

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**

**5<sup>th</sup> March, 2019 at 6.00pm  
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** The Mayor (Councillor Edis);  
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Goult);

Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Allcock, Allen, Ashman, Bawa, Carmichael, Cherrington, Chidley, Costigan, Crompton, K Davies, P Davies, S Davies, Dhallu, Downing, Eaves, Edwards, Eling, Gavan, E A Giles, E M Giles, L Giles, Hackett, Hadley, Hartwell, L Horton, S Hosell, P M Hughes, P Hughes, M Hussain, M Y Hussain, Dr Jaron, Jarvis, I Jones, O Jones, S Jones, Khatun, Lewis, Lloyd, Melia, Millard, Moore, Padda, Phillips, Piper, Preece, B Price, R Price, Rouf, Sandars, Shackleton, Shaeen, Singh, Tagger, Taylor, Trow, Underhill, Webb and White.

**Apologies:** Councillors Akhter, S Crumpton, Dr T Crumpton, Y Davies, Hevican, R Horton, D Hosell, Rollins, Tranter and Worsey.

**In Attendance:** Gary Taylor (Assistant Chief Fire Officer).  
Mahmoud Suraj, Steve Nemo, Suharna Khanum and Josh Jordan (Youth Parliament Members).

15/19 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

16/19 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor welcomed and congratulated the four newly elected members and deputy members of the youth parliament. Over 6000 young people in Sandwell had voted for them.

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Councillor Hackett, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, welcomed the youth members and looked forward to working with them at a national, regional and local level. Councillor Hackett invited Councillor Ali, as a former youth deputy, to speak. Councillor Ali congratulated the youth members and stressed the importance of having young people at the heart of what the Council did and thanked the Council for getting this important issue back up and running.

Details of Mayoral engagements since the last meeting of the Council had been circulated to members.

In particular, the Mayor made reference to the opening of TMP Solutions, Holocaust Memorial Day and the tram naming event, in honour of the late Cyrille Regis.

The Mayor also referred to the literature which had been circulated in relation to child sexual exploitation and reminded members of their duty to keep young people safe from harm as part of their corporate parenting role.

**17/19      Petitions Under Standing Order No. 5**

No petitions were received under Standing Order No. 5.

**18/19      Election of Leader of the Council**

Before inviting nominations for Leader of the Council, the Mayor took the opportunity, on behalf of the Council, to thank Councillor Eling for his many years of service as Leader of Sandwell Council and Cabinet Member and his effort and commitment to the Council demonstrated in the many successes during his tenure as Leader.

Local Government had faced many challenges over recent years and Councillor Eling, amongst other Councillors, had helped the Council effectively meet those challenges.

Councillor Trow was nominated by Councillor Preece as Leader of the Council and Councillor Edwards seconded the nomination. The nomination was put to the vote and agreed.

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Councillor Trow was declared Leader of Sandwell Council and in making his speech, echoed the words of the Mayor in thanking his predecessor for all his many dedicated years not only as Leader, but for all the years he had expertly managed the Council's finances. The Council remained in a strong position, with many other councils struggling to maintain even an adequate level of services for their communities. Sandwell was in a strong position and the bill of health following the LGA review showed that this Council was consistently focussed on what mattered and continued to move forward with confidence and at pace.

Councillor Trow stated that he was inheriting a confident team of members and senior staff committed to the Sandwell 2030 vision.

Councillor Trow confirmed that Councillor Khatun would continue as Deputy Leader of the Council with the continuation of the current portfolios and portfolio holders, with the Leader retaining the Culture and Core Council Services portfolio until the end of the current municipal year. A review of the executive arrangements would be undertaken and any changes would be reported to the Annual Meeting of Council.

Pursuant to the election of a new Leader of the Council, the Leader would be appointed to the bodies/entities and be the Chairperson of the same with immediate effect, as set out in Appendix 1 and nominated to outside bodies, as set out in Appendix 2.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that, pursuant to the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) and Articles 4.02(d) and 7.03 of the Council's Constitution, Councillor Steve Trow be appointed as Leader of the Council for a period of four years, ending with the Annual Meeting of Council in 2023, or for the remainder of his current term of office as councillor, subject to remaining as an elected member of the Council or otherwise not having been removed from office by a decision of the Council or resigned as leader;

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- (2)(a) that, pursuant to Local Government Act 2000 (as amended), Articles 7.04 and 7.06 of the Council's Constitution, it be noted that the Leader of the Council made the following executive appointments:
- i. Councillor Syeda Khatun be appointed to the position of Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities;
  - ii. Councillor Simon Hackett be appointed to the position of Cabinet Member for Children's Services;
  - iii. Councillor David Hosell be appointed to the position of Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment;
  - iv. Councillor Kerrie Carmichael be appointed to the position of Cabinet Member for Housing;
  - v. Councillor Bill Gavan be appointed to the position of Cabinet Member for Leisure and Commonwealth Games;
  - vi. Councillor Elaine Costigan be appointed to the position of Cabinet Member for Public Health and Protection;
  - vii. Councillor Paul Moore be appointed to the position of Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Investment;
  - viii. Councillor Ann Shackleton be appointed to the position of Cabinet Member for Social Care;
- (2)(b) that it be noted that the Leader of the Council retains the Cabinet Portfolio for Culture and Core Services;

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- (2)(c) that it be noted that the Leader of the Council confirmed that the previous executive portfolios relating to each of the Cabinet Member roles (detailed above) would continue unchanged;
- (3) that the appointment of the Leader of the Council to the Committees, Panels, Outside Bodies and Groups (and as Chairperson as applicable) as detailed in Appendix 1 and 2, be affirmed.

19/19      **Questions Under Standing Order No. 6**

No questions were received under Standing Order No. 6.

20/19      **Council Finances 2019-20 to 2021-22**

The final Local Government Finance Settlement was received on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy set out how the Council would structure and manage its finances now and in the future in response to this settlement. It also detailed the assumptions and calculations behind the Council's estimated budget position for 2019/20 onwards. Work was ongoing across the Council to identify ways of achieving savings to cover the shortfall.

**Council Tax**

For 2019-20 an increase of 3.99% was proposed with included 1% for the adult social care precept. This was within the referendum threshold.

At its meeting on 15 January 2019, the Council agreed that the tax base for 2019/20 would be set at 74,150.81.

The anticipated surplus on the Collection Fund at the end of 2019/20 was £1.849m.

Both the West Midlands Fire and Rescue and Police and Crime Commissioner precepts had now been confirmed.

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The overall Council Tax increase would be 5.18% which resulted in a total Band D rate of £1,614.63.

### **Balances and Reserves**

Revenue balances were necessary to enable the Council to maintain a degree of flexibility in its finances and to meet potential liabilities or deal with unforeseen events. Balances could also be used to fund capital expenditure in addition to the level which could be funded from capital receipts.

The Local Government Act 2003 introduced a new statutory requirement for the Chief Financial Officer to comment on the robustness of the budgetary process and adequacy of the Council's reserves to meet any unforeseen liabilities.

The estimated General Fund reserve balance as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 was £47.5m.

After consideration of the Council's strategic risks, the forecast level of free balances at the end of 2018/19 were likely to be £10.9m, representing a reduction of £0.3m from the £11.219m of free balances held at the end of 2017/18. This represented 4.48% of net operating budget and was at a level deemed to be adequate in the medium term.

### **Specific Reserves and Provisions**

The Council had several specific reserves and provisions, in addition to general reserves, for meeting known or anticipated liabilities. The establishment of these specific reserves reflected the Council's ongoing risk assessment of potential liabilities and this in turn reduced the risk of unexpected calls on the Council's general balances.

Specific reserves and provisions had been reviewed during the budget process and found to meet existing known liabilities. They would continue to be thoroughly reviewed as part of the 2018-19 closedown of accounts process.

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### **Capital Programme**

The five-year capital programme provided at Appendix F incorporated the capital review that was reported to Cabinet on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019 and any further approvals that had been agreed.

Available resources assumed the use of borrowing under the prudential regime. A decision to reduce the level of borrowing (i.e. a reduction in the capital programme) would result in revenue savings of approximately £0.070m per £1.000m of borrowing.

### **Capital Strategy**

The level of resources committed by the Council for capital investment was significant. In the period 2019/20 to 2022/23 total resources were expected to be around £318m. The effective use of these resources was vital in achieving the Vision 2030 ambitions.

The Council had a strategic approach to ensure funds were invested in capital projects that supported the longer-term objectives of the Council and its partners and provided value for money service provision.

### **Housing Revenue Account**

The Housing Revenue Account was included in the Neighbourhoods business plan presented to Cabinet on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019. The Housing Revenue Account was a ringfenced account which operated fully within its own resource, meeting expenditure from income obtained from tenants' rents. The 2019/20 rent income required a 1% reduction on the previous year's rent as imposed but the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. This reduction was approved by Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

Previously, the Housing Revenue Account was required to stay within a 'borrowing cap' that limited the ability of the account to invest in its current stock and increase the supply of its own stock to replace that lost through the Right-To-Buy programme. This borrowing cap was removed in October 2018, giving greater freedom to invest using the resources generated by the Housing Revenue Account.

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A 30-year plan was maintained to ensure that any future planned investment remained affordable. The current 10-year investment plan was approved by Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, with planned investment of £485m over the 10-year period. Following the removal of the borrowing cap, this programme of investment was being reviewed to ensure that it still met the needs of the Housing Revenue Account and its tenants.

In presenting the Council Finances, the Leader of the Council stated that the last five years had been a difficult time and councils like Sandwell had been hit hardest. The budget for next year continued to protect libraries, children's centres, green flag parks and weekly bin collections whilst maintaining a healthy reserve. The Council was committed and determined to invest in new council housing and over the last two years the Council had launched the second biggest increase in new build council housing in the country. The Leader wished to commend staff and scrutiny members in the preparation of the budget.

In response to questions, the Leader commented as follows:-

- Housing needs were among the Council's ten key ambitions and the Council was committed to achieve the vision of providing a full range of housing needs taking as much advantage as possible in design choices, efficiency to plan for better quality of housing in Sandwell, including taking account of the aging populations but also taking into account the needs of the younger population;
- the Council Tax precept was not completely in the Council's control and included decisions of the Fire Authority and Police and the Council would try to be as transparent as possible.

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In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, and Standing Order 12, the decision relating to Council Finances 2019-20 to 2021-22 was put to a named vote as follows:-

For:

Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Allcock, Ashman, Bawa, Carmichael, Cherrington, Chidley, Costigan, Crompton, K Davies, P Davies, S Davies, Dhallu, Downing, Eaves, Edis, Edwards, Eling, Gavan, E A Giles, E M Giles, L Giles, Goult, Hackett, Hadley, Hartwell, L Horton, S Hosell, P M Hughes, P Hughes, M Hussain, M Y Hussain, Dr Jaron, Jarvis, I Jones, O Jones, S Jones, Khatun, Lewis, Lloyd, Melia, Millard, Moore, Padda, Phillips, Piper, Preece, B Price, R Price, Rouf, Sandars, Shackleton, Shaeen, Singh, Tagger, Taylor, Trow, Underhill, Webb and White.

Against:

None.

Abstentions:

None.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as detailed in Appendix A to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (2) that the expenditure level for 2019/20 as set out in Appendix B1 and B2 and the resultant Council Tax as detailed in Appendix C to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (3) that the provisional budgets for 2019/20 to 2021/22 as detailed in Appendix B3 to the report now submitted, be approved;
- (4) that the revised financial position and the forecast reserves position for the end of 2018/19 be noted;
- (5) that the supporting information on the robustness of the budget process and adequacy of the council's reserves detailed in Appendix D to the report now submitted be noted;

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- (6) that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Strategy in Appendix E to the report now submitted be approved;
- (7) that the Capital Programme 2018/19 to 2022/23 in Appendix F and the Capital Strategy in Appendix G to the report now submitted be approved;
- (8) that Council, at its meeting on 15 January 2019 approved the amount of 74,150.81 as its Council Tax base for the year 2019/20 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 33 (5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;
- (9) that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2019/20 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 be approved:-
- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| (a) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act   | <b>£1,059,470,803</b> |
| (b) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act;  | <b>£955,549,997</b>   |
| (c) Being the amount by which the aggregate at 9(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 9(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year; | <b>£103,920,806</b>   |

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(d) Being the amount at 9(c) above, all divided by the amount at 8 above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year; **£1,401.48**

(e) Valuation Bands: Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 9(d) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;

£	
<b>A</b>	<b>934.32</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>1,090.04</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>1,245.76</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>1,401.48</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>1,712.92</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>2,024.36</b>
<b>G</b>	<b>2,335.80</b>
<b>H</b>	<b>2,802.96</b>

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- (10) that, for the year 2019/20, the major precepting authorities have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

<b>Valuation Bands</b>	<b>West Midlands Fire &amp; Rescue Authority (£)</b>	<b>Police &amp; Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands (£)</b>
<b>A</b>	40.40	101.70
<b>B</b>	47.13	118.65
<b>C</b>	53.86	135.60
<b>D</b>	60.60	152.55
<b>E</b>	74.07	186.45
<b>F</b>	87.53	220.35
<b>G</b>	101.00	254.25
<b>H</b>	121.20	305.10

- (11) that, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 8(e) and 9 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, sets the following amounts as the Council Tax for the year 2019/20 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

<b>Valuation Band</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>A</b>	1,076.42
<b>B</b>	1,255.82
<b>C</b>	1,435.22
<b>D</b>	1,614.63

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<b>E</b>	1,973.44
<b>F</b>	2,332.24
<b>G</b>	2,691.05
<b>H</b>	3,229.26

- (12) that the Chief Finance Officer be authorised to take any necessary action to collect revenues and disburse monies from the relevant accounts;
- (13) that the requirements of any relevant legislation to consider reports as a consequence of the approval of the Council's Finances 2019/20 report, be dispensed with on the grounds that in the opinion of the Council the items are urgent, be approved;
- (14) that the Chief Finance Officer be authorised to agree the contract sum for the Children's Trust for 2019/20.

21/19      **Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2019-20 provided critical support to low income families in the borough and was based on income bands to enable residents on very low incomes to receive 100% support.

The Scheme for 2019/20 was approved by Council at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019. Following confirmation of welfare benefit rates payable from April 2019 an issue had been identified with the income bands detailed in Schedule 1 of the Scheme. In order to continue to provide 100% support to our most vulnerable residents a change to Schedule 1 of the 2019/20 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme was required.

**Resolved** that the revised Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019-2020 be approved.

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22/19

**Council Tax Award of Discount Policy 2019-20**

The Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework was approved by Cabinet on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

There was a legislative requirement for the Council Tax Award of Discount Policy to be approved by Council. The policy was reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it was fit for purpose and to take account of any legislative changes.

Legislation had now been passed which would allow Councils to increase the Council Tax charged on long term empty properties. The policy had therefore been amended to include the following changes:-

- from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 onwards, a 100% premium would be applied for homes empty over two years, generating a Council Tax charge of 200%;
- from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 onwards, a 200% premium would be applied for homes empty for over five years, generating a Council Tax charge of 300%;
- from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 onwards, a 300% premium charge would be applied for homes empty for over ten years, generating a Council Tax charge of 400%.

These changes had been assumed when calculating the Council Tax Base and would increase the amount of collectable Council Tax for the borough.

**Resolved** that the Council Tax Award of Discount Policy for 2019-2020 be approved.

23/19

**Pay Policy 2019 and Gender Pay Gap Reporting**

Each year the Council was required, by the Localism Act 2011, to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement setting out its policies relating to: the remuneration of their chief officers, the remuneration of their lowest-paid employees, and the relationship between the pay of chief officers and that of other employees.

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Each year the Council was also required, by the Equality Act Regulations 2017, to prepare and publish its Gender Pay Gap data. These provisions formed part of a range of transparency obligations placed upon local authorities.

### **Pay Policy Statement**

The Localism Act determined that the Statement must cover a range of the authority's policies relating to the pay of Chief Officers including:-

- the level and elements of remuneration for each officer (including salary, bonuses, performance-related pay and benefits in kind);
- remuneration of chief officers on recruitment;
- increases and additions to remuneration;
- the approach to the payment of chief officers on their ceasing to hold office or to being employed by the authority.

Supplementary Guidance had since added to and clarified the information required to be published, notably that the Council should be given the opportunity to vote before:-

- large salary packages were offered in respect of a new appointment and large severance packages were approved for staff leaving the organisation;
- the Council should state the thresholds at which it wished to require approval.

The Guidance considered that £100,000 was an appropriate threshold.

Section 40 of the Localism Act required the Council to have regard to this guidance in the exercise of its functions under pay accountability provisions. The Council followed the spirit of the guidance, should particular circumstances dictate, and this approach had duly been reflected in the Pay Policy Statement.

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The Council's previous Annual Pay Policy statements (1<sup>st</sup> February 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018) had informed interested parties that pay ratio between the lowest paid (full time equivalent) employee and the Chief Executive was 1:10. This ratio narrowed on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018 to 1:9.

In line with the requirement of the Localism Act 2011, Sandwell Council no longer needed to include within its Pay Policy Statement reporting those employees who moved to Sandwell Children's Trust on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. The majority of these employees (circa 500) were employed on band F and above, which was equivalent to a minimum salary of £29,055. For the purposes of the Pay Policy Statement, this had resulted in a reduction in the median Full Time Equivalent salary from £27,668 to £25,463. This change had also been reflected in the pay level ratios in that when compared to the Chief Executive's salary, the ratio in pay had widened from 1:5 to 1:6.

### **Gender Pay Gap Reporting**

The Council was required to publish the following statistics on its public-facing web site, and report the same, to the Government online:

- the mean gender pay gap;
- the median gender pay gap;
- the proportion of male and female employees in each pay quartile;
- a narrative to supplement the data.

The gender pay gap was an equality measure that showed the difference in average earnings between men and women, expressed as a percentage of male earnings.

The legislation detailed that employees at Maintained Schools must be treated as if employed by the governing body, therefore the Council must exclude schools from its gender pay gap reporting.

Sandwell Council's mean Gender Pay Gap figure for 2019 had narrowed to 7.1% over the last 12 months.

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The first mean Gender Pay Gap figure, published last year, was 8.4%. It was agreed that the Council would use this figure as an initial baseline to enable the monitoring of progress.

Although the gender pay gap figure had reduced significantly, the causes of any gender pay gap remained complex and overlapping and there was not one single over-riding reason why a gender pay gap existed.

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services had considered it necessary to continue with higher pay increases for those employees on the lower pay points in order to continue to close the gap with the National Living Wage. Reporting had identified that 72% of those employees receiving the higher percentage pay increase were female.

A supporting narrative to explain and complement the Council's gender pay gap data would be developed and published.

All calculations had been made in line with the regulations set out in the gender pay gap reporting legislation.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Pay Policy Statement 2019 be approved;
- (2) that the Gender Pay Gap data be approved.

24/19

**Planning Committee Annual Report 2018**

In accordance with the Council's arrangements for the principal member with responsibility for key Council functions to report periodically to the Council on the activities of the relevant committee or decision making body, the Chair of the Planning Committee, Councillor Sandars, presented the annual report of the Planning Committee for 2018.

During 2018, 1250 planning applications were received. Of the 1083 determined, 988 (95%) were dealt with by officers under delegated powers. Of those determined applications, 955 (92%) were approved and 83 (8%) were refused.

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This compared to 1200 planning applications received in 2017 of which 1115 were determined. Planning Committee met on a monthly basis and considered 131 applications which was an increase on the 2017 figures.

The figures indicated that the overall number of planning applications received during 2018 revealed an increase on 2017. Notwithstanding this, these numbers were affected by the fact that in 2013, the Government introduced a new 'Prior Approval' system which was intended to primarily allow householders greater scope above and beyond existing regulations to extend their properties. Before this date, such extensions would have required a formal planning application to be submitted. These Prior Approvals did not appear in the formal figures for the numbers of applications dealt with but in essence the process and the work required was the same although no fee was paid. The Council received 258 such applications in 2018.

The large percentage of applications approved in part reflected the openness of the service in encouraging developers and prospective applicants to engage in pre-application discussions which were currently provided free at Sandwell. This approach had been worked up into a more formal 'Development Agency' approach in order to send the message that the Council, despite the existing economic difficulties, was very much open for business and ready to facilitate development opportunities.

The positive outcome of the vast majority of planning applications submitted at Sandwell was also in part a reflection of where there were problems with a proposed scheme, officers would endeavour to negotiate workable solutions within the prescribed time scales.

In addition to the above planning applications, the Development Management section also dealt with around 500 complaints regarding alleged breaches of planning control. Officers remained acutely aware of the fact that the credibility of the planning system as a whole rested on the ability to take timely and appropriate enforcement action.

A further 150 sites had also been investigated by officers as potentially requiring tidy up work using in the main powers available under Section 215 of the Town and County Planning Act 1990.

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(This power allowed the local planning authority to deal with privately owned land or buildings, the condition of which was adversely affecting the amenity of a particular area). This area of work had grown in recent years on the back of the Council's own Grot Spots programme.

Officers continued to strive to build on the good work to date and the partnerships already created both within the Council and with outside bodies such as the Police, Fire Service and rehabilitation groups.

In presenting the report, Councillor Sandars wished to place on record his thanks to the Committee and to the staff of the Planning Team.

Councillor Moore, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Investment also wished to place on record his thanks to the Planning Team which continued to be one of the best departments in the region in terms of performance.

25/19

**West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

Councillor Edwards, the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to report on the activities of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, presented an update on the work of the Fire Authority, accompanied by Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Gary Taylor.

Particular reference was made to:-

**- Revenue finances**

The Government provisional four-year settlement offer which was originally announced in December 2016 and confirmed each year, resulting in the following core funding reductions:

- 2016-17 £3.278m
- 2017-18 £3.962m
- 2018-19 £1.673m
- 2019-20 £0.982m

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This produced a total reduction in government funding for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority over the period 2011/12 – 2019/20 of £38m (50% of original core funding).

On 18<sup>th</sup> February 2019, the Authority set a revenue budget for 2019/20 of £96.778 million supported by Council Tax income of £43.215 million and a Band D property precept increase of 2.99%. Even taking into account this Council Tax increase, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority still set the lowest Band D Council Tax level of all Fire and Rescue Authorities in England.

The use of general balances of £1.1-million in 2019-20 had been agreed to support the ongoing costs of service transformation and some reinvestment in fire protection services and over stretched support services which had been cut by 40% and 26% respectively since 2011-12.

The Authority had also agreed a capital programme for 2019-20 of £6.52 million. The two largest items of capital spend were £3.25 million for the vehicle replacement programme (with the majority being spent on front-line fire appliances) and £2.15 million for the completion of the rebuild of Aston fire station (which would incorporate the West Midlands Fire Service Heritage Centre and a new branch library for Birmingham City Council).

**- Impacts of budget reductions on West Midlands Fire Service 2019/20**

The cumulative impact of cuts to revenue funding for the past nine years and the withdrawal from commissioned services for three West Midlands local Authorities, had led to a reduction in the budget available for firefighter voluntary addition shifts in 2019-20. This would result in less firefighters on duty at any one time, and a consequent reduction in the availability of fire appliances which would need to continue to be managed in an even more flexible and dynamic way under delegations to the Chief Fire Officer.

The numbers of Brigade Response vehicles would be reduced on a flexible basis from the current nineteen to contribute to achieving a balanced budget.

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The reduction in the availability of fire appliances would impact negatively on prevention activities with a projected reduction in safe and well visits to the most vulnerable members of our communities.

In the face of these unavoidable reductions West Midlands Fire Service remained committed to maintaining its five minute risk based attendance target for first appliances to category 1 incidents which threatened life and property. The evidence provided to the Fire Authority as part of the decision making process demonstrated that this was a realistic ambition.

**- Developments in inclusive recruitment**

Since September 2017, West Midlands Fire Service had been operating a new approach to the recruitment of firefighters, moving away from campaign-based recruitment. West Midlands Fire Service, supported by the Fire Authority, was committed to ensuring that the staff employed reflected the communities across the area served. Firefighter recruitment activity was now driven by a sustained approach to positive action, focusing attention on generating a candidate pool who were nurtured through selection.

**- Future governance of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

As a result of changes made to the draft Order, a pause had been created in the process to move governance of West Midlands Fire Service to the Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority. These changes centred on the delegation of the accountabilities and responsibilities of the Chief Fire Officer and removed the absolute assurance that these would be delegated by the Mayor. This resulted in concern that the operational and organisational independence of the Chief Fire Officer role could be compromised.

The Chief Fire Officer issued an assessment to all seven constituent authority Chief Executives to this affect, with the result that constituent authorities did not provide the required consent to the Home Office for the Order to be laid before Parliament on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

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Following recent meetings between the Mayor, Fire Authority Chair and Chief Fire Officer, each party had re-affirmed their commitment to the governance transfer to the Combined Authority, subject to acceptable assurances around the role of the Chief Fire Officer in any new arrangements being aligned to that intended in the locally agreed draft Order submitted to the Home Office in September 2018 which was approved by Sandwell MBC and the six other West Midlands Local Authorities.

WMCA Officers had proposed five distinct areas which were intended to provide assurance around the independence of the CFO role and key accountabilities. It was intended that following the development of these assurances. the constitutional detail and the assessment of the Chief Fire Officer, the proposed constitutional clauses as developed would be submitted to the Combined Authority Board in March 2019.

26/19      **Transport for West Midlands**

Councillor Allcock presented an update on the work of Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) and in doing so wished Councillor R Horton a speedy recovery.

Particular reference was made to:-

-      **Commonwealth Games**

The transport planning for the Games was proceeding well with the development of an Integrated Transport Programme reporting into a multi-agency Joint Transport Group. Work was progressing on developing a Games Transport Plan which would set out the approach to the detailed planning required for the integrated transport network.

-      **M5 Oldbury Viaduct works**

The project remained on track for completion in the Autumn of 2019.

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**- Bus Network**

The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan – Movement for Growth, set out a vision and the high level objectives of the public transport network.

TfWM had defined a Strategic Vision for Bus in the West Midlands to ensure that bus continued to be able to deliver the current and future objectives of the WMCA.

In partnership with local authority's transport teams and industry, TfWM was now developing a delivery plan from which it will be able to evaluate the best route to achieving its vision including working with the Bus Alliance or looking at other legislative options to see what the most effective and efficient delivery models were.

**- Rail Investment and Partnerships**

Particular highlights for Sandwell were:

- Tamebridge Parkway would have regular direct services through to London Euston;
- local stations between Birmingham and Wolverhampton would be served by earlier and later services;
- Smethwick Galton Bridge would have two direct trains to/from London Euston per hour;
- services between Snow Hill and Kidderminster would operate more frequently on weekdays and Saturdays after 1900 giving stations such as Cradley Heath better evening services.

**- Sustainable Travel**

**- Community Cycle Clubs**

In partnership with Cycling UK, 5 Community Cycle Clubs had been set up in Sandwell. Smethwick Beat the Street Community Cycle Club met every Monday at Smethwick Fire Station for Adult Learn to Ride Sessions where bikes and helmets could be borrowed.

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The second club at Hallam Street Hospital was operating and ideally placed for National Cycle Network Route 5 and any future developments through nearby local cycling and walking infrastructure plan led investment. The third club at Lightwoods Park had grown since inception with several members becoming Ride Leaders, the club ran on Wednesday mornings. The fourth was Tipton's Victoria Park Community Cycle Club. The fifth club had just started at Hadley Stadium which was working to make use of their athletics track for cycling.

- Living Streets Walk to School Programme

In partnership with TfWM, Living Streets had been working with seven Sandwell primary schools to encourage children to walk to school with the aim of improving wellbeing and reducing the number of cars at the school gates to reduce vehicle emissions. The seven primary schools were:

- Blackheath Primary School
- Corngreaves Academy
- Crocketts Community Primary School
- Ferndale Primary School
- Glebefields Primary School
- Our Lady and St Hubert's Catholic Primary School
- Yew Tree Primary School.

In response to questions, Councillor Allcock commented as follows:-

- with regard to the proposed new tram stops without car parking facilities, this matter would be taken back for comment;
- in relation to parking issues, particularly in the Cradley Heath area, as it was assumed this was not related to park and ride, discussions would take place with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment.

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**West Midlands Police and Crime Panel**

The Council's representative on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel, Councillor Costigan, provided members with an update on the work undertaken by the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel.

Particular reference was made to:-

- Core Work Programme – Statutory Scrutiny Responsibilities

The Panel had a number of statutory scrutiny responsibilities that it must deliver and constituted the core work programme:-

- scrutinise and comment on the PCC's Police and Crime Plan;
  - scrutinise and make a recommendation on the policing precept and budget for policing, with the power to veto the proposed precept;
  - review the PCC's Annual Report;
  - hold confirmation hearings before the PCC makes certain key appointments;
  - handle complaints about the PCC, referring serious complaints to the Independent Office for Police Conduct.
- Achievements 2018/19
    - in October 2018 the Panel reviewed the PCC's Annual Report examining the progress made towards his priorities and targets set out in his Police and Crime Plan;
    - in January 2019 Members questioned the PCC and Deputy Chief Constable over their plans for local policing and the improving public engagement;
    - in February 2019 the Panel reviewed the PCC's policing precept and budget for 2019/20;
    - Budget Scrutiny - the Panel established a sub group to carry out detailed scrutiny of budget issues and develop a good understanding of key issues, budget pressures and projections. The sub group looked in detail at the PCC's budget outturn, medium term financial plan, and the PCC's preliminary revenue budget and capital programme;
    - the Future of Police Governance - The Panel played a key role in police governance so a key focus of work this year was examining the proposals to transfer the PCC responsibilities to the West Midlands Mayor in 2020.

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Members challenged Andy Street, West Midlands Mayor, and officers of the WMCA on proposals. The Police and Crime Commissioner also outlined his views on the two roles merging. The Panel's response to the WMCA consultation is on the Panel website;

- the Panel also received regular updates at each meeting from the PCC on recent activity, including his efforts to tackle vehicle thefts, violent crime, reduce drug related deaths, and the development of the police cadets scheme. In addition, Members have challenged the PCC on the recent HMICFRS 'inadequate' rating for crime recording and questioned the PCC and Deputy Chief Constable on resources for local neighbourhood policing and benefits arising from the WMP2020 police transformation programme.

Councillor Costigan added that she had received a petition calling for an increase in policing which had been referred to the Home Secretary.

**28/19      Vacancies on Committees and Boards**

In connection with the election of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Preece reported that there were no vacancies which needed addressing.

**29/19      Minutes and Policy/Strategic Recommendations of the Cabinet**

The Council received the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 30<sup>th</sup> January and 6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

In response to a question with regard to Minute No. 21/19 in relation to Emergency Accommodation Tender Exercise (20<sup>th</sup> February 2019), the Leader confirmed that officers would look at how the scheme was interpreted to ensure there were no safeguarding issues arising. The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that the issue was being investigated.

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**30/19 Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board**

The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, Councillor P Hughes, presented the minutes of the meetings of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held on 9<sup>th</sup> January and 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

No questions were asked of the Chair.

**31/19 Minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Councillor Preece, presented the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

No questions were asked of the Chair.

**32/19 Minutes of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee**

The Chair of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee, Councillor Dhallu, presented the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee held on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

The Council considered the recommendations of the Committee on the following matter:-

**32/19(a) Changes to Polling Stations**

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the polling station in respect of polling district Bristnall ward BRB/BRC be relocated to Moat Farm Infant School, Brookfields Road, Oldbury, B68 9QR for the Local Election on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019;

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- (2) that the polling station in respect of polling district Wednesbury South ward WSA/WSB be relocated to a portable unit sited opposite the former polling place at Leabrook Methodist Church, Leabrook Road North, Wednesbury, WS10 7LY for the Local Election on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019.

(The meeting ended at 7.29pm)

This meeting was webcast live and is available to view on the Council's website (<http://sandwell.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>).

<p>Contact Officer: Trisha Newton Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3193</p>
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## **Appendix 1**

### **Appointments to Committees, Panels and Boards 2018/2019**

Pursuant to the election of a new Leader of the Council under Recommendation 1 of the report, the Leader of the Council be appointed to the following bodies/entities and be the Chairperson of the same with immediate effect consistent with the decision of Council at its Annual Council meeting on 22 May 2018:-

Emergency Committee  
Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Committee  
Chief Officer Terms and Conditions Appointments Sub-Committee  
Governance and Constitution Review Committee  
Commonwealth Games 2022 Steering Group  
Strategic Waste Partnership Board

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### Appointments to Other Bodies

Pursuant to the election of a new Leader of the Council under Recommendation 1 of the report, the Leader of the Council be appointed to the following bodies/entities with immediate effect consistent with the decision of Council at its Annual Council meeting on 22 May 2018:-

<b><u>National Organisation</u></b>	<b><u>Term of Office</u></b>	<b><u>Current Representative(s)</u></b>
Local Government Association – General Assembly	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council (5 votes) Non-voting members:- Deputy Leader of the Council  Director - Regeneration and Growth
SIGOMA (Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities within the LGA)	Expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council or nominee
<b><u>Regional Organisation</u></b>		
Association of Black Country Authorities	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council (substitute: Deputy Leader)
West Midlands Rail Ltd	Expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council Substitute: Lead Member for Transport or Leader's nominee

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<b><u>Partnership Organisation</u></b>	<b><u>Term of Office</u></b>	<b><u>Current Representative(s)</u></b>
West Midlands Shareholders Airport Committee	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council* Observer: Deputy Leader
Black Country Consortium	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council
Black Country Executive Joint Committee	Expiring Council's annual meeting 2019  Expiring Council's annual meeting 2018	Leader of the Council  Deputy Leader of the Council
Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council Councillor Gavan

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<b><u>Partnership Organisation</u></b>	<b><u>Term of Office</u></b>	<b><u>Current Representative(s)</u></b>
Contest Board	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Public Health and Protection
W2R Contract Management Board	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council or nominee Cabinet Member for Highways & Environment Executive Director - Neighbourhoods
West Midlands Combined Authority Board	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Investment Substitute: Deputy Leader of the Council
West Midlands Combined Authority Growth Company	1 year expiring Council's annual meeting 2019	Leader of the Council