

Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board

18 August, 2015

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor S Jones

The Scrutiny Board met on 18 August, 2015 and the following items were considered. I have selected the main points of the discussion that I feel members of the Council will be particularly interested to know more about. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at <http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/>

1. Economic Regeneration Initiatives and their Impact on Worklessness in Sandwell

The Board received a presentation from the Think Sandwell team, part of the Council's Economic Regeneration service, on the economic regeneration activities taking place in the borough, and their impact on worklessness figures. The Board is pleased to hear that the team has placed 846 people into employment and apprenticeships since 2013. In addition, 25 young people with disabilities and 9 care leavers have been supported into employment.

The Board is also pleased to hear that, through the use of Community Benefit Clauses, the team has ensured that developers of large regeneration projects will employ a percentage of apprentices and local labour, contributing to a boost in skills and experience in the borough. Businesses have also been supported by the team with bidding for Regional Growth Fund money to expand and develop, creating new jobs in the borough.

A bid has been made for £10 million from the Building Better Opportunities Fund, which will target adults over 25 with a range of support, beginning Summer 2016. Furthermore, £51 million has been allocated to the Black Country region to tackle worklessness and encourage the take-up of positive destinations, including apprenticeships, jobs, education and training.

In the past two years, the various initiatives that the team is involved in have resulted in a reduction of 4,400 in Sandwell's worklessness numbers, which represents 4.3% of its economically active population, against a national average of 5.1%.

2. Routes into Employment, Education and Training for Care Leavers

The scrutiny board chairs, as a collective, have decided to carry out a piece of work to look at how scrutiny can demonstrate its commitment and support to Children's Services' improvement journey. Each board has been asked to contribute to this by focussing on an area within its terms of reference. The Board received a presentation outlining the support that the Council provides to assist care leavers into education, employment and training.

The Board heard details of the range of support mechanisms provided by the Think Sandwell team and the Connexions service. The support is adapted to meet the needs of the individual, but includes working with foster carers, social workers, schools, training providers and employers, to ensure that the young person's needs are met and they achieve their full potential. The Connexions service also holds specific post 16 careers events for care leavers.

The Board was told that some young people struggle with dealing with the realism of working life and its associated pressures, which can cause them to get frustrated and angry and sometimes put their employment in jeopardy. Officers feel that they could benefit from some support with managing these feelings. The Chair undertook to report this back to the scrutiny chairs.

3. Top 50 Fastest Growing Companies Index

The Board heard that the Council is working hard to capitalise on Sandwell's business strengths by building an environment that supports business confidence, development and growth, to transform the Borough into a diverse and sustainable economy with productive and innovative companies and a highly skilled workforce.

As such, the Council launched an annual 'Top 50 Fastest Growing Companies Index' in July, to celebrate the success of these companies, which were selected based on their rate of growth and turnover.

The Chief Executive is arranging a programme of visits to the companies to discuss how the Council can support them to continue to grow. An engagement event is also being held in the autumn with the companies, cabinet members and chief officers to support this work. The Board looks forward to further reports on the impact of this piece of work.

Councillor S Jones
Chair