

Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board

13 October and 8 December, 2015

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor S Jones

The Scrutiny Board met on 13 October and 8 December, 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/>

13 October, 2015

1. The Sandwell Guarantee – One Year On

The Board received a report detailing the Council's progress on the Sandwell Guarantee, since its launch in September, 2014.

It was noted that, the biggest challenge for the project has been identifying young people to apply for the many opportunities available and therefore two engagement/mentoring officers were recruited in July 2015. Engagement events continue to take place across the borough and the programme has a strong presence on the Council's website and receives, on average, five referrals per day.

The Board heard that the Council has made a bid for funds from the Government's Youth Employment Initiative, which was due to commence in November 2015, and aims to extend the provision of apprenticeships, work experience placements and youth entrepreneurship programmes. Youth Employment Initiative funds are able to support people up to aged 29 into employment.

2. Black Country Talent Match – One Year On

The Board received a presentation detailing the progress on the Black Country Talent Match project since its launch in October 2014.

The Black Country was awarded £10million of a Big Lottery funds, to support young people aged 18-24, who have been unemployed for at least 12 months, into education, employment or training by improving their skills, confidence and motivation and providing work experience opportunities. A bid has also been submitted for £16million to the Youth Employment Initiative fund to enable the age range of the project to be extended.

The Black Country project has taken a partnership approach to project delivery involving businesses, training providers and third sector organisations. Young people are at the heart of the project and decision making and nine young people sit on the project's Steering Group, alongside representatives from business and the public sector. Support is delivered to the young person via a mentor and caseloads are limited to 10, to ensure that the support is intensive and tailored to meet to the specific needs of the individual. 600 young people have been referred to the project to date, 83 of which came through the Sandwell Hub. Referrals are received from a variety of agencies, including Connexions, the Prison Service and the Police.

Going forwards the project is looking at increasing the number of female participants by extending its engagement activities and working with Women's Aid and other domestic violence groups. An additional 18 mentors were also being recruited, to bring the total number to 48 across the Black Country project. Big Lottery was due to conduct a review of the project in November 2015 and a pre-review had started in preparation for this, involving the Black Country local authorities.

8 December, 2015

1. Combined Authority Update

The Board welcomed an update on progress towards the establishment of a Combined Authority for West Midlands.

The Board notes the anticipated benefits to the borough from having a Combined Authority but that it is not yet clear how funding will be used and distributed.

The Board looks forward to receiving further updates on progress.

2. Support for New Business

The Board received a report detailing the support that the Council offers to its residents to help them start up their own business. It notes in particular the work that the library service is doing in relation to facilitating workshops and signposting individuals for further advice and support.

The Board also notes the financial support available by way of start-up grants. The Council has commissioned UnLtd, a national organisation supporting social entrepreneurs, from October 2014 to September 2016, to support the development of social enterprise in Sandwell. Grants of up to £5,000 are available to applicants and nine Sandwell residents have so far received money to develop their ventures and have been successfully trading for around six months. The Board notes that there is still around 60% of this fund available and recommends that this be publicised better to ensure that prospective entrepreneurs are aware of this support and where they can access it.

The Board discussed the importance of ongoing advice and support for new businesses beyond start-up, in particular in relation to tax issues. The Board noted that the new Sandwell Business Solutions Centre at the Windmill Centre in Smethwick will provide information and support to help large and small companies in the borough to improve their business performance and thrive and grow, which will hopefully address this issue.

The Board welcomed the information on the variety of work being done to support business. Members feel that the Sandwell Guarantee resources could be utilised to support people into the self-employment route and recommends that the Director-Regeneration and Economy considers expanding the scope of the Sandwell Guarantee to enable this.

Councillor S Jones
Chair of the Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board