


REPORT TO CABINET

9 December 2020

Subject:	Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Councillor Singh, Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills
Director:	Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's Services
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Councillor Singh, Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills: throughout
Director Approval:	Lesley Hagger, Executive Director for Children's Services: 29/10/2020
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provisions do not apply
Exempt Information Ref:	Exemption provisions do not apply
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	This report affects the whole borough
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board to take place on 12 November 2020
Contact Officer(s):	Kelly Thomas, Employment and Skills Services Manager E: kelly_thomas@sandwell.gov.uk M: 07977270823

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23 attached as Appendix 1.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Cabinet is requested to approve the proposed Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23 attached as Appendix 1.

2 IMPLICATION FOR VISION 2030

2.1 **Ambition1**

Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.

Ambition 3

Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.

Ambition 4

Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.

Ambition 10

Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Sandwell Skills Strategy is an overarching document which sets out the borough's skills challenges and key priorities. The strategy is aligned to the WMCA Regional Skills plan which similarly sets out the region's skills challenges and key priorities.
- 3.2 The Sandwell Skills strategy brings localised challenges to the forefront and aspirations for the future and is a collaborative approach delivered by key stakeholders from the Employment and Skills sector.
- 3.3 The strategy highlights the requirement for a series of actions plans, both sectoral and for specific cohorts and challenges. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan in development as an immediate concern is Reset and Recovery to support actions aimed at mitigating the specific challenges caused by the impact of the pandemic.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The skills strategy was in development prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data has been used from before the pandemic to baseline the skills picture as a reference to reflect progression from the pre-pandemic position.
- 4.2 The key skills challenges highlighted for the borough include:
- Low skill levels in the population, with fewer people qualified to Level 4+ and more people with no qualifications, compared to other areas
 - Issues of poverty for those in employment, driven by low wage levels
 - Skills shortages faced by employers, particularly in roles that require advanced and/or higher skills
 - Lower attainment by young people through early years, primary and secondary education.
- 4.3 The pandemic has negatively impacted skills and employment in Sandwell since unemployment rates have increased and accessibility of provision for those digitally excluded has been exacerbated. Brexit also has the potential to impact on skills demand and infrastructure.
- 4.4 Additional challenges highlighted within the Reset and Recovery action plan include:
- Large scale redundancies and a shift in growth sectors
 - An increased need for digital skills and access to equipment
 - Young people facing more competition for opportunities
 - Mental health and lack of resilience.
- 4.5 The strategy sets out the borough's skills aspirations including improving skills attainment, moving more residents into sustainable employment and more people moving into higher positions in employment. There is also an aspiration for businesses to have full access to a skilled and talented local workforce.
- 4.6 A performance management framework will be developed to monitor the key performance indicators and progress towards outcomes of the strategy. Intelligence will be aligned to the action plan for Community Wealth Building and Economic Resilience Board.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with a number of groups including residents, businesses, voluntary organisations, Educational establishments, Schools and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 5.2 Workshops have taken place with groups of residents to shape the delivery of the strategy and the feasibility of the recommended actions.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no alternative options, the strategy has been carefully considered with no other feasible alternative options.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The delivery of the Strategy is predominantly funded by external sources including the Education Skills Funding Agency, European Social Fund, West Midlands Combined Authority, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education. The Sandwell Skills deal was referred to in the Inclusive Economy deal as £69m.
- 7.2 The majority of the funding and grants referenced to deliver the strategy are not owned by the Council, they are funding that comes into the borough into a range of providers such as the Colleges and training providers. The funding the Council is formally responsible for the Adult Education Budget contract delivered by Sandwell Adult Family learning and we are a delivery partner in a European Social Fund contract, Black Country Impact.
- 7.3 Facilitation, co-ordination and monitoring of the Strategy and action plans will be conducted by the Council utilising existing resources.
- 7.4 Activities of internal Council teams also contribute to the delivery of the Strategy with a mixture of Council core budget and external funding resources used.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Governance of the Strategy will be delivered by the Employment and Skills Partnership chaired by the Executive Director of Childrens' Services, with representation from key stakeholders within the Employment and Skills sector.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 An equality impact assessment (EIA) screening has been carried out. As the outcome found that there are no adverse impacts on protected characteristics, a full EIA is not required for this proposal.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 There are no specific data protection implications arising from the content of this report.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

11.2 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with - to identify and assess any significant risks associated with this decision/project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.

11.3 A risk assessment is being carried out to assess the risks associated to deliver the Strategy. Any risks identified will be addressed with a series of actions to mitigate the risk. At present 3 risks have been identified as significant and are in respect of:

- Sustainable officer resources to deliver and monitor progression and outcomes of the skills strategy
- Partner engagement to co-deliver on the Strategy
- Achieving good quality data as skills needs are frequently changing due to the evolving nature of the pandemic.

Measures will be put in place to manage these risks to an acceptable level.

11.4 Risk will be continuously monitored through the performance management framework to ensure we meet the needs of residents. The development of the Strategy and action plans is good practice by increasing partnership working and utilising collaborative working practices for issue identification and solution focussed actions. The Strategy provides a collective skills vision for Sandwell with a shared responsibility to respond to the skills challenge.

11.5 If the Cabinet report is not approved and the performance management framework is not developed, the local authority would fail to respond to the skills challenges in a collaborative approach with key partners and stakeholders.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

12.1 The over-arching Strategy covers the period 2020-23. A series of action plans for specific themes and cohorts of individuals will sit underneath the strategy. The action plans will be reviewed at regular intervals to respond to new developments and opportunities identified.

12.2 A new strategy will be developed in 2023 prior to the scheduled period covered by the existing strategy.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

13.1 The Strategy contributes to the health and wellbeing of residents due to the association of positive health benefits as a result of employment and skills outcomes. Mental health and resilience has been highlighted as a key priority in the Strategy, to ensure any employment and skills provisions developed incorporate this need.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

15 There are no implications on any council managed property or land in relation to this report.

16 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 The Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23 sets out the key skills challenges, opportunities and strategic priorities for the borough. The Strategy has been shaped in a collaborative approach with contributions from key stakeholders to tackle borough wide skills barriers and maximise local opportunities.

17 BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 **Reset and Recovery Strategic Plan 2020-21**

18 APPENDICES:

18.1 Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23

Lesley Hagger
Executive Director of Children's Services