

# Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**Tuesday 29 April 2025 at 6.00pm**  
**In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

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

**In attendance:** Chief Superintendent Kim Madill (West Midlands  
Police) and Sue Smith (Tenant and Leaseholder  
Scrutiny Group).

**Officers:** Nicola Plant (Assistant Director – Public Protection and  
Community Safety), Nigel Collumbell (Assistant  
Director – Housing Management), Sarah Ager  
(Assistant Director – Asset Management and  
Improvement), Wendy Sims (Operations Manager –  
Community Safety), Maria Smith (Drugs Project  
Manager), Christine Davis (Tenant Engagement  
Officer) and John Swann (Democratic Services Officer).

## 29/25      **Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Iqbal.

## 30/25      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 31/25      **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 10  
April 2025 are confirmed as a correct record.

## 32/25 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

## 33/25 **Implementation of Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022- 26**

Further to Minute Nos. 30/23 (meeting held on 23 March 2023) and 27/ 24 (meeting held on 14 March 2024) the Board received an update of the work undertaken by the Safer Sandwell Partnership (SSP) Police and Crime Board. The Board was a multi- agency body made up of colleagues from West Midlands Police, West Midlands Fire Service, the local authority, and probation and health colleagues.

The Strategy had been in place since 2022 and focused on three strategic priorities:

- Preventing violence and exploitation.
- Reducing offending and serious organised crime.
- Preventing crime and anti- social behaviour in neighbourhoods.

The delivery of the strategy had been shaped by the Strategic Assessment, Serious Organised Crime (SOC) profile and statutory duties such as the Serious Violence Duty.

### **Preventing violence and exploitation**

Consultation had taken place on a local knife harm strategy, alongside visible patrols in high- risk areas and hotspot-based youth engagement exercises to prevent disorder. Over the previous year there had been a 22% reduction in serious youth violence, whilst all serious violence was a concern, this represented the largest reduction in the West Midlands.

Youth outreach and mentoring programmes had also been funded via the Violence Reduction Partnership grant, which had been accessed by 5,000 young people.

The force had received 247 reports of modern slavery and had trained over 1,080 professionals to recognise signs of modern slavery to build frontline capacity.

In addition, it was responded that domestic abuse (DA) incidents had fallen to the lowest level in four years, with 10,183 reported in the previous year. Over 2,000 victims of DA had supported by Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors and over 100 individuals had been supported by Independent Sexual Violence Advisors.

### **Reducing offending and serious organised crime**

Operation Guardian and county lines intensification activity had increased mapping of organised crime groups (OCGs). Individuals who had been exploited as part of county lines operations had been successfully referred to safeguarding and exploration panels.

Eight OCGs had been actively monitored and following a multi- agency intervention had their activities disrupted with tactical enforcement.

There was a dedicated service to tackle stalking in Sandwell and rates of both stalking and DV had undergone improvement. There was a particular focus on police performance and Crown Prosecution Service performance.

The Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 had provided accommodation for inmates leaving prison who were at risk of homelessness for 85% of individuals on probation.

### **Preventing crime and anti- social behaviour in neighbourhoods.**

The SSP had strengthened its performance infrastructure, including the development of a new Community Safety Dashboard. The tool allowed partners to categorise data by location, type and cohort.

The Borough tasking model had been refocused on evidence and intelligence led approaches to address crime within Sandwell's communities.

The Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) within the Borough had been reviewed and renewed to support the

reduction of anti- social behaviour (ASB) in hotspot areas following public consultation.

It was reported that the town with the highest rates of ASB was West Bromwich, followed closely by Smethwick. The lowest rates of ASB by town were in Wednesbury.

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

- The manner by which Sandwell recorded data in relation to modern slavery had been recognised as best practice by the Human Trafficking Foundation and the Local Government Association Modern Slavery Working Group. However as Sandwell recorded modern slavery differently to other local authorities following a serious incident, benchmarking and comparing our data to other local authority areas was challenging.
- Homelessness was a contributing factor for those at risk of re- offending.
- Housing pathways were in place for ex- offenders, the type of accommodation varied, but due to ex- offenders being mostly single males, hostel accommodation was frequently used.
- The re- offending rate for those under Probation was 6%, which was similar to the regional average and had improved from a 10% rate during the year.
- A slight increase of prosecutions for those reported for rape or sexual assault had been recorded within both Sandwell and the West Midlands.
- The online space was one of the most challenging areas to police and did contribute to radicalisation of individuals; raising awareness of means to tackle this, such as parental controls, were of benefit.
- Local Authorities, schools and hospitals had a statutory duty to report those suspected of radicalisation. Sandwell had previously benefitted from increased funding, however as it was no longer one of the top 20 worst affected areas, this funding had been withdrawn. The withdrawal of funding was not anticipated to jeopardise the service as multi- agency and partnership working arrangements were in place, including with local places of worships and faith groups.

- The Council's ability to deliver its Prevent service via the Prevent Delivery Group and the CONTEST Board was reviewed annually and monitored by the Home Officer.
- 20 pilots were due to take place nationally across violence reduction areas to provide interventions for those who are known to police but may not be suitable for Prevent due to a lack of ideology identified as being a motivating factor for violence.
- Board Members would benefit from receiving a 'data dashboard' of crime statistics for each of the six towns on a quarterly basis.
- Serious youth violence was a concern; there had been a reduction in knife crime offences but it was recognised further work was to be done. Intelligence teams had identified hotspots within the Borough which were patrolled at random and stop and search powers were used where appropriate.
- Prevention work was being undertaken at an early stage in primary schools. Of particular note were the 'Loudmouth' programme for pupils in years 5 and 6 and the 'My Tomorrow' programme which was young people led.
- Budget and resourcing issues were always prevalent within police forces; however, 20,000 additional officers nationally had boosted figures within Sandwell and 150 additional officers had recently been announced for the West Midlands, of which Sandwell would get its proportional share.
- Ensuring enough police vehicles were on the road was challenging, and Sandwell was able to borrow vehicles from other West Midlands local authority areas as required on a reciprocal basis.
- High turnover of community police officers within towns meant that some newer officers lacked locality specific knowledge. Whilst consistency was a priority of the police force, it was recognised that officers do sometimes seek new roles or get promoted.
- Performance was monitored on a monthly basis, including policing statistics and location based data to ensure the SSP objectives were being delivered against. Key performance indicators including crimes where alcohol was a factor or where weapons were used in DA offences were also monitored. It was

agreed that the SSP delivery plan would be shared with Board Members.

- Work was being undertaken to produce the new Community Safety Strategy from 2026, including consulting partner agencies and community groups.
- Sandwell Children's Trust were the lead agency for the Exploitation Strategy, however efforts were ongoing to provide an all- ages exploitation strategy, rather than being focused on solely young people.
- DA offences had decreased, however there had been a change in the methodology by which DA crimes were recorded. Multiple DA offences by a perpetrator to the same victim were classed as ongoing crime rather than separate offences. In addition, strong wrap- around support services for victims via commissioned services and prevention and enforcement action had resulted in a 22% reduction in repeat DA cases.
- DA was considered a 'hidden crime' and the rates were believed to be far higher than the crime statistic indicated. Furthermore, as DA victims were less likely to testify in court, evidence was gathered from multiple sources to strengthen the prosecution case.
- Domestic Abuse Protection Orders were utilised to prevent a perpetrator from attending a specific location or removing them from an address for 28 days.
- DA programmes had been specifically tailored for 16/ 17 year olds which were delivered via the Youth Justice Service or in schools.
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres were utilised to provide support for victims. The service incorporated specially trained officers and chaperones. In instances where children had also been incorporated into DA based crimes, the service could also be used and a young person's domestic violence advisor was allocated to them to support them via their school.
- Those from ethnic minority backgrounds were overrepresented within the youth justice system and engagement activities with members of the community, including advisory groups, to tackle disproportionality were being undertaken.
- It was acknowledged that further work was needed in all areas of the strategy to achieve better outcomes, notably with respect to violence against women and girls.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Assistant Director for Public Protection and Community Safety and the Borough Commander for Sandwell Local Policing Area extract data and key metrics from crime databases and cascade this to the Board for information;
- (2) that the Assistant Director for Public Protection and Community Safety and the Borough Commander for Sandwell Local Policing Area provide the Board with a 'data dashboard' by town, to include key trends and key metrics on a quarterly basis.

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

### **34/25      Housing Improvement and Transformation Update**

Further to Minute Nos. 36/24 (meeting held on September 2024), 45/24 (meeting held on 5 December 2024) and 5/25 (meeting held on 6 February 2025), the Board received an update in relation to the Housing Improvement and Transformation Plan (HITP).

The HITP had been developed to achieve and monitor progress towards compliance with the regulatory framework and required building safety standards.

Key progress since the last update had included achieving 100% compliance with fire risk assessments and the new repairs policy approved at Cabinet.

The Repairs Backlog contractor procurement was on track and new dedicated emergency and urgent day- to- day repairs team setup to increase performance and reduce tenant wait times.

The HITP was made up of ten key projects, each with distinct workstreams.

The majority (seven) were on track and progressing well:

- Compliance and Building safety Improvement
- Repairs Review Backlog and Improvement Plan
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Customer Journey and Consumer Standards Improvement Plan
- Contract Process Review
- Workforce Development, Resource Management and Culture Change
- Best use of Resources and Stock (Value for Money)

Slippage had been encountered in the three below workstreams:

- IT and Systems Transformation
  - The Integrated Housing Management System procurement route was being re- evaluated by Legal colleagues. Slippage had been encountered due to new procurement legislation being introduced in February 2025.
  - Timeframes for the procurement activity was now likely to be available in April 2025 instead of March.
- Communications Plan
  - Corporate Communications colleagues had supported the Plan 1 day a week and whilst the initial strategy had been delivered the Plan was still undergoing development.
  - Increased activity was required to ensure corporate branding and messaging was being cascaded to residents to communicate the changes the service is experiencing.
- Climate Change Response Plan
  - The roll- out of recycling to high- rise accommodation had been deferred until the new municipal year to allow capacity to transition to alternative weekly bin collections, subject to Council approval.

Metrics related to matters which had been identified by the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) were being regularly communicated to both the regulator and the Housing Transformation and Improvement Board on a monthly basis.

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



- Residents were due to be written to, informing them about the proposed changes to service standards and outlining the number of outstanding jobs to manage expectations.
- 8,600 jobs were remaining, however it was envisaged that once these had been completed the service would be back to 'business as usual'.
- An estimated 88-97% of urgent or emergency jobs had been completed within timescales in April 2025.
- The Council was not expecting a perception of an improved service for an extended period of time.
- The recruitment of ten multi-trade operatives was taking place with the job vacancies due to be advertised.
- The Corporate Communications team was undergoing a restructure, following which it was hoped there would be further resources and capacity within the team.
- Elected Members could assist officers by also communicating key changes to residents.
- The Compliance System had been online since April 2025.
- Introduction of new procurement legislation in February 2025 had delayed the procurement of software systems however it was intended that the Asset Management System would be in place by the end of 2026 and that the Housing management system would be in place by the end of 2027. Once procurement exercises had been commenced, contact with suppliers and the market response would provide further clarity around timescales for implementation.
- Stipulations within the procurement exercise would ensure that the different software systems would be fully integrated with each other.
- A single contractor was due to be appointed to complete the backlog of repairs jobs.

**Resolved** that the Executive Director – Place compile a briefing note detailing the new repairs policy which is cascaded to all Elected Members to enable them to communicate the changes to residents.

## Major Aids and Adaptations

The Aids and Adaptations Service enabled individuals, especially those with disabilities, mobility challenges, or age-related conditions, to live more safely, comfortably, and independently in their homes for longer.

There had been a restructure within the housing directorate to improve the way the service was delivered.

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

- Large adaptations were inspected regularly, however for smaller repairs such as grab-rails, tenants were responsible for reporting maintenance issues or requesting repairs.
- It was acknowledged that tenants who were digitally excluded may develop additional needs.
- The Home Checks programme aimed to visit all tenants on a three- year rolling programme. In the previous three-year period over 50% of tenants had been visited.
- A review of the Aids and Adaptations Policy was being completed to ensure it met both legislative requirements and best practice guidelines.
- It was intended that the Aids and Adaptations budget would be approved by Cabinet on an annual basis rather than having to request sperate approvals for different pieces of work.
- The Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group would be consulted as part of a workshop exercise by the Capital Investment Team within the Asset Management and Improvement department.
- The Assistant Director – Housing Management undertook to provide the Board with progress of the Home Checks Programme.

## **Outcome of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board Working Group Session on Draft Housing Policies**

At its meeting on 6 February 2025, the Board resolved to create a working group to consider draft policies as and when such policies were made available to the Board.

On 14 April 2025, Working Group members attended a session and considered four draft policies, namely:

- Tenancy Sustainment Policy
- Tenancy Fraud Policy
- Good Neighbourhood Management Policy
- Domestic Abuse Policy.

Working Group Members outlined that further detail within the pre-tenancy section of the Draft Tenancy Sustainment Policy outlining what checks and processes were included in the affordability assessment conducted upon prospective tenants.

**Resolved** that the Executive Director of Place amend the draft Tenant Sustainability Policy to include detail within the pre-tenancy section setting out what checks and processes are incorporated into the affordability assessment conducted upon prospective tenants.

## **Interim Report of the Scrutiny Review into Communities**

At its meeting in September 2024, the Board resolved to create a working group to conduct a scrutiny review into Communities.

As it was the last meeting of the municipal year an Interim Report had been compiled to brief Board Members of the progress made.

The working group had met throughout the year and had considered evidence, conducted a literature review and heard from frontline staff.

Members had sought to learn from national best practice and considered the approach of analogous communities and

statistic neighbouring local authorities as part of the body of work.

Possible next steps had been identified by working group members; however, continuation of the scrutiny review would be subject to the Scrutiny Board in the municipal year of 2025/26.

**38/25      Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Action Tracker**

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

**39/25      Cabinet Forward Plan and Board Work Programme**

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

**39/25      Record of Thanks**

The Chair noted that it was the last meeting of the 2024/ 25 municipal year and thanked the Members for their hard work throughout the year.

The Board placed on record its thanks to the Chair, Vice-Chair and Democratic Services. Its thanks were also placed on record to the Chair and Members of the Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group.

Meeting ended at 8.50pm  
(meeting adjourned between 7.49- 8.00pm and 8.23- 8.31pm).

Contact: [democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)