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Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Thursday, 17 July 2025 at 6.00 pm at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Fenton (Chair)

Councillors: Davies Dhatt E A Giles W Gill	Councillors: Hinchliff Jeffcoat Lewis Singh
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Officers: James McLaughlin (Assistant Chief Executive), Alan Lunt (Executive Director-Place), Mike Jones (Assistant Director- Legal and Assurance), Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead- Service Improvement), Julie Andrews (Assistant Director Education Services), Suky-Suthi Nagra (Democratic Services and Member Services Manager) and Alex Goddard (Scrutiny Lead officer).

33/25 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

34/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

35/25 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 24 April and 8 May 2025 are approved as a correct record.

36/25 Urgent Additional Items of Business

There were no additional urgent items of business to be considered at the meeting.

37/25 Election of a Vice-Chair

At its meeting on 13 May 2025, Council had established the membership of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, excluding to the role of Vice-Chair. The Board considered the appointment of a Vice-Chair for the 2025/26 municipal year from amongst its membership.

A Vice-Chair supported, and acted in the absence of, the Chair of the Board, ensuring the effective operation of the Board.

Resolved that Councillor Ashley Lewis is elected Vice-Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for the municipal year 2025/26.

(Councillor Fenton left the meeting after this item and did not return. Councillor Lewis (Vice-Chair) took the chair.)

38/25

Q4/Annual 2024/25 Corporate Performance Report

The Board was presented with a report setting out progress on delivery of the Council Plan for quarter 4, and the annual position at the end of 2024/25.

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.

A two-tiered approach to performance measures had also been developed: -

- Measures that were within the gift of the Council and for which meaningful and ambitious targets could be set. There were 175 of these measures;
- Contextual measures that were important for the Council to monitor but were not solely influenced by the Council and therefore no targets could be set. There were 37 of these measures.

Of 116 quarterly performance indicators for quarter 4, 85 were annual measures and 127 were quarterly measures. Excluding contextual measures, 56% of indicators had been met for both quarter 4 and the end of year point.

The Board noted the following key achievements in quarter 4 and at year end:-

- Oracle Fusion was launched in October 2024.
- The Council's accounts were now up to date with the final Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 having been presented to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on 20 February 2025 and subsequently published.
- The Council had made appropriate arrangements to ensure compliance with the Procurement Act 2023, which came into effect in February 2025.
- There had been significant improvements to the Occupational Therapist (OT) assessments and processes in 2024/25.
- New Neighbourhood Working model was launched in April 2025.
- Persistent absence from school had improved from 20.2% in 2022/23 to 16.6% in 2023/24 (1065 students) in primary schools and from 27.8% in 2022/23 to 27.3% in 2023/24 (241 students) for secondary schools.
- New Customer Service Standards launched in April 2025, putting the customer at the heart of everything we do.

- The performance measure for the rent collected by the Council as a proportion of the rent owed against HRA properties ('Rent Collection as a percentage of rent due') was better than target throughout 2024/25 and for Q4 was 96.91%, also exceeding last year's performance of 95.98%.
- The Household Support Fund provided £3.471m of support to 53,000 households in need from October 2024 to March 2025, which included the provision of free school meals in the school holidays for around 23,000 children.
- The Supporting Families Data Maturity Project had brought together multiple data sets into one platform, identifying 289 families requiring support based on criteria set by government. The project would next be utilising data to support prevention and early intervention work.
- A Performance Board had been established to monitor delivery of the Council Plan.
- The Council was shortlisted in the 'Most Improved Council' category in the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards.
- The Board noted specific per data against each of the strategic themes in the Council Plan.

From the comments and questions by Board members and the responses given, the following key points were noted: -

- The Adult Social Care Transformation Project had improved a number of processes and team collaboration to better understand individual needs, which had contributed to a reduction in waiting times for Occupational Therapy Assessments. Further detailed information would be provided to members.
- Additional staff had been recruited to address the backlog of assessments for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and the team had been re-organised to make best use of resources. It was anticipated that the backlog would be addressed by end of July 2025.
- A review of place sufficiency and location was taking place to address the poor attainment of key stage 4 children with EHCPs. This would ensure that children were receiving the correct provision and as close to home as possible to reduce travel. Further detailed information would be provided to members.
- The Children and Education directorate was evaluating the impact of the Priority Education Area Investment Funding. Retaining good maths teachers was challenging, however work was underway with schools to develop practice to sustain improvements.
- Officers from the skills and employment team were working with the Forum for Independent Young Adults to ensure that young adults had the support they needed to take up work experience opportunities.
- The Attendance Service was working with multiple agencies to identify the factors affecting school attendance. Further detail would be provided to members on whether the improvements seen since 2022 were as a

result of positive activity or a natural improvement following the removal of covid-19 restrictions.

- Further detail would be provided to members on the new delivery model to support adult weight management.
- A number of notable and tragic cases had impacted on data in relation to those killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents, as well as an expected increase in traffic rates post covid-19. Limited resources meant that efforts had to be focused on areas with a higher number of accidents and this was a national approach. The Council also worked with the Police to identify dangerous areas and take a pro-active approach to accident reduction.
- A draft workplace strategy for electric vehicle (EV) charging on Council car parks was in development and both the Council and Serco's fleets were being reviewed.
- The Council was working on development of cross-pavement EV chargers due to the high number of properties with no driveways in Sandwell. Further detailed information on the current methodology for the placement of EV chargers would be provided to members.
- All performance measures were reviewed annually to ensure that they remained valid for officers, leaders and the public.
- An officer working group to consider options for the future management of leisure services was now operational and initial considerations had been presented to cabinet members. It was anticipated that a service specification would be ready early in 2026.
- Sandwell Leisure Trust had a competent Chief Executive and an effective Board in place who saw their role in addressing health inequalities in Sandwell. Investment in current facilities continued but plans for identified premises were clear, which included minimising the impact of security costs on relation to empty premises.
- Padel was a fast growing, low-impact sport and Sandwell was one of only three local authorities to invest in courts at its leisure centres. Data on court usage would be provided to members.
- Discussions were taking place at a West Midlands level to expedite the delivery of new housing.
- The Council was taking a pro-active approach to the publication of data and information, which it was hoped would reduce the number of requests received under the Freedom of Information Act.
- 89% of annual staff reviews had taken place by the deadline of 30 June 2025 and 82% of staff were having regular one to ones with managers.

Anecdotally there was no correlation with areas of poorer performance, but Senior Leadership Team maintained oversight.

39/25 Scrutiny Annual Update 2024-25

The Board received the draft Annual Update for 2024/25 which outlined the work undertaken by the Council's scrutiny function and highlighted a number of activities and outcomes that contributed towards the objectives of the Council Plan.

Resolved that in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, the Assistant Chief Executive finalises the report and submits it to Council on 21 October 2025.

40/25 Work Programme 2025-26

The Board received its proposed work programme for 2025/26 for approval, along with the work programmes for the Council's other four scrutiny boards.

The work programmes had been developed following a public consultation exercise from 4 April to 9 May 2025, along with consultation with chief officers and cabinet members.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board's work programme for 2025/26 is approved.
- (2) that the work programmes of the Children's Services and Education; Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment; Health and Adult Social Care and Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities scrutiny boards for 2025/26 are endorsed.

Meeting ended at 7.51 pm

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