

Scrutiny Board:	Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board
Report Title	Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough
Date of Meeting	8 January 2026
Report Author	Rhys Attwell Interim Democratic Services Officer John Swann Democratic Services Officer
Lead Officer	James McLaughlin Assistant Chief Executive
Wards Affected	All Wards
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Not Applicable
Appendices (if any)	1 DRAFT Scrutiny Review Report 2 Summary of Evidence Gathered

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report presents the final findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough, which was initiated in response to calls for improved community relations following the Summer 2024 riots (none of which occurred within Sandwell). The review explored themes such as intersectionality, local identity, national best practice, and barriers to community participation.

2. Recommendation

2.1 To consider Scrutiny Review of the Communities in our Borough.

2.2 To determine any recommendations that wishes to make to Cabinet and approve the DRAFT recommendations set out in Appendix 1- namely:

2.2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Business and Skills create a publicly accessible comprehensive directory of English for Speakers of Other Languages courses.

2.2.2 That the Statutory Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finances and Resources conduct a coordinated campaign to increase the profile and awareness of English for Speakers of Other Languages courses across the borough.

- 2.2.3 That the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods produce and develop a borough wide Community Asset Map of organisations, services, and resources by ward.
- 2.2.4 That the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods promote and support inclusive community events and cultural celebration days in public spaces, with family friendly activities provided free of charge.

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- 2.3 Board Members are also requested to approve the DRAFT resolution set out in Appendix 1- namely:

- 2.3.1 That a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the commissioned translation and interpretation service is submitted as a suggestion for scrutiny topics in the 2026/ 27 municipal year.

3. Background and Context

- 3.1 Following the Interim Report of the Scrutiny Review in Communities on 29 April 2025, and the Work Programming Sessions in June it was felt by Members that there was still scope for scrutiny in relation to the calls for improved community relations, especially cohesion and cultural exchange, following the Summer 2024 riots across the United Kingdom (although not within Sandwell).
- 3.2 The Interim Report identified several key themes, including Intersectionality, which acknowledged the complex and overlapping identities within Sandwell's diverse population; Local Identity, recognising the distinct character and makeup of towns across the Borough; and National Best Practice, which emphasised the value of learning from external case studies and benchmarking with statistical neighbours.
- 3.3 The Members acknowledged that Sandwell's diversity means many residents identify with multiple demographic and cultural groups. The Report aims to build on Sandwell's Social Cohesion initiatives and draw lessons from the Borough's ethnic diverse Programmes and initiatives.
- 3.4 Additionally, the review highlighted challenges in Community Participation, particularly low engagement among hard-to-reach groups, and stressed the importance of Trusted Messaging, noting that communication is more effective when delivered by local champions and trusted community figures.
- 3.5 The Interim Report of the Scrutiny Review into Communities on 29 April 2025 identified possible next steps including the Engagement with Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Centre (STEPS), and Engagement with the centre for Intensive Engagement, in regard to the Diagnostic Tool and the Eight Step process.
- 3.6 As per the previous Interim Report of the Scrutiny Review into Communities. Members attempted to learn from national best practises and identified suitable statistical neighbouring local authorities, however when these authorities were contacted there was no response.

3.7 On the 15 September 2025 there was a meeting with the managing Director of Intensive Engagement, The Intensive Engagement Diagnostic Tool is an evidence-based framework designed to evaluate and improve community engagement strategies. Developed over more than a decade of research and practical application, the tool helps organisations:

- Assess current engagement effectiveness that would Identify what is working well and where improvements are needed.
- Focus resources strategically, with their being directs efforts toward engagement methods proven to deliver impact.
- Measure progress, and track improvements over time to ensure engagement approaches remain effective.
- Embed sustainable practices, including the Works with local leaders to integrate successful techniques into long-term strategies

3.8 Following the meeting with the Managing Director of Intensive Engagement, Members proposed the development of a borough-wide Community Asset Map highlighting local organisations, services, and resources available in each ward. Members felt strongly that this would assist residents and service providers with identifying and connecting with community assets.

3.9 On the 6 October 2025 Members visited Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Centre (STEPS), where they were given a site visit and a meeting with staff and pupils of the educational Centre. Members wished to note the success of the Centre, with providing English language skills and essential life skills to those who required it.

3.10 Members during the visit discussed ways to promote the Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Centre (STEPS) and ESOL courses to the wider public. Following the visit, Members recommended the creation of a comprehensive directory of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses accessible to individuals engaging with Council services, as well as establishing a first point of contract referral system for those seeking language support.

3.11 Members following the visit to STEPS recommended to Leader of the Council that a review into Translation and Interpretation Services offered within the Council. Wishing to see a report of how accessible and efficient the Services were in meeting the needs of diverse communities.

3.12 On the 19 November 2025 Members met with the Chief Executive Officer of the Ethnic Minority Council. The meeting helped support and enforce the needs for suggested recommendations, as well as support for the continuation of library Services.

3.13 On the 17 December 2025 Member met with the Operations Manager for Community Safety. The meeting helped support and enforce the needs for suggested recommendations.

4. Consultation

4.1 Members of the Public and relevant Partners and Stakeholders were consulted as an ongoing basis as part of the Scrutiny review. As part of the

ongoing Scrutiny review, stakeholders included third sector organisations, registered partners and other community leaders.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Not Applicable.

6. Legal and Governance Implications

- 6.1 The recommendations fall within the Council's general powers under the Local Government Act 1972 and the Equality Act 2010. Compliance with statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, has been considered. Consultation with stakeholders and partners has been undertaken in line with governance requirements.

7. Risks

- 7.1 Low uptake of ESOL courses despite promotion efforts. Mitigation: targeted outreach and partnership with trusted community figures.
- 7.2 Resource constraints for maintaining the Community Asset Map. Mitigation: phased implementation and integration with existing digital platforms.
- 7.3 Failure to improve cohesion could lead to reputational risk and continued community tensions. Mitigation: monitoring through the Intensive Engagement Diagnostic Tool and regular reporting to Scrutiny Board.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed. The proposals aim to reduce barriers for non- English speakers and promote inclusion through accessible services and events. No adverse impacts identified; positive impacts include improved access to language support and cultural participation.

9. Other Relevant Implications

- 9.1 Workforce/HR: No direct staffing changes anticipated.
- 9.2 ICT/Digital: Development of the Community Asset Map will require integration with Council's web infrastructure.
- 9.3 Procurement: Any external services for translation or event delivery will follow Council procurement rules.
- 9.4 Climate Change: Community events will encourage sustainable practices (e.g., recycling).
- 9.5 Social Value: Promotes local engagement and opportunities for community organisations.
- 9.6 Health and Wellbeing: Increased social cohesion and reduced isolation.

9.7 Crime and Disorder Act 1998: Proposals support community safety by fostering trust and reducing tensions.

10. Background Documents

10.1 Interim Report of the Scrutiny Review into Communities (April 2025)

11. How does this deliver the Outcomes in the Council Plan?

11.1 The recommendations support the Council Plan by fostering inclusion, improving access to language and cultural resources, and strengthening community cohesion. These actions contribute to better educational outcomes, healthier and more connected communities, economic opportunities through enhanced language skills, and a unified approach across services and partners, ensuring Sandwell remains a thriving and inclusive borough.