

Reason for Decision

The strategy provided a structured approach to integrating technology into care pathways to improve efficiency, enhance service quality, and support independent living, for longer, for residents.

Alternative Options Considered

Do nothing: This would result in continued inefficiencies, higher costs, and missed opportunities to modernise care services.

Partial TEC implementation: While beneficial, a fragmented approach would fail to achieve full efficiency gains and resident empowerment.

Full TEC adoption (recommended): A comprehensive approach ensured systematic integration, cost-effectiveness, and improved care quality.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to the Digital and Technology Enabled Care Strategy 2024 – 2028 as set out in Appendix 1;
- (2) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, to authorise the Director of Adult Social Care to ensure the implementation of the Strategy across adult social care services with a coordinated approach to embedding technology in adult social care and its partners, including procurement and award of contracts and partnership agreements;
- (3) that the Director of Adult Social Care is authorised to establish a governance framework to ensure accountability and strategic oversight of Technology Enabled Care adoption;
- (4) that approval is given to the allocation of funding to support digital inclusion, Technology Enabled Care deployment, and workforce training.

35/25

Exemption and Contract Award – Tipton Tow Centre Regeneration Project (Parcels 1 and 2)

It was reported that whilst the Tipton Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Rescope and Funding Package was agreed by Cabinet on 18 October 2023 (see Minute No. 129/23), the minimum number of bids required to meet the procurement thresholds for awarding the construction contract had not been met on delivery parcels 1 & 2 (P1 & P2 hereunder). An exemption from the procurement and contract procedure rules was therefore required to allow the commencement of the project.

Awarding of this contract would realise the delivery of 55no. new, high-quality and sustainable social homes for Sandwell residents, as well as delivering 55 of the 70 housing outputs required to satisfy the grant funding agreement.

Reason for Decision

The procurement exercise was undertaken on a fully open and competitive basis pursuant to the council's Contract and Procedure Rules. Of the 5 bidders, Torsion Construction Ltd were the highest scoring bidder in terms of quality of SQ submission.

However, upon receipt of final bids, there were insufficient tenders to meet the threshold for minimum number of tenders.

The commercial submission had been independently scrutinised by the council's Senior Lead Quantity Surveyor (Urban Design and Building Services) who was satisfied that the proposal offered value for money and was in line with the previous internal project cost estimates.

Alternative Options Considered

Option 1- Do nothing

The council could choose to do nothing. In this instance, whereby no contract was awarded, the grant funding would be returned to MHCLG, and no outputs would be realised. This was not considered to be a viable option.

Option 2- Retender

The council could choose to retender the project on the grounds that the minimum number of bidders was not met. This was not recommended due to:

- a) The risk of grant clawback- If the council were unable to disburse the grant funding within the timescales set out within the grant funding agreement, there was a risk that the council could be subject to grant clawback.
- b) Commercial assurance- due to our own independent scrutiny of the proposal, it was considered value for money. As such, there was not likely to be any material further cost reduction by retendering the project.
- c) Quality score- of the 5no shortlisted bidders Torsion Construction Ltd scored highest during the previous round of qualitative quality screening.

In summary, Torsion Construction was considered to be a reputable partner with demonstrable experience of schemes of a similar nature and have provided a sound commercial submission. As such, a retender was not recommended.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Executive Director - Place is authorised to award a contract to Torsion Construction for £13,164,602 to deliver 55no. new residential units in Union St, Tipton;
- (2) that any necessary exemptions be made to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to allow the Executive Director - Place to award contracts to the successful tenderer if the required minimum number of tenders are not received on this and all other procurement activity pertaining to the Tipton Regeneration Project;
- (3) that the Executive Director - Place is authorised to design, procure, award any further contracts to redevelop three sites in Tipton town centre (as indicated in Appendix 1) for affordable one and two bed council housing units.

Meeting ended at 4.19pm

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