

Minutes of Council

**Tuesday 18 March 2025 at 7.00pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

- Present:** The Worshipful Mayor, Councillor Khatun (Chair);
- Councillors Melia (Deputy Mayor), Carmichael (Leader), Moore (Statutory Deputy Leader) K Allcock, Ashraf, Bhamra, Bhullar, Chidley, Cotterill, Crompton, Davies, Dhatt, Dunn, Fitzgerald, Gavan, E Giles, E M Giles, J Giles, L Giles, S Gill, W Gill, Hackett, Haq, Hartwell, Hemingway, Hinchliff, Horton, Hughes, Hussain, Iqbal, Jalil, Jeffcoat, Kalebe-Nyamongo, Kaur, Khan, Khatun, Lewis, Maycock, Millar, Millard, Muflihi, Owen, Pall, Piper, Preece, Rahman, Randhawa, Shaeen, A Singh, J Singh, N Singh, Smith, Taylor, Tipper, Tromans, Trumpeter, Uddin, Webb, Williams and Younis.
- Officers:** Shokat Lal – Chief Executive; James McLaughlin- Assistant Chief Executive; Suky Suthi-Nagra – Democratic Services and Member Services Manager; Stephnie Hancock- Deputy Democratic Services Manager, Connor Robinson- Democratic Services Officer, Kennedy Brown – Sergeant at Arms.

9/25 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Allcock, Choudhry, Dhariwal, Fenton, Johnston, Kordala, Loan, Mayo, Weston and Wilkes.

10/25 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared at the meeting.

11/25 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council, held on 25 February 2025, are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12/25 **Announcements**

Council received announcements in relation to the Mayor's recent engagements.

The Mayor extended sincere thanks to all members and officers who had supported her efforts throughout the municipal year.

The Chief Executive addressed Council to announce that on International Women's Day 2025, Hayley Insley, Capital Projects Manager in the Place Directorate, was recognised by The Planner Magazine as one of the 2025 Women of Influence in the Public Sector. Over 200 nominations had been received for this award.

This was the second consecutive year that a Sandwell officer had won this prestigious award. In 2024, Tammy Stokes, Assistant Director Spatial Planning and Growth had won the award.

13/25 **Annual Report on the Treasury Management Service and Actual Prudential Indicators for 2023/24 and Mid-Year Review 2024/25**

Council considered the annual report on the Treasury Management Service, Actual Prudential Indicators for 2023/24 and the Mid-Year Review 2024/25.

Council noted the Treasury outturn for 2023/24, including the Treasury and Prudential Indicators. All indicators were green except for the one related to General Fund borrowing, which was amber.

It was further noted that no amendments were required to the previously approved limits on borrowing for 2024/25. Revisions had been made to Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 as a result of updates on capital spend profiles and predicted outturn information.

14/25 **Statement of Licensing Policy 2025**

Section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 mandated that the Council, as the Licensing Authority, publish a Statement of Licensing Policy, detailing how it intended to execute its licensing functions under the Act.

The Act required the Council to determine its policy regarding the exercise of its licensing functions for each five-year period and to publish an updated statement of that policy.

The previous Statement of Licensing Policy had been approved by the Council's Emergency Committee in May 2020, under emergency arrangements due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following formal consultation with the statutory consultees, the Council was asked to approve the 2025 Policy with no major amendments.

The Chair of the Licensing Committee put on record his gratitude to the members of the Licensing Committee and to Democratic Services and Licensing officers, for their work supporting the Committee.

Resolved that the Statement of Licensing Policy 2025 is approved.

15/25

Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles

Section 349 of the Gambling Act 2005 mandated that licensing authorities publish a Statement of Principles, which they proposed to apply in exercising their functions under the Act, for each successive three-year period.

The Council's previous Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005 had been implemented in May 2022. Consequently, a revised Statement of Principles was required by May 2025.

Following formal consultation with statutory consultees, the Council was asked to approve the revised Statement of Principles.

Resolved that the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles is approved.

Pay Policy 2025 and Gender Gap Reporting from 1 February 2024 to 31 January 2025

As required by the Localism Act 2011, the Council was required to publish a Pay Policy Statement, outlining its policies regarding the remuneration of chief officers, the remuneration of the lowest-paid employees, and the relationship between the pay of chief officers and that of other employees.

Additionally, the Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 mandated that the Council annually prepare and publish its Gender Pay Gap data.

The median Full Time Equivalent (FTE) salary had increased by 9.8% during the 12-month period from 1 February 2024 to 31 January 2025, from £32,076 to £35,235 per annum. The previous year's increase was 6.4%. This rise in value resulted from the 2024 pay award, incremental progression, and the median salary being represented by SPC 25, rather than SCP 23, as reported in the previous year's statement.

It was noted that when comparing pay ratios between the median FTE earnings and the median chief officers' pay, the ratio had reduced over the 12-month period from 1:4 to 1:3. This change was due to the increase in the median FTE salary and a slight decrease in the median chief officers' pay, from £113,884 to £112,193. Otherwise, pay level ratios within the Council remained consistent with the previous reporting period.

The Council's mean Gender Pay Gap figure for 2025 had narrowed from 2.5% to 2.2% over the 12-month period. It was noted that the first mean Gender Pay Gap figure, published in 2018, was 8.4%. It had been agreed that the Council would use this figure as an initial baseline to monitor progress.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) annual survey of the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom reported that the mean Gender Pay Gap figure as of 1 April 2024 was 7.0%.

The Council was requested to approve the Pay Policy Statement 2025, and the Gender Pay Gap Data prior to publication before 31 March and 30 March respectively.

Resolved: -

- (1) that the Pay Policy Statement 2025 is approved and published before 31 March 2025;
- (2) that the Gender Pay Gap Data is approved and published before 30 March 2025.

17/25

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks for Members

The Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee had oversight of the Council's ethical governance framework, which included oversight of the implementation of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Protocol for Members.

The Committee had noted that undertaking DBS checks for members on an annual basis was labour intensive for officers due to the significant timescales involved with the DBS process. The Committee therefore recommended that Council authorise the Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance and Monitoring Officer to amend the DBS Protocol for Members so that the frequency of repeat DBS checks was undertaken on a three-year basis, which was in line with the Council's protocol for officers.

Resolved that the Assistant Director of Legal and Assurance and Monitoring Officer is authorised to amend the DBS Protocol for Members so that DBS renewals are

undertaken every three years, in line with the Council's DBS protocol for Officers.

PROCEDURAL

18/25 Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 Update

Council received updates from: -

- (1) Councillor Jalil as the Council's lead representative on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority;
- (2) Councillor Millard as the Council's lead representative on Transport for West Midlands;
- (3) Councillor Carmichael as the Council's lead representative on the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- (4) Councillor Taylor as the Council's lead representative on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel.

MOTIONS FOR DEBATE

19/25 Notices of Motion

The Council considered the following motions received under Standing Order No. 12: -

19/25(a) **Motion - Prohibition of Off-Road Bikes in Public Spaces**

It was moved by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Hackett: -

“Council Notes:-

1. the growing issue of illegal off-road bikes being ridden dangerously in public spaces across Sandwell, is causing disruption, damage to green spaces, and posing serious risks to pedestrians and road users;
2. numerous complaints from residents about noise pollution, anti-social behaviour, and safety concerns linked to off-road biking in parks, footpaths, and other public areas;
3. existing enforcement powers are limited, and the problem persists despite police and council efforts to tackle it;
4. other local authorities have successfully introduced Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) to deter and enforce against illegal off-road bike use.

Council Believes:-

1. that stronger enforcement powers would help solve the issues;
2. that stronger powers would help protect residents, preserve green spaces, and reduce anti-social behaviour;
3. enforcement should involve collaboration between the council, local police, and community safety teams to ensure effective action against offenders.

Council therefore resolves to call on the Leader and Cabinet to explore options to:-

1. consult with local police and key stakeholders to investigate the feasibility of implementing a borough-wide Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) banning off-road bikes in all public spaces across Sandwell, that develops clear enforcement measures;
2. work with West Midlands Police and community safety teams to increase enforcement efforts against illegal off-road bike use;
3. launch a public awareness campaign to inform residents about the PSPO, encourage reporting, and highlight enforcement actions;
4. prioritise the investigation into the feasibility and implementation of the PSPO;
5. ensure adequate resources are allocated for enforcement and public engagement;
6. report back on progress within two months.”

The motion was put to the vote and carried.

8/25(b)

Motion - Diversity and Representation in Local Democracy and Inspiring the Next Generation of Councillors

It was moved by Councillor Hemingway and seconded by Councillor Kalebe-Nyamongo: -

“Council notes and welcomes the diverse and inclusive nature of the communities which together make the borough of Sandwell so unique and welcoming.

Council further notes the importance of affirming commitments toward ensuring local democracy is transparent, inclusive and representative of all our communities, and accessible to all, whilst always ensuring the highest standards of behaviour and conduct which our residents and communities rightly expect.

Council acknowledges that it is the responsibility of not just Sandwell Council itself but of all councillors, whether as part of a political group or as an independent, to engage and encourage the next generation of councillors to come forward and to continue working to improve diversity of representation in local democracy.

Council notes and welcomes the aspirations set out in the Co-operative Party’s Diverse Councils Declaration which collectively sets out a pathway to support the Council in ensuring the most inclusive representation, including the following aims –

1. Providing a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy;
2. demonstrating an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct;

3. setting a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the next local elections. including:
 - calling on political groups to appoint Diversity Ambassadors from their Councillors to work with each other and local party associations to encourage recruitment of candidates from under-represented groups;
 - continuing to encourage and enable people from under-represented groups to stand for office through the provision of activities such as mentoring and shadowing programmes and information and learning events for people interested in standing as official candidates;
 - proactively engaging local community groups and partner organisations to encourage the widest possible representation across councillors from under-represented groups;
 - encouraging all councillors and prospective candidates to complete a survey around election time to gather views to inform future support arrangements;
 - encouraging all political groups to set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the next local elections.
4. Continuing the development of a Member Development Strategy, Induction Programme for new councillors and a wider annual Member Development Programme and working towards achieving accreditation for member development through the Local Government Association (LGA) Councillor Development Charter and/or Charter Plus.

5. Affirm commitments to supporting all Councillors including:-

- access to counselling services for all councillors;
- offering training and support promoting the safety and wellbeing of Councillors whenever they are performing their official duties;
- taking a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment of Councillors in any form.

6. Explore options to ensure flexibility in committee and meeting arrangements:-

- endorsing and encouraging recent Government proposals to allow remote attendance at meetings;
- ensuring the schedule of council and committee meetings is sufficiently flexible to ensure the widest possible participation by councillors, including the duration of meetings and adjournments to support councillors who may have wider familial and caring commitments who may otherwise be less able to undertake the role.

7. Requesting the Independent Panel on Members Allowances to undertake an ongoing review of members allowances to ensure these remain fair and enable diverse representation in our councillors, not limiting the ability to stand for public office and give service to the community to those who can afford it, including the suite of supporting policies for councillors relating to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave.

8. Working to ensure councillors from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile, influential and decision-making roles.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to work with Opposition Leaders, Independent Councillors, and all Councillors to commit to the Diverse Councils Declaration and ensure Sandwell remains a diverse and representative Council, including continuing to explore a range of measures and support options to achieve this objective from training and development to arrangements and frameworks supporting Councillors to undertake their roles.”

The motion was put to the vote and carried.

Meeting ended at 8.29pm.