

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY
BOARD - 6 January 2022**

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

06 JANUARY 2022

(HYBRID MEETING)

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE (Chairman). Councillors D Gibbin, B Groom, P Hogarth MBE, M Parker, W Qais (Vice-Chairman) and M Wilson.

Apologies:

Councillor S Sheshabhatte. [virtual attendance]

Councillor M Brain.

Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Infrastructure).

Gary Palmer – Group Manager (Policy & Engagement).

Report authors/witnesses in attendance: [all virtual attendance]

Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships).

Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

Lauren Beach - Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure.

Andrew Callingham (Head of Safer Communities).

Austin Rodriguez - Head of Stronger Communities (Housing & Communities).

Mark Andrews – Head of Planning, Design & Engagement.

Ciaran Brennan – Technical Development Officer.

External Witnesses in attendance:

None.

Cabinet Members in attendance:

Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities).
[virtual attendance]

Councillor Mrs K Grinsell – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport).

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

None.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations on interest.

2. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no questions or deputations.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last (hybrid) meeting held on 4 November 2021, was submitted for review and approval.

RESOLVED

That the Minutes from the meeting held on 4 November 2021, be agreed as a correct record.

4. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) UPDATE – BUDGET STRATEGY 2022/23 – 2024/25

In attendance: Lauren Beach - Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure; Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships); Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment) and Andrew Callingham (Head of Safer Communities).

The Board considered a detailed report which set out the budget proposals identified for 2022/23 to 2024/25 within the Environment and Infrastructure; Leisure Tourism and Sport; and the Stronger and Safer Communities Cabinet Portfolios.

Officers reported that the focus of the budget strategy, this year, had been on managing the significant ongoing financial challenges faced by the authority. Cabinet Portfolios had again not been asked to propose savings to meet a corporate target, but instead had identified options for mitigating service pressures, which had been considered by the Budget Strategy Group at their three meetings held in October and November.

As part of their work, the Budget Strategy Group had also considered some specific pressures and agreed to recommend the inclusion of additional funding through the MTFS for specific priorities across the wider authority, full details of which were submitted.

As in previous years, the Strategy was proposed to manage any movement in the first two years of the MTFS as one-off adjustments, using the budget strategy reserve to smooth the profile of the funding pressures so that there was no impact on the savings and mitigations already being delivered for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

In addition to the service-specific pressures, the Budget Strategy Group had also considered emerging corporate pressures affecting the MTFS. Members noted that inflation was currently at a ten-year high, affecting general supplies and services as well as specific contracts. The inflation assumptions in the MTFS had, therefore, been revised (upwards) in line with the Office for Budget Responsibility projections published alongside the Spending Review.

The Spending Review, published in October 2021, included a number of announcements in respect of local government funding. That included additional funding for local government of £1.6 billion per annum to 2024/25 and confirmation that the government intended to maintain the referendum threshold for core council tax at 2.0% and continue with a social care precept of 1.0% per annum for the next three years. The implications for individual authorities were unclear but the updates to the MTFS considered by the Budget Strategy Group included the estimated impact of relevant announcements, resulting in an ongoing funding gap for 2024/25 of £9.054 million. Since the publication of the Board's agenda, the provisional local government finance settlement had now been received which had within it around £2.5M of additional funding for each year of the MTFS which now improved that position.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

Each individual Scrutiny Board this month was now being asked to consider, in detail, the budget proposals which related to the Cabinet Portfolios within their remit. Included within the report were details pertaining to portfolio-specific considerations insofar as pressures and proposed mitigations; key risks relevant to the budget proposals; and a schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2022/23 for services provided by the above three Cabinet Portfolios.

As a result of the report and supporting appendices, the following questions and observations arose:

- A review was planned of customer contact that was targeted to deliver savings of £100,000 in 2023/24, increasing to £200,000 from 2024/25. That would include considering collaborative working with Solihull Community Housing, further development of digital channels and a wider review of first point of contact across the Council to ensure that was done in the most efficient way. The Board sought reassurances that the review would not result in a reduction in face to face services which vulnerable customers relied on. Officers confirmed that this was not the intention. The review sought to address the channel-shift that had been seen since the start of the pandemic insofar as the increase of digital customer interaction with service provision; and to ensure a strong presence was maintained for face to face contact, particularly for vulnerable customers.
- In terms of fees and charges generally, the Board sought views from Officers as to what work was being done to ensure services were attractive, competitive and accessible. The Core Theatre was cited as a particular example where evening parking concessions might encourage a greater number of visitors and help generate more income for the authority. Officers acknowledged that the Core Theatre had been running at a financial loss for a number of years and one of the service priorities was to extend the current offer to improve the financial position of that asset. However, the pandemic had severely hindered any meaningful progress with that work. Officers highlighted that the 2021 Christmas Pantomime had been very popular. Unfortunately, the Pantomime had been cancelled partway through its 2021 schedule due to the current position with Covid-19 and that had a significant impact on income from that event alone.
- The Board also highlighted that fees and charges pertaining to the Core Theatre (and its use by local amateur dramatics groups) should not be prohibitive to them as this could pose a further financial risk and loss of income if those smaller performances no longer took place. Officers acknowledged the value of those groups and reassured the Board that this was always a consideration when annual increases to fees and charges was proposed.
- Specifically for statutory fees and charges for the Councils licensing services (gaming machines, gambling premises and bingo clubs etc), the Board enquired where within the statutory parameters had Solihull set its own fees and charges to ensure the authority was covering all its costs to run those licensing services. Officers advised that it was always intended to maximise income for the authority although it was not permissible to make a profit from certain fees and charges. Officers reassured the Board that the service area was charging as much as it could for the majority of statutory services. Officers also highlighted, as further reassurance, that benchmarking across the region was also undertaken where permissible.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

- In July 2022, the Commonwealth Games would come to Birmingham and whilst Birmingham City Council would host the games, Solihull would also host a number of sporting events and seek to maximise that opportunity to promote the Borough as a tourism destination. It was recommended that £100,000 be set aside in 2022/23 for potential costs. The Board asked if any further update had been received from Sport England with regards to grant funding. Officers advised that no further updates could be confirmed during the meeting, although Mrs Alison McGroary offered to check the position and communicate the outcome to the Board. In response to a further question, Officers also highlighted the intentions for a major communications plan for everything associated with the Commonwealth Games.
- Insofar as the Borough's leisure centres and in response to a question regarding the financial impact of the pandemic on those centres, Officers advised that they had been open and following Covid-safe procedures in place. The recovery of those services had been good, based on the information received from the operators.
- The Board noted that the Council had pledged to plant 250,000 trees over a ten year period. To achieve the target, it was likely that further funding would need to be identified and options for that would include accessing external grants, and working with partners to deliver tree planting through social value commitments within contracts. The report also highlighted that there was a possibility that the government would issue a directive to remove all ash stock in order to help manage the spread of ash tree die back. Officers reiterated from the report that approximately 15% of SMBC tree stock were ash trees and the costs of removing those would be significant. That could also result in additional costs to continue to meet current tree planting targets. Those costs had not been budgeted for as evidence of ash tree die back in Solihull was minimal to date. There were approximately 10,000 ash trees in Solihull, including those privately owned.

The above observations and recommendations of this Scrutiny Board would now go forward to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet during February 2022.

RESOLVED

That, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** makes the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board** and **Full Cabinet**:

That, subject to the observations and comments recorded in the preamble above, the Board:

- (i) Acknowledges the pressures and mitigating actions set out in Appendix A to the report;
- (ii) Supports the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2022/23, as attached at Appendix B to the report; and
- (iii) Supports the indicative service budget proposals for 2022/23, as outlined in the report at Appendix C.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

5. COMMUNITY CASEWORK AND COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING

In attendance: Austin Rodriguez - Head of Stronger Communities (Housing & Communities) and Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities).

The Board considered a detailed report that invited them to review the provisional recommendations from a joint officer and Member Working Group, commissioned to examine Member casework and community problem solving.

By way of background, the Cabinet Member for Stronger and Safer Communities had previously approved a number of recommendations concerning the provision and development of support for Members in their casework and community leadership roles. A joint officer and Member Working Group was subsequently set up, comprising cross-party representation, as well as input from Heads of Service and officers from the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate, Solihull Community Housing (SCH), ICT Services and West Midlands Police.

Four workshops were held to explore the issues and identify opportunities for positive improvements. The appendices to the report detailed the outputs from those sessions which had informed the provisional recommendations from the Review.

As a result of the report and supporting appendices, the following questions and observations arose:

- The continuation of multi-agency locality group meetings was highlighted. A Member recalled his own recent experiences of those meetings and expressed concerns that, from his own perspective, they were not effective and the times at which they had been held (daytime) had been prohibitive to those Members who had full-time occupations and had genuine difficulties in attending. A further perception was that the locality meetings covered too large a geographical area. In comparison, the former Ward meetings were perceived to be more useful to Members and focused specifically on individual Ward issues. Those meetings had also been held later in the day and Member attendance had generally been good and outcomes were actioned quickly and effectively. A number of other Members of the Board had sympathy with the issues of concern raised, particularly regarding the accessibility of the locality group meetings. In response, Officers highlighted the typical role and purpose of the locality group meetings to which Members were now being invited.
- Additionally, Officers highlighted that a number of Council services were now configured differently which, in part, had prompted the need for new ways of working. Digital access to services had also greatly improved and the appropriate Officers were always willing to discuss Ward issues with Members at any time. The appendices to the report set out the proposed new arrangements to support Members with their day to day casework. Officers emphasised the aims of the review was to make better use of existing systems in terms of reporting problems and expectations as to what council services, solutions and interventions could be provided and delivered (via new service guides) and also make best use of available resources.
- Members also raised a concern that some key Officer contacts to resolve Ward issues had been lost given that a number of Council services had now been configured differently to previous years. Members recalled the usefulness of the Councillors Year Book and Diary which included details of service area responsibilities, key Officers

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

and their contact details. Acknowledging that the Council was now very much in a digital age which encouraged self-reporting, Members highlighted that similar information should more readily accessible so Members could still have the option to report, discuss and follow-up (to conclusion) Ward issues.

- In response to a question, Officers also highlighted that further work was to be done insofar as ICT to ensure that Members had access to the correct software and equipment to support their casework and that the Councils digital services were configured in the most effective way.

Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities) spoke in support of the intentions of the review and thanked the Board for their comments which she would take into account at her Decision Session on 26 January 2022.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board made the following **MAJORITY RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger & Safer Communities**:

- (i) That, the Board notes the Working Groups recommendations and the overall intentions of the Review;
- (ii) That, the new ways of working for Member casework and community problem solving should continue to include regular Ward-based meetings for Members in light of their perceived usefulness and value;
- (iii) That, future multi-agency locality group meetings should be held at times that are convenient for Members to attend; and
- (iv) That, the new ways of working should publicise (and regularly update) key Officer contacts for Council services to afford Members the option to contact them directly if they wish to discuss issues of concern within their individual Wards.

6. SUMMARY AND ASSESSMENT OF BIDS FOR FUNDING TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PROPORTION OF THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

In attendance: Mark Andrews – Head of Planning, Design & Engagement; Ciaran Brennan – Technical Development Officer; Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities); and Councillor Mrs K Grinsell – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport).

Officers reported to the Board a detailed update on the Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL) and sought views in respect of the annual draft allocations for funding. CIL was introduced in 2010 as a more transparent, flexible and fairer way of raising developer contributions as part of the planning process. It was a tariff-based planning charge levied on new development by local authorities to fund infrastructure and to support the development in their area.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

In parished areas, the monies were paid directly to the parish council who were responsible for spending or allocating the local proportion of the levy. Where there was no parish council to manage the local funds, the responsibility lay with the Council as the Collecting Authority. This report dealt with allocating the local funds for the non-parished Wards within the Borough.

In 2021/22, there was £263.5k available for bidding; £180.5k of which had been rolled-over from 2020/21. The report detailed 12 bids that had been received by the deadline of 30 September 2021, and having been assessed against the agreed scoring matrix, 9 of those bids were now being recommended for approval and funding. Full details of each proposed allocation was submitted. In summary, they were:

1. NCIL21-0001-STA - Outdoor Seating at Alderbrook School.
2. NCIL21-0002-SS - Restoration of the tower clock in St James's Church.
3. NCIL21-0003-KNO – Royal British Legion Knowle - Project Jubilee Room.
4. NCIL21-0004-SE/SS – Shirley Sea Cadets - unit extension.
5. NCIL21-0005-DOR - Installation of disabled and wheelchair bound person's lift at St Phillips Church, Dorridge.
6. NCIL21-0006-DOR - Dorridge Scout Hut Car Park.
7. NCIL21-0010-SE - Palmers Rough Pond Enhancement (part of Newts and Shoots Pond Creation and Enhancement).
8. NCIL21-0011-STA – The Magic Bean Coffee Shop - Community IT and Communication Infrastructure Project.
9. NCIL21-0012-KNO - Knowle Park Basketball Court.

A total of £135.5k was recommended for allocation this year. Following the allocation of funds, £128k would then remain and would roll-over for bidding in 2022/23.

The report also highlighted the option to part fund a project from adjacent and/or multiple Ward funding pots where the project served the wider community. For this round of bidding, the Shirley Sea Cadets project (NCIL/21/0004/SESS) fell within that category as its HQ building lay within Shirley West. However, as no funding was available from the Shirley West funding pot, the bid was submitted on the basis of seeking funds from both the Shirley East and Shirley South Wards on the basis that the Group served all of Shirley, not just Shirley West.

As a result of the report and supporting appendices, the following questions and observations arose:

- Members enquired if there could be bids for multiple projects from the same Ward funding pot and if there was any maximum cap on funding for each Ward. Officers advised that each Ward had a sum of money attributable to it based on how much CIL had been received from local development that attracted that levy. Once a minimum balance of £10k was in the Ward funding pot, bidding invitations were invited. That process did, therefore, allow bidding for multiple projects within the same Ward which would then be assessed against the agreed framework and criteria. The Board was advised that multiple bids were assessed on their own merits and the allocation of funding from Ward pots was dependant on a number of variable factors which included the total funding available, the number of bids received, their individual values and the distribution of available funds across the projects if a number of CIL bids were deemed to be successful.
- As in previous reports, the Board again sought reassurances that the CIL was being publicised as effectively as possible to ensure that

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

applications for funding came forward. Members also asked how the Authority was supporting some of the smaller community groups to participate in the bidding process. Members highlighted that the well-established community groups would be used to participating in schemes such as CIL and would be well versed in preparing a submitting bids, whereas some of the smaller community groups might not have that expertise and experience. Officers advised that the availability of funding was promoted through local Ward Councillors, community groups and more recently, word of mouth and self-promotion, in light of previous successful schemes coming to fruition and attracting interest.

- In respect of NCIL21-0004-SE/SS – Shirley Sea Cadets - unit extension; Members raised concerns at the sharing of funding pots from other Shirley Wards in light of no specific funding being available this year from the Shirley West CIL funding pot. The Board was of the view that for applications from organisations, such as those, which had Borough-wide community benefits, some CIL monies should be set aside each year in a separate non-Ward specific pot to fund successful bids without having to affect the availability of CIL funding in individual Wards which in some instances might be quite limited. In response, Officers outlined the bidding, consultation and scoring process for that particular bid and the reasoning behind the proposed award and the allocation of funding from neighbouring Ward pots.
- The Board noted from the report that any monies not spent in one year would be rolled-over into the next funding year. The Board asked if that rolling-over carried on indefinitely or whether monies would be clawed back into a central budget once an upper limit had been reached. Officer advised that the unspent funding carried on rolling-over, year on year, in line with the national legislation.

Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities) acknowledged the feedback and concerns raised and thanked the Board for their comments which she would take into account at her Decision Session on 26 January 2022.

Councillor Mrs K Grinsell – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism & Sport) also acknowledged the difficulties posed by determining bids that had a clear Brough-wide benefit beyond the Ward in which the group or organisation was located. Further work to resolve that would be welcomed.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger & Safer Communities**:

- (i) That, the Board notes the current position for allocating NCIL funds;
- (ii) That, save for (iii) below, the Board supports the recommended 2021 CIL bids as reported for approval and funding; and
- (iii) That, arising from the debate pertaining to bid NCIL21-0004-SE/SS – Shirley Sea Cadets, the

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

Board expresses concern as to how cross Ward boundary bids are assessed and awarded where the application has clear community benefits far beyond the individual Ward where it originates. The Board would welcome further work to consider the feasibility of a non-Ward specific funding pot for determining CIL applications in those circumstances.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME STRATEGY

In attendance: Andy Callingham - Head of Safer Communities (Regulation and Enforcement) and Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

The Board was invited to consider the Council's draft Environmental Crime Strategy as part of a six-week consultation exercise. The Strategy showed how the Council aimed to prevent environmental crime by educating and engaging with residents and how the Council would use their investigatory and enforcement powers in response to environmental crime in the Borough.

Following the COVID lockdowns, and with people venturing out into their local area more, there had been increased public awareness of issues such as fly-tipping and littering. The Action Plan in support of the Strategy had a greater focus on addressing those issues directly and robustly, as well as providing a clear framework to report and monitor the levels of environmental crime within Solihull. Officers advised that a number of the actions within the draft Strategy had begun or had recently been put into place and the Council would bring quarterly progress reports on the Action Plan to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger & Safer Communities to monitor performance.

Following the outcome of the consultation exercise, the draft Strategy would be reported to the Cabinet Member for Stronger & Safer Communities for approval and adoption in February 2022.

As a result of the report and supporting appendices, the following questions and observations arose:

- The Board highlighted damage to grass verges caused by vehicular parking and also footway obstructions caused by inconsiderate parking. Members asked if the Strategy would support interventions to resolve those types of environmental concerns by the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) by authorised enforcement officers. The Board was advised that most obstruction related incidents were Police matters and invited local intelligence from Ward Councillors to enable them to take the appropriate action.
- In terms of the proposed quarterly performance reporting, the Board asked that, in addition to the Cabinet Member for Stronger & Safer Communities, would Ward Councillors be informed too and how would those key interventions and outcomes be communicated to the public? Officers advised that the intention was that all quarterly performance information would be made public and work was ongoing to consider how to present it in the most meaningful and transparent way.
- Noting that the Strategy and Action Plan covered the period 2021-2026 the Board asked how often they would be reviewed?. Officers advised that the documents would be reviewed annually to ensure that their

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD - 6 January 2022

focus remained correct and appropriate. Any minor refinements throughout the Plan period could therefore be dealt with.

- The Board highlighted the intention of the Strategy and Action Plan to engage with fast food outlets in response to associated litter issues and asked if further detail could be incorporated pertaining to a duty of care for the management of trade refuse. Additionally, could the Strategy and Action Plan include enforcement of late night refreshment house licences in light of the perception that some establishments operated beyond 11.00pm without those licencing arrangements being in place. Officers advised that the intention was, going forwards, to use duty of care powers more widely. In terms of unlicensed establishments operating beyond 11.00pm, Officers invited local intelligence from Ward Councillors to enable them to take the appropriate action.
- With regards to the appropriate use of covert and overt CCTV to investigate fly-tipping in known hotspots, the Board asked if Council policies and working practices were compliant with (and Officers trained in) the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) to protect the Authority. Officers gave assurances that work undertaken using those powers were compliant.
- The report also highlighted the commitment to continue to work closely with housing and other partners to address graffiti. The Board highlighted prolific graffiti taggers and asked if the Council were linking into tracking toolkits to attempt to identify, track and prosecute perpetrators. Officers undertook to explore this question following the meeting.
- Members asked if it was also feasible to incorporate into the Strategy and Action Plan, Section 222 of the Local Government Act 1972 to use against anything that the local authority deemed as a statutory nuisance and, additionally, the use of litter abatement notices by the Local Authority. Officers gave reassurances that those powers were already used on a case-by-case basis as appropriate.
- The Board highlighted that NI195 (national performance indicator) was no longer formally required to measure (and report) street and environmental cleanliness. Officers were asked if monitoring was still undertaken and Officers confirmed that the NI195 methodology was still used in Solihull to measure cleanliness and that was reported locally through the Strategic Environment Contract Board. 70%+ of the Borough's sites still remained at either Grades A or B. No sites within Solihull were Grade D levels of cleanliness and local performance information was available to Members if they wished to see it.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger & Safer Communities**:

- (i) That, the Board supports the contents of the Council's draft Environmental Crime Strategy 2021-2026 and associated Action Plan.

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY
BOARD - 6 January 2022**

8. WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of the Board's Work Programme was submitted which detailed the proposed business for the Board for the remainder of the Municipal Year. There were no further matters arising on this occasion.

RESOLVED

That the Boards 2020/21 Work Programme for its remaining two meetings be noted.

(The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm)