

## Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday, 10 September 2025 at 3.30 pm at Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street, Oldbury, B69 3DB**

**Present:** Councillor Carmichael (Chair)

Councillors: K Allcock Bhullar Hartwell Khatun	Councillors: Moore Smith Uddin
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**In attendance:** Councillors Fenton, Jeffcoat.

**Officers:** Shokat Lal (Chief Executive); James McLaughlin (Assistant Chief Executive); Alex Thompson (Executive Director – Finance and Transformation); Alan Lunt (Executive Director – Place); Sally Giles (Executive Director of Children and Education); Frances Howie (Interim Director of Public Health); Mike Jones (Monitoring Officer, Service Director – Governance); Mandip Chahal (Interim Assistant Director Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement); Samantha Harman (Children’s Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement); Rosa Da Silva (Corporate Parenting Project Officer); Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic and Member Services Manager) and Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer).

### **76/25 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hughes, Taylor, E A Giles and Lewis.

### **77/25 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **78/25 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2025 are approved as a correct record.

### **79/25 Urgent Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

The Cabinet received the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring 2025/26.

The Council had set a balanced budget in February 2025, based on robust estimates. At Quarter 1, revenue expenditure had been on track, however emerging risks were materialising relating to the High Needs Block within the Dedicated Schools Grant, and to Sandwell Children's Trust. The impact on the Council within 2025/26 was predicted to result in an increased contract sum payable from the Children and Education budget to the Children's Trust. However, within the General Fund, corrective action would be taken where necessary and reserve balances remained adequate to mitigate the identified risks.

The General Fund had a gross budget of £821.682m and a net budget of £365.784m. The overall forecast outturn position for the General Fund, as at Quarter 1, was an overspend of £2.218m. This was a forecast overspend of 0.6% when compared with net budget. This forecast outturn position excluded ringfenced budgets for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA), where variations were managed through ringfenced reserves without impacting on the General Fund. The forecast outturn position also excluded the financial position of the Sandwell Children's Trust, which was a separate legal entity, although wholly owned by the Council.

The Council's net budget of £365.784m was split between directorate budgets of £337.562m, that directly delivered Council services, and centrally held corporate budgets of £28.221m, that related to Council-wide matters such as investments and borrowing. In relation to directorate budgets, there was a forecast overspend of £2.759m, following the use of reserves. There was a forecast underspend of £0.540m in relation to centrally held corporate budgets.

### **Reason for Decision**

Section 151 of the 1972 Local Government Act required the Chief Financial Officer to ensure the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs. Budgetary control, which included the regular monitoring and reporting of budgets was an essential element in discharging the Council's statutory responsibility. The reporting and analysis of financial performance versus budget supported the financial sustainability of the Council.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

There were no alternative options to consider.

**Resolved** that the financial monitoring position as at 30 June 2025 (Quarter 1) is received and referred to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment.

Approval was sought to the procurement and award of contract for tree maintenance works to enable the Council to undertake its responsibility for the care and upkeep of approximately 280,000 trees. Whilst not every tree required annual maintenance, those located along highways and on housing sites

generally required attention every three to five years. A schedule helped ensure safety and tree health, balancing the need for oversight with practical maintenance intervals.

Trees were a vital component of our urban environment, contributing to biodiversity, aesthetics, air quality improvement, and the overall well-being of residents. The Council owned a significant number of trees across public spaces, parks, housing sites and highways, necessitating regular maintenance to ensure they remained healthy, safe, and did not become a source of complaint from residents.

Cabinet Members stressed the importance of tree maintenance and how it contributed towards the upkeep of parks and the local environment. Sandwell had 15 Green Flag parks which were recognised as the gold standard and contributed towards the Council's ambition for a cleaner and greener Sandwell.

The tree maintenance contract was set to span a duration of four years. The framework arrangement would ensure comprehensive care and management of the trees, ensuring their health and safety throughout the contract term.

The contract set agreed prices for approximately 30 standard tree jobs and effectively worked as a measured works call-off contract, giving officers the ability to instruct contractors against an agreed cost schedule.

### **Reason for Decision**

Maintaining trees was essential for ensuring both the health of the environment and the safety of people and property. Regular tree maintenance, including pruning, trimming, and thorough health assessments, was crucial to fostering trees' proper growth and structural stability. Such care minimised the risk of falling branches or entire trees, which could lead to personal injuries, damage to homes and vehicles, and disruption of public utilities such as power lines. Identifying potential hazards through regular inspections allowed for the removal of dangerous branches or deadwood before they become serious threats.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

Not to enter a four-year agreement with selected tree contractors could pose significant risks and challenges across multiple areas. Without a long-term contract, emergency tree issues such as fallen branches or trees due to storms or age-related decline may not be addressed promptly, increasing the risk of injury to residents and damage to property and infrastructure. The health of trees would likely suffer without consistent maintenance, leading to hazards from weakened or diseased trees that were prone to falling or shedding limbs. This neglect could also lead to more extensive and costly interventions in the future. Furthermore, with reduced maintenance capabilities, the Council would likely face an increase in residents' complaints, as overgrown or dying trees could affect the aesthetics and safety of neighbourhoods and public spaces.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that delegated authority is given to the Executive Director for Place to undertake a procurement exercise and to award and enter into framework contracts with all successful bidders on terms to be agreed with the Executive Director for Place in consultation with the

Service Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer, for tree maintenance services over a contract term of up to 4 years for the period 2025-2029;

- (2) that the Service Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised execute any documents necessary to give effect to the proposal referred to in Resolution (1).

**82/25**

**City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Rebase - financial year 2025/26**

Approval was sought for the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Rebase. The confirmation by the Government on 4 June 2025 of the intended devolved transport funding for the five years from April 2027, previously referred to as City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement 2 and announced in late 2024, provided an opportunity to revisit the scheduling of schemes in the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Rebase programme, particularly those where an underspend had been forecast. The re-base provided an opportunity to reallocate this underspend to projects and programmes that could deliver during the remaining period of City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, i.e. by March 2027.

The re-based programme was submitted by the West Midlands Combined Authority to the Department for Transport (DfT) in early summer. Confirmation that the revised programme had been accepted by DfT had been received on 15 August 2025.

**Reason for Decision**

The additional funding for highway maintenance would be used to bolster and expand the programme of carriageway and footway maintenance in line with existing priorities. As a result of the additional funding allocation, Sandwell Council's total funding for Highways Maintenance Block for 2025/26 was £8.913m.

The Highway Maintenance Block and Local Network Improvement Plan packaged within individual local authorities were programmes of works that were scalable and easily expanded, thus maximising spend with minimal lead in times compared to major infrastructure projects which could typically take several years from inception to delivery. The substantive allocations covering these two programme blocks were reported to Cabinet on 12 March 2025 as part of the annual City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement and local transport settlement update.

**Alternative Options Considered**

Option 1 – not to accept the additional funding. This option would remove the opportunity for additional investment and improvement in local highways network maintenance (carriageway and footway) and would not deliver additional benefit. This option was therefore dismissed.

Option 2 – alternative allocation and funding split. It was within the Council's discretion as to how it was sub-divided within those broad headings. The additional highways maintenance funding could be allocated across four basic

areas: carriageway maintenance, footway maintenance, bridges and structures, and street lighting maintenance/upgrade. The recommended split across carriageway and footway maintenance was based on the most beneficial use of the additional funding.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that approval is given to accept an additional £2M of West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- (2) that delegated authority is given to the Executive Director for Place in consultation with the Executive Director for Finance and Transformation in accordance with the requirements of the award of funding to allocate the additional funding in accordance with the requirements of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement towards the Highway Maintenance Block during the 2025/26 financial year –

<b>Additional Funds 2025/26 from CRSTS Re-base</b>	
<b>Highways Maintenance Programme</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Carriageway Maintenance	£1,000,000
Footway Maintenance	£1,000,000
<b>Highways Maintenance Total</b>	<b>£2,000,000</b>

- (3) that delegated authority is given to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways in consultation with the Executive Director for Place to approve a programme of works to be funded from the addition Local Network Improvement Plan funding once the final Sandwell allocation is confirmed by the West Midlands Combined Authority.

**83/25**

**Street Lighting Improvement Programme Contract**

Approval was sought to procure and award a contract for the street lighting improvement programme.

The Council had a statutory duty to maintain street lighting on adopted highways. Well-maintained street lighting was critical to road safety, crime prevention, community reassurance, and economic resilience. Inadequate lighting could lead to increased road traffic accidents, reduced pedestrian safety, congestion, public dissatisfaction, and reputational damage to the authority.

The Council provided and maintained 30,985 streetlights and approximately 5,000 other types of illuminated street furniture. Of these, 30,139 lighting units had already been upgraded through a previous lantern replacement programme. This delivered significant energy efficiencies, carbon reductions and introduced Light Emitting Diode (LED) lighting technology controlled via a Central

Management System (CMS), a platform that enabled remote monitoring and adjustment of street lighting assets for optimal performance and fault detection.

### **Reason for Decision**

The proposed contract would focus on upgrading the small number of remaining non-LED lighting units and converting approximately 9,000 existing LED lanterns onto a single, integrated CMS. The contract would also enable the replacement of lighting columns and other illuminated street furniture that had reached the end of their design life, ensuring that the infrastructure remained safe and fit for purpose.

The Council's in-house Highways Maintenance (Street Lighting) Team, based at Taylors Lane Depot, provided a mainly reactive service focused on fault response and urgent repairs. While the in-house team continued to play a vital role, a structured programme delivered through a dedicated external contract would enable planned investment in long-term infrastructure.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

Option 1 – Do Nothing. If the Council did not proceed with the proposed Street Lighting Improvement Programme contract, an individual procurement exercise would be required for each identified need. The time and resource taken would risk a failure to the Council's statutory responsibility to maintain the adopted highway network, increase safety risks for pedestrians and road users, result in higher long-term maintenance costs due to a failure to benefit from reduced tendering costs and greater economies of scale, more reactive rather than planned repairs, potential reputational damage due to service failure and public dissatisfaction. Additionally, the Council could miss an opportunity to deliver further energy savings and carbon reductions in line with climate commitments. This option was not recommended as it would lead to non-compliance with legal obligations and have negative safety, financial and reputational consequences.

Option 2 – Procure and award a contract to deliver an improvement programme for street lighting. This option would see the procurement and award of a contract for the Street Lighting Improvements. This approach enabled the Council to carry out essential upgrades, transition remaining streetlights to LED, centralise control under a unified CMS, and replace life expired columns and illuminated street furniture. The contract would support long-term infrastructure planning, enhance energy efficiency, improve lighting quality, and ensure value for money through competitive procurement.

**Resolved** that delegated authority is given to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation, to prepare tender documentation, conduct a compliant procurement process and award a contract for a Street Lighting Improvement Programme in accordance with The Procurement Regulations 2024 and the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules.

Approval was sought for the West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendment) Order 2017, Combined Authority Roads. Schedule 1 of The West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendments) Order 2017 for prescribed a list of Combined Authority Roads. This designation allowed the West Midlands Combined Authority (WCMA) to exercise various functions in relation to these roads with some of those functions being Mayoral only functions by virtue of Article 22 of the 2017 Order.

### **Reason for Decision**

Section 107ZA of the Local Democracy and Construction Act 2009, as amended by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, granted the power to combined authorities to designate a highway in its area as a Key Network Road, or remove that designation, with the consent of its constituent authorities and its Mayor. The explicit designation of Combined Authority Roads in Schedule 1 caused the WMCA two main issues:

- The WMCA now had the power to designate Key Network Roads, but Schedule 1 only allowed the WMCA to use its powers over the roads already specified as Combined Authority Roads.
- The ability to undesignate roads as Key Network Roads was blocked as their designation as Combined Authority Roads would remain as provided for in the 2017 Order.

To resolve the discrepancy between the WMCA's 2017 Order and section 107ZA of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, an Order was required to be made under sub section.104, 105 and 114 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 to amend the 2017 Order to remove Schedule 1. An Order under sub section.104 and 105 had to follow the process as set out in section.112A of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and could only be made with the consent of the constituent authorities and the Combined Authority.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

Taking no action would mean that there continued to be a discrepancy in the legislation that would stop the WMCA being able to use the powers already granted to it in the intended way.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways to consent to the submission of the proposal to amend the 2017 Order to the Secretary of State for Transport, following the West Midlands Combined Authority Board meeting on 12 September 2025;
- (2) that delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways to consent to the laying of the draft order once it has been received from the Secretary of State for Transport.

**Grove Street, Halberton Street, Abberley Street and Cranford Street, Smethwick - Compulsory Purchase Order**

Approval was sought for the Grove Street, Halberton Street, Abberley Street and Cranford Street, Smethwick Compulsory Purchase Order.

In August 2022, a bid had been submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government for approximately £18m of grant funding from the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 for the acquisition of sites and remediation of land to accommodate future residential development. The bid had not been successful at that time.

In November 2023, the Government had announced that, as part of the Round 3 Levelling Up Fund, it would be reviewing unsuccessful Round 2 bids, which included Grove Lane. The Government then invited the Council to submit the bid, subject to project validation, subsidy control checks and government departmental sign-off.

The updated bid was submitted by the due date following a review of the previous submission to ensure that the outputs could still be delivered within the funding allocation of £18,063,128 and with the Council match funding of £2,007,014. However, the Council had raised concerns regarding the timescale for spend given the passage of time and requested further discussion with Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to resolve this issue. A financial appraisal to ensure there was no risk to the Council was also required for this project.

Cabinet Members expressed their support of the scheme and highlighted how Grove Street and the surrounding area was a key regeneration corridor that supported jobs and infrastructure in Sandwell.

**Reason for Decision**

Council received verbal confirmation that funding had been approved for the project in May 2024. However, due to the announcement of the general election and the change in Government, the Council did not receive formal written notification of the funding until 31 October 2024 following the Government's review of funding programmes.

A Memorandum of Understanding was prepared between Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Sandwell Council setting out the terms, principles and practices regarding the administration and delivery of the Levelling Up Fund for Grove Lane. Initially the Memorandum of Understanding outlined the funding allocations up to March 2026. However, in April 2025, notification was received regarding a variation to the Memorandum of Understanding to extend the funding profile to March 2028.

In November 2022, Cabinet approved the use of Compulsory Purchase to acquire a site south of Cranford Street in Smethwick. Within that report there was also an authority to prepare a Compulsory Purchase Order for land included within the submitted Levelling Up Fund bid to Government (Minute No. 215/22 (j)), subject to a more detailed report being presented to Cabinet at a later date once funding had been secured.

**Alternative Options Considered**



The offer of funding from Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government was to progress this project in Grove Lane only, therefore no other site could be considered for its spend. If it was not possible to acquire by agreement, the only other option would be to acquire the land compulsorily. Not obtaining approval would result in the Council not being able to progress with the Compulsory Purchase Order and ultimately deliver transformational change in this area, losing out on £18m grant funding.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that subject to the completion and approval of an appropriate capital appraisal, delegated authority is given to the Service Director – Governance (Monitoring Officer) to take all necessary action to secure the making, confirmation and implementation of a Compulsory Purchase Order under Section 226 (1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 99 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Acquisition of Land Act 1981, and Section 13 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to be known as The Borough Council of Sandwell (Grove Street, Halberton Street, Abberley Street and Cranford Street, Smethwick) Compulsory Purchase Order. The Compulsory Purchase Order is in respect of approximately 3.45 hectares of land situated across several sites off Cranford Street, Grove Street, Abberley Street and Halberton Street as shown on plans SAM/12980/004 & SAM/21160/001, or lesser land as may be deemed necessary and also including the air space above an area lying to the north and south of the development during the construction;
- (2) that in the event of the Compulsory Purchase Order being unopposed, and the Council thereby being granted powers to do so by the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government, to approve the above order and serve all necessary notices to implement the Compulsory Purchase Order, including the issuing of sheriff warrants;
- (3) that delegated authority is given to the Executive Director for Place to make minor amendments to the (Cranford Street, Smethwick) Compulsory Purchase Order and, more particularly, marked "Map referred to in Borough Council of Sandwell (Grove Street, Halberton Street, Abberley Street and Cranford Street, Smethwick) Compulsory Purchase Order" prior to it being made and submitted for confirmation;
- (4) that delegated authority is given to the Executive Director for Place to continue negotiations and to acquire land and property within the proposed Order lands, on terms to be agreed, in advance of confirmation of the Compulsory Purchase Order by the Secretary of State.

Approval was sought for the Collaborative Working Agreement for Sandwell Public Health and Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust.

A 'Collaboration Agreement' (the Contract) was first entered into by the Council and NHS Trust in 2016, effective from 1 October 2016. The contract included a range of community public health services, initially comprising of Health Visiting, Sexual Health Services and Best start in life Health visitors.

### **Reason for Decision**

The Collaboration Agreement' had been entered into in accordance with authority granted through a Cabinet decision dated 23 March 2016 with an initial duration of 4 years with renewal due by 30 September 2021. Cabinet approval was further given on 9 December 2020 to renew the contract to take effect from 1 October 2021. A review of the contract at that point identified the need for revision to mitigate the risk of external legal challenge: a temporary 4-month extension was therefore agreed to allow the necessary revisions to be made. The revised contract took effect from 1 February 2022, with a duration of up to 4 years and 8 months.

Authorisation for the contract provided for an initial 2-year and 8-month duration covering the period 1 February 2022 to 30 September 2024, with an option to extend for a further 2 years to cover the period 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2026. Authority to exercise the option to extend was delegated to the Director of Public Health.

A delegated decision had been made by the Director of Public Health on 30 September 2024 to exercise the 2-year extension option. Concurrent with the decision being made to extend the contract, the Director of Public Health had been negotiating with the NHS Trust to vary the range of services covered. This had resulted in a further report to Cabinet dated 16 October 2024, delegating authority to the Director of Public Health to –

- increase the budget for existing services specified within the Collaboration Agreement;
- vary the services specified within the Collaboration Agreement to include the Child Vision Screening service, additional Early Help administrative support, breastfeeding enhanced support and remove the infection control doctor contribution;
- increase the Council's financial contribution under the Agreement in line with current inflation to a maximum of 10% of the contract value; and
- extend the Agreement for an additional 6-month period – beyond the current term, from 1 October 2026 until 31 March 2027.

The option to extend the contract through the delegated decision of 30 September 2024 had not been exercised in time, notwithstanding the in-principal agreement of both parties and extended ongoing negotiations over the future scope of services and financial costs moving forward.

Services had continued to be provided by the NHS Trust covered by the now expired contract dating from 1 February 2022, relating to –

- Health Visiting;
- Sexual Health Services;
- Best Start in life Health visitors; and
- Health Protection Infection Control Doctor (ICD).

As the Council and NHS had continued to complete their obligations under the now expired contract, the ongoing provision of services had become what is known as a Common Law Contract.

Delegated authority was sought for the Director of Public Health to continue negotiations with the NHS Trust and to reach agreement for the terms of a new 'Collaborative Working Agreement' contract.

Authority was sought for the new contract to cover some of the original services, comprising:

- Health Visiting;
- Best Start in life Health visitors;
- Breastfeeding support; and
- Sexual Health Services.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

Retender the Services immediately. The Council could retender for the services through a competitive process. This option would require an extended period to complete the procurement process during which time the Common Law position would be relied upon, meaning that additional services and improvements could not be made. This option did not provide opportunity for the most efficient commissioning of services and therefore dismissed.

**Resolved** that delegated authority is given to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing together with the Executive Director Finance and Transformation and the Monitoring Officer, Service Director - Governance to negotiate and enter into a 'Collaborative Working Agreement' contract with Sandwell West Birmingham NHS Trust on terms to be agreed for the provision of a range of public health services within the financial expenditure limits set out in Appendix 1.

**87/25**

### **Recommissioning of Family Hubs**

Approval was sought for the recommissioning of Family Hubs as the current contract was due to end on 31 March 2026.

Sandwell Council took the significant decision to maintain Children's Centres, as far as possible, using general fund money, recognising the positive impact that they had on communities.

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board welcomed the proposal, noting how despite previous Government cuts to funding, Sandwell Council had maintained family hubs in local communities. The support the hubs provided was crucial for mums and young families, and the new Government funding allowed for additional support and services to be delivered.

### **Reason for Decision**

In 2021 the Government announced that it would be providing funding for the provision of 'Family Hubs', the programme was extended for a further year

through to the end of March 2026. For areas that still had Children Centres, the funding was to strengthen and extend their offer.

Sandwell was awarded £3.8m for the delivery of Family Hubs and Start to Life over a three-year period from Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care. The programme's core objective was to improve the universal Start for Life offer and transform the delivery of family services in 75 local authority areas with the highest levels of deprivation and disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes.

Approximately £900k of this funding had been used to enhance service delivery within Children's Centres through the existing contract and improve the reach of the centres. Children's Centres had been rebranded as Family Hubs in July 2023, which had been a key requirement of the funding.

As part of the spending review in June 2025, the Government announced that it would be rolling out the Family Hubs programme nationally and that funding would be provided for each year of the spending review period.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

Option 1 - Extension of contracts. There was no option to further extend existing contracts as this was not available within the existing contract terms and not compliant with procurement regulations.

Option 2 - Shorten the length of contracts offered to two years. It would be possible to go out to tender based on a shorter contract. This course of action however was likely to have a negative impact on the number of agencies bidding for the contracts and have an impact on staff retention as they look for more permanent positions.

Option 3 - Bring the service in-house. An alternative solution would be to bring the operation of core Children's Centres into the local authority. This would require the TUPE transfer of existing staff that meet the TUPE requirements into the local authority. This would be time consuming and costly. Local Authority staffing costs were usually significantly higher than those in the voluntary sector.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that delegated authority is given to the Executive Director of Children and Education Services in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Transformation and the Monitoring Officer, Service Director of Governance to award new contracts for the provision of Family Hub Services for a period of 3 years from 1 April 2026 (with the option to extend for 2 years);
- (2) that delegated authority is given to the Monitoring Officer, Service Director of Governance to enter into or execute, under seal if necessary, any related documentation in connection with the land and property as part of the Family Hub service on terms and conditions agreed by the Executive Director of Children and Education Services

- (3) that approval is given for variations to the Family Hub Services Contract up to a value of £400k per annum, should they be necessitated, for the delivery of additional activity funded via the Best Start Family Hubs grant and that authority to approve such variations be delegated to the appropriate Chief Officer in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member;
- (4) that approval is given for variations to the Contract up to a value of £100k per annum, should they be necessitated, for the delivery of additional preventative activity funded via the social care prevention grant and that authority to approve such Variations be delegated to the Executive Director of Children and Education Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services;
- (5) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, approval is given for an exemption to be made to rule 8.10 of the Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules 2024 to allow the Family Hubs contract to be awarded to the successful tenderer if the required number of tenders are not received.

88/25

### **Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2028**

Approval was sought for the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2028 which set out how the Council and its partners would discharge their roles as corporate parents and outlined how the Corporate Parenting Board would deliver its key priorities and improve outcomes for Children We Care For and Care Experienced Young People. This was informed by the seven Corporate Parenting principles set out in the statutory guidance.

#### **Reason for Decision**

The Strategy outlined the Board's commitment to ensuring the for Children We Care For and Care Experienced Young People in Sandwell can thrive in the future. It had been co-produced by the Children We Care For, Care Experienced Young People, and the Corporate Parenting Board and set out the Board's aspiration for Sandwell's children and young people to be safe, healthy, happy, and given the best opportunity to achieve their full potential.

The Strategy aligned with the Council's Council Plan and supported the delivery of the strategic themes. It supported the Council's commitment to becoming a UNICEF UK Child Friendly candidate by aiming to respect and promote children's rights according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### **Alternative Options Considered**

There were no alternative options. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2028 had been carefully considered with no other feasible alternative options.

**Resolved** that approval is given to the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2028.

89/25

### **Child Friendly Sandwell Discovery Phase Report and Priority Theme Recommendations**

Approval was sought for the Child Friendly Sandwell Discovery Phase Report and Priority Theme Recommendations.

Sandwell Council and the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF had been working together in partnership as a Child Friendly Candidate Community since August 2024. UNICEF UK had made the difficult decision to cease delivery of the Child Friendly Cities and Communities programme at the end of June 2026.

Sandwell Council had recently completed a six-month Discovery Phase with the aim to establish Sandwell's current position on the state of children's rights and wellbeing, and work with partner organisations, children and young people across the borough to identify priority themes for action.

### **Reason for Decision**

Child Friendly Cities and Communities was part of UNICEF's global Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI). Although the UK programme would no longer be delivered by UNICEF UK after June 2026, CFCI would continue to be an international network, providing resources and inspiration for all who seek to uphold the rights of every child at the local level.

The Council's focus was on making sure there was a positive and lasting legacy for our children and young people growing up in Sandwell. The Council were extremely proud of the impact the programme had had to date and would continue to have thanks to the significant work already undertaken to embed children's voices into decision-making processes and make sure that the services and spaces on which children and young people depend take into account their fundamental human rights.

The local structures and ways of working that had been put in place through the programme would mean that children and young people in Sandwell would continue to benefit and continue the child friendly borough programme independently supporting the Council to deliver its commitments to equality and diversity, the Council Plan 2024-27 and the Council living its values, being ambitious, inclusive, customer focused and accountable.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

Delay the development stage. The Council could choose to undertake further Discovery Phase work and delay the Development Stage as an alternative option.

Not proceed with the becoming a child friendly borough. This option did not align with the Council's corporate and strategic objectives and was therefore dismissed.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Council's continued commitment to becoming a Child Friendly borough be endorsed, acknowledging the work undertaken so far representing the development of priority themes for our children, young people, families and communities;
- (2) that approval is given to the recommended priority themes of 'Safe and Secure', 'Family and Belonging' and 'Equal and Included';

- (3) that approval is given to the organisational priority themes of Communication, Culture, Leadership and Co-operation to support with the delivery of the Child Friendly programme;
- (4) that approval is given for the preparation and submission of an action plan to support the Development and Delivery phases of the Child Friendly programme and authorise the Executive Director of Children and Education Services in consultation with the Assistant Chief Executive, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families and the Child Friendly Sandwell Member Working Group to approve to approve the Child Friendly action plan.

Meeting ended at 4.07 pm