

# **Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board**

**16 February, 2016**

## **Summary of Matters Considered at the Board**

### **Report of the Chair, Councillor S Jones**

The Scrutiny Board met on 16 February, 2016 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. Update on the Work of the Black Country Skills Factory**

The Board noted a presentation on the work of the Black Country Skills Factory, which is an employer-led education and training collaboration project, funded by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). The project aims to address the shortfall in high value manufacturing (HVM) skills in the Black Country and increase the pipeline of suitably skilled staff to support the growth of the sector.

Discussions with around 270 Black Country employers identified a need for bite-sized practical training in a number of specific subjects relevant to high value manufacturing. The Skills Factory has subsequently brokered around 100 different bite-sized training courses to meet this need. The number of apprenticeships in high value manufacturing has also increased by 29% from 2012/13 to 2014/15.

The Local Enterprise Partnership has been awarded £7.6million of Growth Deal funding to develop an Elite Centre for Manufacturing. The Centre will provide specialist training in skills that underpin high value manufacturing performance and have been identified as barriers to growth in the sector in the Black Country. The Board is pleased to note that two of the Centre's satellite sites will be based in Sandwell, at Dudley Port and the National Metal Forming Centre in West Bromwich.

The Skills Factory also carried out engagement activities with schools, putting on around 75 events in Sandwell alone to encourage links between schools and industry. An Enterprise Adviser Programme has been established, funded by the government's Careers and Enterprise Company, to provide a high calibre business representative in schools to develop careers and enterprise plans and broker business engagements.

## **2. Discussion with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Investment**

The Cabinet Member gave a detailed report setting out a number of high profile pieces of work that he is involved in, one of which is the preparation work for a West Midlands Combined Authority.

He reported that he sits on a number of boards on behalf of the Council, one of which is the sub-committee of the Local Enterprise Partnership responsible for the distribution of Growth Deal funds. The Board is pleased to hear that over half of this funding has been awarded to projects in Sandwell, which has benefitted many businesses in the borough.

The Board was informed about a number of private sector residential schemes that the Council is having an input into as part of the planning process. The Council is also building around 800 new council houses in the borough over the next two years. The Board acknowledges that one of the key factors for Sandwell in managing government funding cuts and boosting our economy is the building of new homes to bring people to live and work in the borough.

The Board welcomes the news that Sandwell is the best performing authority in West Midlands in relation to its performance on planning applications, with 82% of major applications being determined on time, against a national benchmark of 60%; and 84% of minor applications being determined on time, against a benchmark of 65%.

The Board is pleased to hear that the Sandwell, Guarantee continues to be successful and that excellent feedback is being received from participants.

It was noted that the Cabinet Member is currently working on a number of policy reviews, including a review of the way gypsies and travellers are dealt with in the borough.

The Board welcomed the detailed an informative presentation from the Cabinet Member and looks forward to receiving updates on the pieces of work discussed in due course.

**3. Tracking and Monitoring of the Recommendations from the Former Youth Employment Commission**

This report was noted.

**Councillor S Jones**

**Chair of the Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board**