

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Tuesday 28 October 2025 at 6.00 pm at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present:

Councillors: Davies Dhatt Fitzgerald E A Giles	Councillors: W Gill Hinchliff Jeffcoat
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Also in Attendance: Councillors Khatun, Hughes and Smith

Officers: Alex Thompson (Executive Director Finance and Transformation), Alan Lunt (Executive Director Place), Claire Spencer (Service Director Finance) and Nigel Collumbell (Assistant Director Housing Management).

55/25 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ashraf and Fenton.

56/25 Declarations of Interest

Councillor E A Giles declared that a family member is employed by the housing repairs service.

57/25 Urgent Additional Items of Business

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

58/25 Medium Term Financial Strategy – Housing and Planning, Regeneration and Infrastructure and Business and Skills

Further to Minute No. 54/25 (of the meeting held on 23 October 2025), the Cabinet Members for Housing, Regeneration and Infrastructure, and Business and Skills were in attendance to present the budget proposals for their respective areas of responsibility.

Housing

The portfolio budget for 2026/27 included growth of just under £1m, which included £625k to correct income budgets within planning and building control and £121k for pay awards. The housing general fund position was stable, with growth of £476k relating to pay and contract inflation however temporary accommodation costs continued to be closely monitored. Deletion of a vacant post would also provide an efficiency of £25k.

It was highlighted that a new supported housing service had been established, to address complex housing need and help prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. Sandwell's rate of households in temporary accommodation was currently one third of the national average.

The key financial pressures for 2026/27 related to the planning service, as income from building control and land charges had reduced, alongside existing pressures related to planning fees, since income had not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Pressures relating to the Sandwell Local Plan would be funded from in-year budget adjustments.

There were no new capital proposals for 2026/27.

The Housing Revenue Account budget would be included in a further report to the Board in January 2026.

Following questions and comments, the following key points were noted:

- the Council consistently considered new and innovative ways to ease budget pressures and good practice was discussed in Strategic Leadership Team;
- recharging of Oracle Fusion costs to the housing revenue account was apportioned according to what the cost related to;
- a lack of suitable building land for large developments in Sandwell had affected income on the planning budget, as well as a general downturn in planning activity since the pandemic, and the Council continued discussions with developers to bring forward sites for development;
- it was prudent to account for ongoing pressure in the planning budget in future years, pending forthcoming changes to the planning system;
- the one off adjustment of £180k in relation to the Local Plan related to the costs of immediate review of the Plan after adoption, due to a change to planning regulations;
- targets for new homes required under new planning legislation would not change significantly;
- the Council would consider building low rise flats to meet housing demand if necessary;
- the vacant post deleted did not relate to a statutory service;
- homelessness reduction was regularly discussed at the West Midlands Combined Authority and best practice shared;
- it was confirmed that there were no proposals in the 2026/27 budget to close the shop mobility service;
- there would be greater certainty on pay awards following the government's budget announcement, efforts would be made to minimise any unforeseen impact in-year and reserves would be used if necessary;

Regeneration and Infrastructure and Business and Skills

Both portfolios were responsible for bringing growth to Sandwell, working with public and private sector partners. The proposed 2026/27 budget was £9.327 million. Efficiencies relating to the conclusion of the Levelling Up Fund equated to £112k and there was a reduction in the supplies and services budget to the value of £50k. In terms of capital projects, Levelling Up funding was set aside to acquire premises and carry out remediation works in connection with the Gove Lane Master Plan (Smethwick). Funding had also been allocated to development of the former Brandhall golf course, which included the provision of new open space.

Various schemes would provide investment across the Council's corporate estate to ensure compliance and property operability. There were a number of sites across the borough marked for demolition to ensure safety and support development and disposal opportunities.

Following questions and comments, the following key points were noted:

- there was an additional £50k reduction in supplies and services budget related to the Executive Director's budget;
- there were no budget pressures relating to any of the Levelling Up Fund projects;
- a number of government policies impacted on business rates, and further detail on the impact in Sandwell would be known following the Chancellor's announcement expected in November 2025.

Meeting ended 7.09pm.