

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board Scrutiny Review into Communities

Scrutiny Review into Communities

Date of Review: Municipal Year 24-25

Review Objectives: To foster an improved sense of community, to bridge social divides and to encourage individuals to be active within their respective community.

Reason for Review being undertaken: Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board commissioned a Review based upon a few points. Including being one of the most suggested topics by Members of the Public in relation to improved community relations, including community cohesion and culture sharing. As well as more contextual background of the 2024 riots across the United Kingdom, there was a strong feeling from Members of the Board to ensure communities across Sandwell felt-safe and felt a connection to their local area.

Evidence and Sources

Source Type	Name and Details	Key Evidence Provided	Reliability/ limitations
Local Data platform	Sandwell Trends – A data and intelligence platform managed by Sandwell Council, providing local demographic data, community profiles and social indicators. Home page - SANDWELL TRENDS	Offers detailed data on population diversity, deprivation levels, migration patterns and neighbourhood cohesion indicators in Sandwell. Useful for identifying community needs and cohesion challenges.	Reliable for Local context but must be supplemented with qualitative evidence and lived experiences for a fuller picture.
Community Engagement	Faith Sector Sessions workshop or consultation held with representatives from local faith communities across Sandwell to	Provided valuable qualitative insights into interfaith relations, barriers to community cohesion,	High value for lived experience and grassroots perspectives. May not represent all faith groups equally or comprehensively.

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	<p>discuss social cohesion and community challenges.</p> <p>For Professionals Healthy Sandwell</p>	and how faith-based groups contribute to local unity and resilience.	
Public Consultations	<p>Consultation and Communication session organised to engage with residents, community leaders and stakeholders on local cohesion and integration efforts.</p>	<p>Gathered views on communication barriers, trust in local institutions, and opportunities to strengthen community connections through shared information.</p>	<p>Captures diverse public opinion, through feedback may be reflected only those already engaged.</p> <p>There was no 'correct' type of consultation as the best method differed based on the type of response being sought. Whilst surveys garnered the largest response, focus groups with the target population were beneficial for subjects such as Adult Social Care policies.</p> <p>The demographic data available was inconsistent in some areas and a more prescriptive approach to consultations would be of benefit. This could include mandating that all Council departments use the same age brackets as the National Census.</p>
Statistical data	<p>Measures of Civic Engagement-voter turnout.</p> <p>Local and national voter turnout statistics (e.g. local elections, general elections).</p>	<p>Provides insight into levels of civic participation, democratic engagement and potential disengagement in certain communities or demographics.</p>	<p>Quantitative data is objective and useful for trend analysis but doesn't explain underlying causes of low engagement.</p>

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Comparative Research	<p>Review what other Council approaches have been.</p> <p>Desktop research into initiatives, strategies and best practises used by other Councils to promote social cohesion.</p> <p>Examples of Council included Bradford, Rotherham and Stoke</p>	Offers comparative models of community engagement, partnership models and policy employed by other local authorities and regions.	<p>Gives insight into other regions and local authorities, which can be used for benchmarking data.</p> <p>Might not be relevant to local demographics, however.</p>
Online Resources/ Practical online tool	We Make Camden, is a Camden Council initiative allowed residents to design and lead on Local community initiatives.	<p>Demonstrates a practical citizen led approach to community-based issues.</p> <p>This included grassroots ideas, funding allocation and step by step guidance.</p>	The project is an example of community led initiatives, but limitations around Camden's demographical and socio-economic status in comparison to Sandwell.
Training Event	<p>Council Culture -Training session on 18 June 2025.</p> <p>COUNCIL CULTURE New Citizen Project</p>	A workshop and training session centred around Council culture working better with Local residents.	
Policy Document	<p>Independent Commission on neighbourhoods Report titled "Think Neighbourhoods: A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy challenges"</p> <p>Think Neighbourhoods: A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy challenges</p>	Provided ideas on new approaches to fix neighbourhoods, including economic integration and community led initiatives.	<p>Whilst has new approach to one of the country's biggest policy challenges.</p> <p>Requires a tailored approach to Local Authorities as the report covers a national scope.</p>

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Policy Document	Local Trust -Left behind report The Local Trust - Left Behind?	Provided ideas on how to uplift left behind communities.	Requires Local Authorities to adopt and tailor the report to said authorities.
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Key Findings

Following the Scrutiny Review meeting the following themes and findings were discussed:

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Summary of Findings</u>
Intersectionality	<p>It was understood that Sandwell is a diverse Borough, and residents may have multiple identities that span across multiple demographics and communities.</p> <p>The six towns that make up the borough, have vastly different compositions and needs.</p>
Borough Structure	<p>Towns across Sandwell have unique identities and are made up of different communities. Whilst scrutiny reviews are strategic in nature and should be focused on matters at a borough wide level, regard can also be had for town and ward tiers of locality. Ward Coordinators and town profiles could feed into the review where appropriate.</p>
National Best Practice	<p>Looking external to the Borough may provide the best opportunities for understanding what works well, and how this can be adapted for use in Sandwell. By approaching national organisations rather than local organisations which already operate within the Borough we can explore alternatives to the current arrangements.</p> <p>By looking at case studies of communities which are analogous and statistical neighbours to Sandwell, (have similar levels of deprivation, are ethnically diverse and are close to cities but</p>

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	have their own distinct identities) can provide learning opportunities.
Consultation Participation	<p>Those from hard- to- reach communities are less likely to respond to consultations conducted by the Council.</p> <p>Consultation response levels were identified as a key and measurable factor in monitoring levels of engagement. Members indicated that an improved consultation process could be a key workstream of the scrutiny review.</p> <p>Key lines of enquiry with regards to this matter could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Is there a standard operating procedure (SOP) for conducting consultations or do different departments conduct them differently? b) What corporate guidance is currently provided and is this suitable for all communities? c) Do different consulting methods (Citizen space, in person, paper forms in libraries etc.) incur differing response levels by community group? d) How are specific instances (cultural sensitivities, English not- first- language) addressed as part of the consultation period? <p>Consultation data and input from Service Improvement and Corporate Communications departments has been sought as part of the review.</p>
Tailored approach to communities	Research indicates that professionals are likely to encounter increased barriers and resistance from a community group when they are perceived to be an outsider.

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	<p>The champions programme within the Directorate of Public Health demonstrated that those from hard- to- reach communities are more likely to respond to key messaging and reported higher levels of engagement when messaging came from those within their communities and trusted local leaders rather than an external body.</p>
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