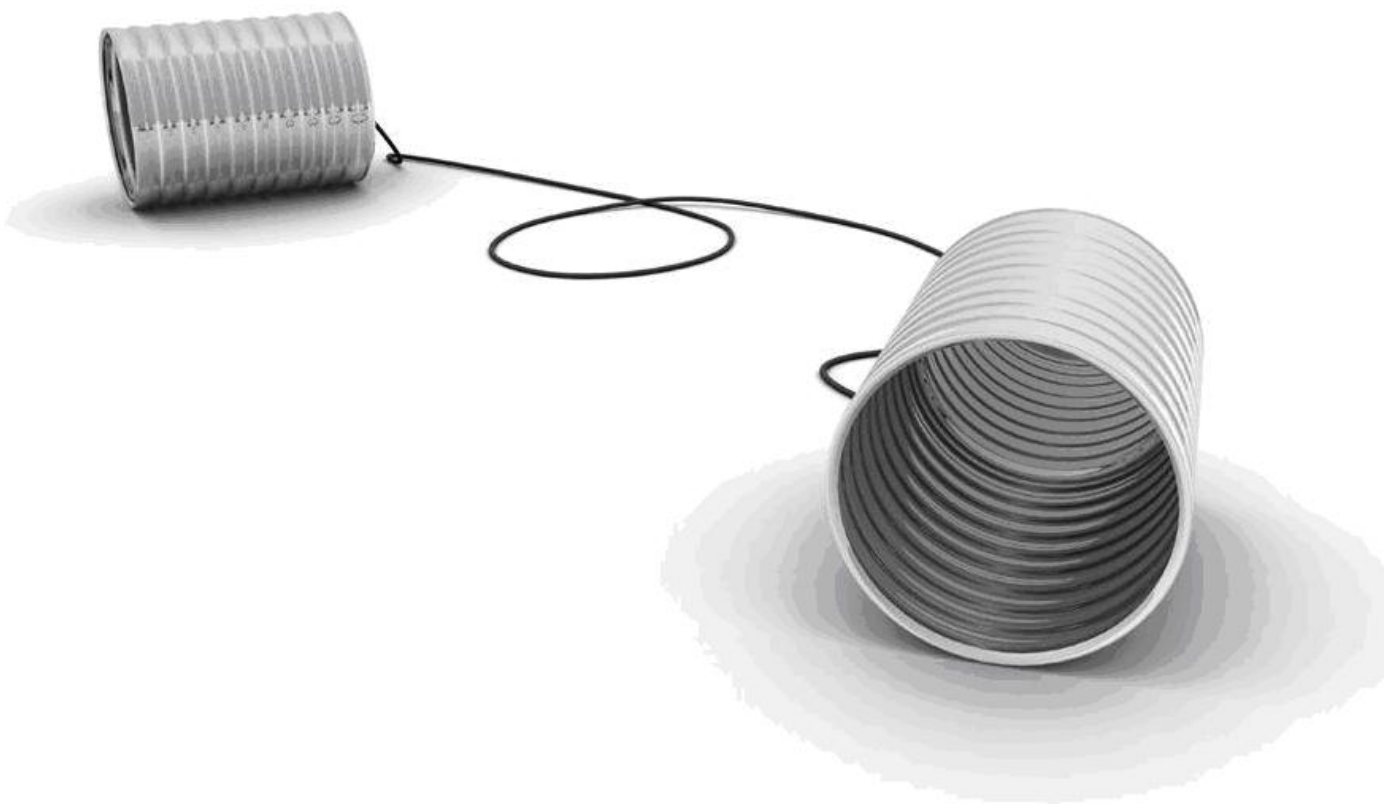


Strategy Unit
monthly policy briefing
NOVEMBER 2011



Interactive contents

[CLICK ON EACH TOPIC BELOW TO GO STRAIGHT TO THE STORY]

<u>Autumn Budget Statement</u>	3
<u>Education Act 2011</u>	3
<u>Localism Act 2011</u>	4
<u>Plans for a second year's council tax freeze set out</u>	5
<u>Ofsted annual report published</u>	5
<u>Ofsted annual children's services assessment results</u>	6
<u>Gove reveals BSF decision and announces school capital recipients</u>	9
<u>Children in care and adoption performance tables released</u>	10
<u>EHRC report into older people and human rights in home care</u>	11
<u>Local Enterprise Partnership update</u>	13
<u>Osborne announces review of PFI model</u>	14
<u>MPs report on formula funding of local public services</u>	15
<u>CLG Committee publishes report on regeneration strategy</u>	17
<u>Local Authority collected waste for England – annual statistics released</u>	18
<u>FoI Act applies to personal email accounts used for official business</u>	20
<u>Cabinet Office report on the August riots and involvement of young people</u>	22
<u>Socitm survey into number and size of council websites</u>	23
<u>What's new on Sandwell Trends?</u>	24
<u>Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council press releases – November 2011</u>	25

Autumn Budget Statement

Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne has made his [Autumn Budget Statement](#) to the House of Commons.

Replacing Labour's Pre-Budget Report, the Autumn Budget Statement issues revised predictions for growth and borrowing and is also an opportunity for the government to present a raft of measures aimed at promoting growth and recovery.

The Strategy Unit produced an [on-the-day briefing](#) on the Autumn Statement.

[Full transcript of George Osborne's statement to the House of Commons](#)

[Full copy of the Autumn Budget Statement](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Education Act 2011

The Education Act received Royal Assent on 15 November 2011.

The Act takes forward the legislative proposals in the Schools White Paper, [The Importance of Teaching](#), and measures from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Many of the provisions in the Act will be commenced within the next two months, with those relating to abolition of arms-length bodies being commenced at the end of the financial year and the remainder at the start of the school year in 2012.

The Strategy Unit has produced a [special briefing](#) on the Education Act looking at the implications for local government.

[Department for Education web page on the Education Act](#)

[UK Parliament Education Act web page](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Localism Act 2011

The Localism Bill received Royal Assent on 15 November 2011 and became the Localism Act. The government claims that the new legislation “puts a raft of new rights and powers at the disposal of local people to take charge of their future, delivering on more than 30 coalition agreement commitments”.

Key measures

Key measures to increase the power of local government through the Act include:

- Introducing a new general power of competence
- Overseeing the transfer of power to major cities
- Abolishing the Standards Board
- Clarifying the rules on predetermination
- Enabling councils to return to the committee system of governance
- Giving councils greater control over business rates
- Introducing new planning enforcement rules
- Increasing powers for councils to remove illegal advertisements and graffiti and prevent fly-posting,
- Giving planning authorities stronger powers
- Reforming homelessness legislation
- Abolition of the housing revenue account

The Strategy Unit will be producing a briefing on the Localism Act, focusing on changes to planning and housing and implications for democracy and governance.

[DCLG press release on the Localism Act](#)

[DCLG Plain English Guide to the Localism Act](#)

[LGiU briefing on the Localism Bill receiving Royal Assent](#)

(login required)

[LGiU blog article on the Localism Bill receiving Royal Assent](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Plans for a second year's council tax freeze set out

The government has announced that it has set aside an extra £805 million (of which up to £675 million will be available to local authorities in England) to help keep council tax down for a further year.

To accompany this announcement, estimates of the government grant boost that every council in England would receive if they commit to holding or reducing average Band D council tax for a second year have been published.

The new council tax freeze is voluntary and is open to the same councils as last year. Councils that freeze or reduce their council tax next year will get a one off grant equivalent to raising their council tax by 2.5%.

Sandwell's grant estimates

Grant payable during Spending Review if taking up both freeze offers (£)	
2011-2012	2,521,133
2012-2013	5,053,529 *
2013-2014	2,521,133
2014-2015	2,521,133

* The grant total for year 2012-2013 includes an amount based on the scheme for 2011-2012 plus an indicative amount for those authorities that freeze their council tax in 2012-2013.

[DCLG press release on the council tax freeze grant estimates](#)

[BBC News article *Fifth of English councils 'could reject tax freeze'*](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Ofsted annual report published

Ofsted has published its [2010-2011 annual report](#).

Some of the key findings from this year's report include:

- Of the 47 local authorities who received a full safeguarding inspection this year, nine were judged inadequate for services that keep children and young people safe, 25 were adequate and 13 were good.
- Unannounced inspections of 133 local authorities' contact, referral and assessment arrangements found three councils with areas of serious weakness.
- 46 councils had their services for looked after children services inspected - 26 were adequate 19 were good and one was inadequate.
- Most of the academies inspected were sponsored academies where previously the school had experienced a history of failure or low performance. Of the 75 academies inspected this year, 40 were judged to be providing good or outstanding education. Five were inadequate.
- All but seven of the 68 adoption agencies inspected were found to be good or outstanding. However, too many children are waiting too long to be adopted.

Ofsted has said that the findings on safeguarding were 'stark' and that while inspectors had found much good practice, "no service was outstanding and overall there was too much variation".

Interim chief inspector Miriam Rosen said that while an inadequate inspection judgement for a school, children's home, or council department could be an important catalyst for change, the report's safeguarding findings were a cause for concern.

"It is particularly worrying to reflect on the numbers of local authorities that are providing inadequate safeguarding services for children," she said. "Given that they are providing care for the most vulnerable children of all, this is not good enough."

[Ofsted annual report web page](#)

[LocalGov article on the Ofsted safeguarding findings](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Ofsted annual children's services assessment results

Ofsted has published the outcomes of the 2011 annual children's services assessments for local authorities across England.

The results show that the majority of authorities are providing good or better children's services, with 28 authorities providing excellent services for children in their area, eight more than last year. However, fifteen councils have been given the lowest rating for the quality of their children's services, with some of these maintaining their 'performs poorly' rating from 2010.

Chief inspector Miriam Rosen called the growth in excellent authorities "encouraging" and said: "The challenge now is for all authorities to aspire to provide the highest level of services for all children and young people in their community".

Sandwell's results

Sandwell's children's services received a 'performs poorly' rating, the same rating it received in 2010. The report states that the majority of settings and institutions in Sandwell inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Improving the quality of secondary schools, post-16 education provision, attendance and outcomes for 16-year-olds remain areas for improvement.

Strengths

- Provision for young children, including for those of pre-school age, is mostly good.
- The large majority of nursery provision is good or outstanding
- Effective support is provided to children and families in children's centres.
- Very young children make good progress in their levels of development.
- Outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage match similar areas.
- Over half of the primary schools are good or better.
- The schools in an Ofsted category of concern are making satisfactory progress.
- Results at the age of 11 match similar areas and provisional results for 2011 show improvement.
- Specialist education provision remains mostly good or better. One inadequate pupil referral unit made good progress and is now satisfactory.
- Education outcomes at the age of 19 are improving.
- Outcomes for young people from low-income backgrounds have improved.

Areas for further improvement

- The effectiveness of services to ensure that children and young people in Sandwell are safe remains inadequate until further safeguarding inspection evidence becomes available.

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- Services and outcomes for looked after children and young people are only satisfactory.
- The local authority fostering agency is inadequate and the adoption agency is only satisfactory.
- Only half of the children's homes are good.
- Many young people do not have the opportunity to attend good secondary schools in Sandwell.
- Four of the nine local authority secondary schools and half of the school sixth forms are only satisfactory.
- One local authority secondary school is inadequate.
- The proportion of young people achieving five GCSE at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is below similar areas.
- Secondary school attendance is below that of similar local authorities.
- The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds in work, education or training is below similar areas.

Sandwell comment

Sandwell is making progress in improving safeguarding services for children and this is confirmed in the Ofsted unannounced Inspection in March 2011 and in the more recent peer review in November 2011. However, Ofsted in the annual assessment of children's services will continue to rate children's services as performing poorly until there is another full announced Ofsted Inspection.

The Ofsted unannounced inspection in March 2011 stated ' children suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm are appropriately identified and receive a prompt and appropriate service.' The annual assessment highlights the positive work in our early years and the work of our schools in providing a firm foundation and improving educational attainment. There is more to be done and there is a clear focus and vision to improve our children's services further.

For more information contact Barbara Peacock, Corporate Director – People, on 0121 569 8204 (barbara_peacock@sandwell.gov.uk).

[Ofsted inspection results for Sandwell Council](#)

[Ofsted news release on the inspection results](#)

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[CONTENTS](#)

Gove reveals BSF decision and announces school capital recipients

In a statement to the House of Commons, Education secretary Michael Gove confirmed that six councils who took his 2010 decision to scrap their Building Schools for the Future programmes to judicial review would not see those schemes resurrected.

He also named 111 councils that will get a share of £500 million in schools capital funding to increase pupil places.

In his ministerial statement, Gove said “I announced what I was minded to do in July and have received further representations from each of the claimant authorities. I considered these carefully but I am not persuaded that I should depart from the decision which I announced I was minded to take.”

BSF in Sandwell

The announcement that Gove has confirmed his decision not to reverse his decision to cut BSF funding in Sandwell is disappointing.

Using the network we had established with the other claimant authorities most had received a letter saying "no" in similar terms to us. Sandwell has been the most active in terms of asking for information and we have constantly sought to get suitable reward for the many thousands of students and hundreds of staff that have missed out on BSF.

Taking further legal advice we agreed that our lawyers will start work on a response to the Gove letter setting out questions about the decision making and requests for information to validate the decision. We are still awaiting a reply to a Freedom of Information letter that should (if the government respond to it as we would wish) provide some of the answers to our question in advance of further correspondence. We will then cross reference why Gove's 'minded not to' letter was so short and yet the final decision generated a nine page reply!

We have also been tasked to establish our proven liabilities before Gove allocates a capital grant. This piece of work is already underway.

For more information contact Paul Piddock, BSF Programme Director, on 0121 569 8399 (paul_piddock@sandwell.gov.uk).

Capital funding allocation

Sandwell will receive £1,837,267 as its share of the £500 million capital funding pot.

Sandwell SMBC welcomes the additional Capital Funding this year although this relatively small amount from a total pot of £500m is significantly less than many other boroughs across the country. Following appropriate consultation, will use this allocation to help fund projects to create more school places for pupils in the areas of most need.

For more information contact Catherine Foulkes, Adviser for Strategic Change, on 0121 569 8294 (catherine_foulkes@sandwell.gov.uk).

[DfE news release on Gove's BSF and capital funding decisions](#)

[DfE downloads on the £500 million capital funding allocations](#)

[LGCplus article on the BSF and capital funding announcements](#)

(login required)

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[CONTENTS](#)

Children in care and adoption performance tables released

The government has published tables ranking every local authority in England on issues such as how quickly they place children for adoption. The tables show great variation in how local authorities are looking after the children in their care.

The government says it wants to overhaul the care and adoption system “to improve chances for vulnerable children”. The average length of time for an adoption to take place is two years and seven months and the government wants this to be quicker.

Numbers of adoptions have been falling in recent years – down 8% since 2007 - and educational outcomes for children in care remain poor. The number of children who are not in education, employment or training in when they leave care is 33% compared to a national average of 18%.

Sandwell's results and comment

The government figures are two years old and as such can give a slightly misleading of how authorities are currently performing in national and regional adoption tables.

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Figures from 2010 show Sandwell performing well ahead of national and regional averages. Sandwell's performance is at 78.3% against the West Midlands average of 73.8% and the national average of 72.4%.

Furthermore, on nine of the 15 indicators, Sandwell performs better than the national average.

Cabinet member for children and families Councillor Bob Badham said: "This is very good news for children in Sandwell and is a credit to the hard work and dedication of the officers involved in this crucial but complex service.

"This shows that we are making real progress and a real difference to the children's lives, in a service which was found to be performing poorly in an inspection in 2009."

The borough had 25 children with best interests for adoption and 20 of these children were placed within 12 months of this decision - which is what the current measurement is & what is being talked about in the press.

We have already been reviewing our adoption procedures to make them more efficient in the future, and have recently introduced a new fast-tracking system for prospective adoptive parents.

For more information contact Rachel Gillot, Adoption Service Manager, on 0845 352 8629 (rachel_gillott@sandwell.gov.uk).

[Children in Care and Adoption Performance Tables](#)

[DfE press release: Local authorities challenged to do better on adoption](#)

[LGCplus article: Sector defends adoption record](#)

(login required)

[BBC News article: Action pledged against councils over slow adoptions](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

EHRC report into older people and human rights in home care

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published a report, [Close to Home: an inquiry into older people and human rights in home care](#), which reveals

“disturbing evidence that the poor treatment of many older people is breaching their human rights and too many are struggling to voice their concerns about their care or be listened to about what kind of support they want”.

The inquiry found that although many older people receive care at home which respects and enhances their human rights, this is by no means a universal experience. It uncovered areas of real concern in the treatment of some older people and significant shortcomings in the way that care is commissioned by local authorities.

It also found that the legal safeguards provided by the Human Rights Act, which should be used to guarantee respect for the human rights of older people, including preventing inhuman or degrading treatment, are not as widely used as they should be.

The report states that “bare compliance with the Act is not enough” and that public authorities have “positive obligations” to promote and protect human rights.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of detailed recommendations which fall into the following three categories:

Proper protection

- Close the gaps in the current legal system so that older people receive better protection.
- In particular, close the loophole in the Human Rights Act so that home care is covered in the same way as residential care.

More effective monitoring

- Local authorities need to do more to incorporate human rights into the ways in which they commission care services.
- They need to overcome the barriers which many older people face when raising concerns or making complaints.

Better guidance

- Older people and their families need to have access to better information when making choices about care provision
- They also need to know more about how their human rights should be protected when care is delivered.

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- Clearer guidance on human rights obligations should be provided to local authorities for use in the commissioning process.

A copy of the full inquiry findings report which includes recommendations for change is available on the [EHRC website](#), together with supplementary reports.

[EHRC older people and human rights in home care inquiry web page](#)

[Full copy of EHRC report *Close to Home*](#)

[Executive summary of EHRC report *Close to Home*](#)

[EHRC press release on the *Close to Home* report](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Local Enterprise Partnership update

Centre for Cities report: 'LEPs show limited progress'

A report published by Centre for Cities claims that many of the original Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have made limited progress.

The report states that “eight have yet to have their boards recognised by government, only two have produced a long-term strategic plan and five do not have a dedicated website”.

In some cases, LEPs have appointed large boards and advisory teams. This, the report claims, could add “a level of bureaucracy and process that might slow decision-making”. In addition to these issues, some LEPs also face “mismatches between spatial geography and the political and economic reality and pressures of partnership working across new boundaries”.

Centre for Cities argues that LEPs still have potential if the government acts now to empower them to meet the rising expectation that they will be primary drivers of the government’s growth agenda.

The study also advises that local authorities have a key role to play in this process by overcoming local politics and sensitivities and working in partnership for the benefit of the wider area. They should match the money provided by national

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government to support the administration of the LEP and offer up some input into strategic planning.

[Full copy of the Centre for Cities report on LEP progress](#)

[Centre for Cities news release on the LEP progress report](#)

£500 million Growing Places Fund announced

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has announced a £500 million Growing Places Fund to help areas “boost economic growth by getting the required infrastructure built to enable the creation of new jobs and homes by getting stalled projects moving again”.

The Fund will be available for the 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships able to apply for funding and then take decisions about what to prioritise locally. All £500 million will be allocated from the end of January 2012.

Ministers have recently published indicative allocations of the £500 million Growing Places Fund to each of the 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The Black Country LEP has been given a provisional allocation of £9,619,452 from the £500 million fund.

[DCLG press release on the £500 million Growing Places Fund](#)

[LGCplus article on the £500 million fund](#)

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ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Osborne announces review of PFI model

The government has announced that it will review the private finance initiative (PFI) and consider other delivery models. The objective of the review, led by the Treasury, is to create a new model for delivering public assets and services that takes advantage of private sector expertise, but at a lower cost to the taxpayer.

The government’s approach will look to create a model which is cheaper, accesses a wider range of private sector financing sources and “strikes a better balance of risk between the private and the public sectors”.

The review will look to create a model which:

- is less expensive and uses private sector innovation to deliver services more cost effectively
- can access a wider range of financing sources
- strikes a better balance between risk and reward to the private sector
- has greater flexibility to accommodate changing public service needs over time
- maintains the incentive on the private sector to deliver capital projects to time and to budget
- delivers an accelerated and cheaper procurement process
- gives greater financial transparency at all levels of the project

The Treasury will launch a call for evidence on 1 December 2011. It will also look to retain the benefits of the PFI model, including getting projects delivered to time and to budget, and “giving the private sector the right incentives to effectively manage risk”.

[Treasury press release on the PFI review](#)

[LGCplus article on the announcement of the PFI review](#)

(login required)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

MPs report on formula funding of local public services

The Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has published a report into the formula funding systems for local public services, the current system for distributing grants to local areas.

In 2011-2012 government departments distributed £152 billion (one-fifth of all government spending) to local public bodies in based on three grants:

- Primary Care Trust Allocations
- Dedicated Schools Grant
- Department for Communities and Local Government’s Formula Grant

These distribute funding to local public bodies in a range of sectors, including health, education, local government, police and fire and rescue services.

The report into these systems claim they are “complex, difficult to understand, and have led to inequitable allocations”. It states that the Dedicated Schools Grant has resulted in per pupil funding for schools with similar characteristics varying by as much as 40%. Under Formula Grant, nearly 20% of authorities received allocations which are more than 10% different from calculated need.

In addition, the report also found that some of the data used by departments in calculating relative needs “is inaccurate and out of date”. For example, some of the indicators used to assess relative need are based on 2001 Census data.

Margaret Hodge MP, Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts, said: "The current system for distributing central Government funding to local bodies is complex and difficult to understand, and too often results in local public bodies getting the wrong amount of money, which is not fair to local communities.

All of the approaches to formula funding we considered are under review. This is the perfect opportunity to address the weaknesses this Committee has identified and we will examine closely how those government departments respond."

Sandwell comment

Sandwell would welcome any general review of the formula grant system, however any such review should align to the current consultation and implementation timescales relating to the Government's proposals for localised business rates retention and also take into account the feedback received on the recent consultation document from local authorities. In general terms, Sandwell would welcome a review of the existing formula grant damping arrangements to ensure that future resources are allocated on an equitable basis dependent upon local need.

For more information contact Rebecca Fisher, Corporate Finance Manager, on 0121 569 3790 (rebecca_fisher@sandwell.gov.uk).

[Full copy of the PAC Formula Funding of Local Public Services report](#)

[UK Parliament news release on the PAC report](#)

[LocalGov article on the PAC report](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

CLG Committee publishes report on regeneration strategy

The Communities and Local Government (CLG) Select Committee has published its report of an inquiry looking at the government's approach to regeneration.

The report concludes: 'Ministers have no adequate strategy to address the complex problems faced by England's most deprived communities. If further resources for regeneration are not found, there is a risk that major problems will be stored up for the future.'

Clive Betts MP, Chair of the committee, said: "The Government has cut public funding for regeneration programmes dramatically and has produced no adequate 'strategy' for regeneration sufficient to tackle the deep-seated problems faced by our most deprived communities. The measures identified by the Government focus overwhelmingly on the pursuit of economic growth. The Government's measures will not attract sufficient investment for renewal into those communities where the market has failed."

The report also warns that the cancellation of Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder funding has impacted profoundly upon the lives of people across the Midlands.

Recommendations

The report calls on government to publish a national regeneration strategy that specifically targets the country's most disadvantaged communities. This should be based upon a detailed understanding of what worked or failed in the past.

The committee also calls for:

- Further consideration of how Enterprise Zones could bring benefits to deprived areas, and better use to be made of public land and European funding to ensure they stimulate regeneration.
- Community Budgets -pooling resources from public bodies across a given local area - to be used to generate massive efficiencies and bring in much-needed private investment for regeneration

Sandwell comment

Regeneration

Evidence from other parts of the world suggests a wide recognition that a strategic approach is necessary to the delivery of regeneration as it involves partnership

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working. However, the many factors involved in implementation generally results in strategic development and supporting funding streams focusing on delivery at a regional or local levels.

There appears to be increasing recognition that economic regeneration needs to align closely with the anti poverty and deprivation agendas. Sandwell already makes a clear connection in its Economic prospectus between economic regeneration and the need for residents to be able to access to jobs, training and employment. However, acquiring adequate funding, for example to make employment sites and premises fit for purpose, is an increasing problem particularly in a borough such as Sandwell which has a lot of Brownfield land.

For more information contact Andy Bywater, Economic Strategy Manager, on 0121 569 3083 (andy_bywater@sandwell.gov.uk).

Impact of the cancellation of the Housing Renewal Pathfinder

Sandwell is a designated HMRA transition area until end of March 2013. This status endorsed by the CLG provides Sandwell with opportunity to secure any additional funding that may become available to the borough over the next two year period. The Council has a detailed plan in relation to how we deliver the HMRA legacy offer for the borough including joint working with partners and local community groups.

For more information contact Nikki Sinclair, Principal Housing Research Officer, on 0121 569 5220 (nicola_sinclair@sandwell.gov.uk).

[CLG Committee news release of regeneration inquiry report](#)

[LGCplus article on the CLG Committee regeneration inquiry report](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

CONTENTS

Local Authority collected waste for England – annual statistics released

Final estimates of local authority collected waste generation and management for England and the regions in 2010-2011 have been published by the Department of Food and Rural Affairs.

These statistics are based on data submitted by all local authorities in England on the waste they collect and manage.

Headline results

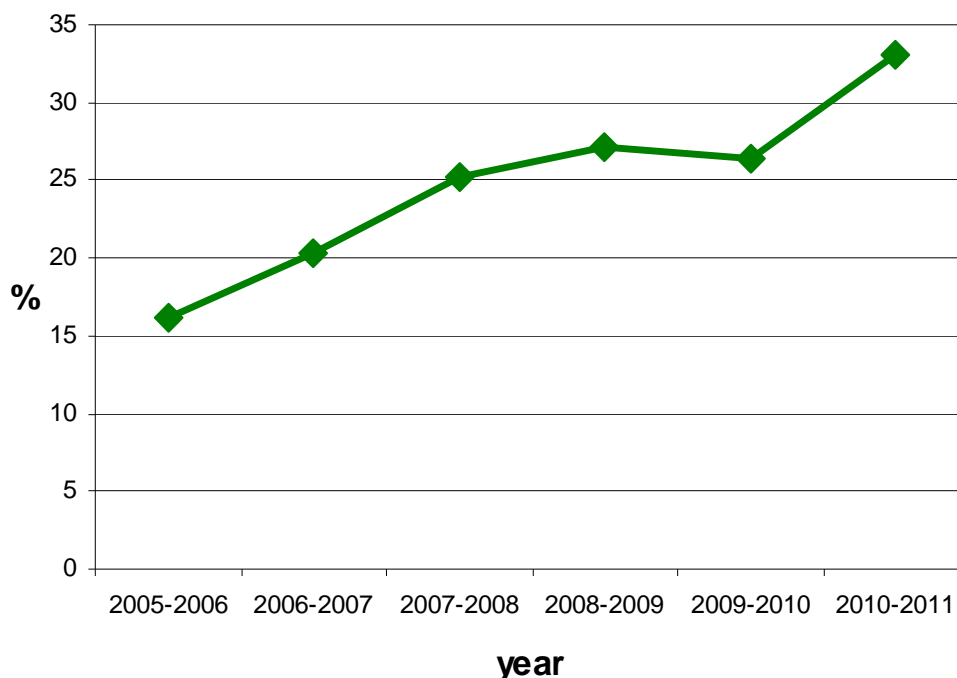
- **Household recycling has increased** The proportion of household waste sent for recycling, composting or reuse in 2010-2011 in England was 41.2%, increasing from 39.7% in 2009-2010.
- **Household waste production has decreased** The generation of household waste continued to decrease between 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, with a 0.9% reduction to 23.5 million tonnes.
- **Waste generation per person has decreased** The weight of household waste generated in 2010-2011 in England was 449 kg per person. Of this total, 185 kg was recycled, composted or reused whilst 264 kg was not.
- **Local authority collected waste sent to landfill has declined** The tonnage of local authority collected waste being sent to landfill by local authorities has decreased by 8.8% between 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

Sandwell results

Reuse, recycling and composting

The 2010-2011 figures for Sandwell show that 33% of household waste was sent for reuse, recycling or composting. This is lower than the 41.2% average for England, but shows a significant increase in Sandwell since 2005-2006, when the figure was 16.2%. In particular, the increase of 6.6% from last year's figures of 26.4% to 33% in 2010-2011 represents the biggest increase since 2005-2006:

Percentage of household waste in Sandwell reused, recycled or composted



Household waste production

Figures for household waste production in Sandwell have also fallen since 2005-2006. Although no figures were available at the time of writing for household waste production for 2010-2011, there has been a general drop since 2005-2006, when 130,609 tonnes were produced, to 2009-2010 when 121,340 tonnes were produced.

LocalGov article

['Figures suggest fortnightly collections key to councils' recycling efforts'](#)

[Defra press release on local authority collected waste statistics](#)

[Defra statistical release on local authority collected waste statistics](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Fol Act applies to personal email accounts used for official business

Adam Chapman, head of public law at Kingsley Napley LLP, has advised that emails between persons employed by a public authority using personal email accounts may well be subject to freedom of information laws.

An issue has been raised around Education Secretary Michael Gove's use of private email accounts to communicate with his special adviser and others about topics that include the Building Schools for the Future programme.

In response to this, the Department for Education referenced Cabinet Office guidance which said private email accounts do not fall within the Freedom of Information (Fol) Act. However, the Information Commissioner has said that it was possible "that information contained in private emails could be subject to Fol if the information concerned government business".

Chapman states that the Information Commissioner "is clearly right". He states that if a special adviser (or any other person employed by a public authority) is "dealing with the official business of his employer, then in principle Fol 'catches' the information he or she creates".

"What is of central importance here is not where or how information is held – it does not have to be on an official email system – but what the information is and whether it was created for official purposes."

Depending on the content of any such emails, it may be that they fall under FoI exemptions, and in such cases the Information Commissioner would consider whether the balance of public interest favoured disclosure. In Chapman's view "there is no certainty that he would do so".

Sandwell's Building Schools for the Future programme

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council has written to the Department for Education to ask whether personal email accounts were used to discuss the matter of its Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF).

This follows reports in the Financial Times over a private email sent by the Secretary of State in which he refers to the Judicial Review over the decision to cancel BSF. The Sandwell letter states:

"We have noted with concern the media coverage of the investigation by the Information Commissioner into the suspected use of private email accounts by the Secretary of State and his advisers. **Please confirm by return** that no emails were sent to or from the private email accounts of the Secretary of State and/or any of his aides, officials and advisors who were involved in the decision-making process around the cancellation of the BSF scheme and/or the reconsideration of that decision following the judicial review judgment that:

- a) may have been relevant to the original decision-making process and/or the reconsideration of the BSF decision; and/or
- b) concerned directly or indirectly Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council."

In response the permanent Secretary wrote: "The Department considers that the media coverage that you mention provides no basis for your request."

The council has written to the Secretary of State once more, asking him to disclose information on his original decision in July 2010, how he has dealt with the Judicial review and subsequent decisions since.

For more information contact Paul Piddock, Programme Director, Building Schools for the Future, on 0121 569 8399 (paul_piddock@sandwell.gov.uk).

Sandwell's Freedom of Information responsibilities

Private email accounts can potentially fall within the scope of the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act 2000 as its provisions do not only not apply to information physically held by the council. For instance, if the council uses the services of a storage company to store some hard copy files, the council would not physically

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hold this information but it would still be 'held' for the purposes of the FoI Act, as the information relates to council business.

Likewise, if an employee were to use a private email account to send emails to colleagues or third party partners, the information would almost certainly be covered by the FoI Act, if the content of the email related to council business. Employees must not assume that they can store information on personal computers as a way of ensuring that it falls outside the scope of the FoI Act. The Information Commissioner has the power to demand access to information held within private email account, where he believes that information relevant to any investigation may be held within it.

Colleagues should remember that it is a breach of council policy to use non council email accounts for any work related business and employees caught doing so will risk being subject to disciplinary proceedings. Any employee seeking guidance on how the FoI Act applies to them can email: info_management@sandwell.gov.uk.

For more information contact Nigel Parr, Data Protection / Freedom of Information Officer, on 0121 569 3248 (nigel_parr@sandwell.gov.uk).

[Article by Adam Chapman on publicservice.co.uk](#)

[Local Government Chronicle article on Chapman's article](#)

[SMBC news article on the council's FoI request regarding BSF](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

CONTENTS

Cabinet Office report on the August riots and involvement of young people

The Cabinet Office has published a [report by NatCen](#) into independent research examining the motivations of young people involved in the August riots.

[The August Riots in England: Understanding the involvement of young people](#) is the first major study to be based on what young people themselves have to say about the riots.

The overall aim of the study was to explore the triggers of youth involvement in the August riots from the perspective of those involved and affected. Young people were not solely responsible for these events – older people were also

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involved – but they are the focus of the study because the role played by young people is of particular concern and their perspectives are less likely to be heard in other ways.

The core question it sought to answer was: 'Why did young people get involved in the riots?' To address this, the report describes:

- **what** occurred in five affected areas and two areas unaffected by rioting
- **who** was involved in the riots
- **why and how** young people got involved

The report examines what the motivation was for young people to get involved in the rioting. It states that:

“Young people were motivated to get involved in rioting or looting by what they thought they might gain, but whether they chose to get involved or not was affected by a range of situational, personal and contextual influences.”

It considers what the factors were that facilitated or inhibited involvement in the rioting.

Children and Young People Now

[Young people add voice to riot debate](#)

[Full copy of the Cabinet Office report *The August Riots in England*](#)

[Cabinet Office press release on the August riots report](#)

[NatCen web page on the August riots report](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

Socitm survey into number and size of council websites

Socitm Insight is undertaking a survey into the number and size of websites being run by individual councils.

The survey will provide evidence around what, if anything, might be gained from rationalising the number of websites run by each council and also reducing the size of websites.

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The programme will feature a discussion on web resources that will also include results of a survey of web teams undertaken in the summer by Aberdeen City Council with the support of Socitm Insight.

Other Socitm Insight research has shown council websites varying in size from fewer than 1,250 pages (6% of all councils) to more than 25,000 pages (32% of all councils).

Sandwell comment

Sandwell Council is currently undertaking a project to reduce the number of pages on our website to around a tenth of what they currently are, and in doing so make those pages more accessible with a Plain English approach.

We have also been making improvements to popular pages on the website as part of Socitm's [Better Connected 2012](#) assessment.

For more information contact Matt Johnson, Web Development Officer, on 0121 569 3419 (matthew_johnson@sandwell.gov.uk).

[Socitm news release on the survey of council websites](#)

[LocalGov article on the Socitm survey](#)

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

[CONTENTS](#)

What's new on Sandwell Trends – November 2011

[Sandwell Trends](#) is the first port of call for data, intelligence and analysis about the people and places in Sandwell.

November 2011 items:

- Data from the [‘My Council’](#) summer roadshows has been added, together with a [topic page](#)
- A [libraries intelligence](#) topic page has been set up, which presents and analyses data from the Library Survey 2011, together with membership and other business data
- Other datasets added include [healthy lifestyles choices](#) (which analyses calls to the healthy lifestyles service) and [residential completions](#)

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- There have been some updates to the datasets on children. These include [child obesity](#), [NI 118](#) (take-up of childcare tax credits) and [NI 116](#) (proportion of children in poverty)

For more information about Sandwell Trends contact Alex Hawley, Research and Information Manager, on 0121 569 3008 (alex_hawley@sandwell.gov.uk).

ARTICLE BY ARRAN DYDE

CONTENTS

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council press releases – November 2011

The press releases that the council sent out in November 2011 can be found on the council website.

[Read the Sandwell MBC November 2011 press releases](#)

CONTENTS

The Policy Briefings are produced by the Strategy Unit. Previous briefings can be found on the Sandwell MBC website:

[Policy briefings on the Sandwell MBC website](#)

For more information about the Policy Briefings or to suggest an article, contact Arran Dyde on 0121 569 3109.