

Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board

13 September, 2016

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor S Jones

The Scrutiny Board met on 13 September, 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/cm5/>

Support for New and Existing Sandwell Businesses

The Board received an update on the support that the Business Growth Team is providing to new and existing businesses in Sandwell.

The Board is pleased to hear that the Council is extending its partnership with UnLtd until March 2017 and that £20k remains in the funding pot for local residents to apply for a grant to start up their own business.

The Board welcomed process improvements to advertise and evaluate funding submissions and is encouraged by progress that is being made to identify potential social enterprise sites for Sandwell Residents in Queens Square and West Bromwich Market.

The update on business development support and financial assistance to SMEs in the region highlighted the opportunity for businesses to apply for Black Country Gold support grants between £5k and £30k. The Board is assured that monitoring arrangements are in place in Sandwell to ensure that companies comply with conditions attached to funding.

The West Midlands Growth Hub continues to operate as a single point of contact for businesses in the Black Country to access a wide range of support and expertise. Sandwell Business Solutions Centre is relocating to Sandwell College which will provide opportunity for the College to promote apprenticeship schemes in businesses. The Board will consider, in more depth, the support for business growth in Sandwell at a future meeting.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Board received a briefing about the Community Infrastructure Levy which highlighted the expenditure process and how the funding pot is to be distributed (80% goes to a general pot linked to a statutory list, which set out the Councils needs in terms on infrastructure; 15% goes to neighbourhood funding and 5% on administration charges).

The Board highlighted that the Government has not given guidance about how the six Sandwell town funding pots should be used; whether it is saved or spent on a capital project. The amount in each town funding pot will be dependent on the amount of new development in the area, once the process to distribute the funding pot is agreed the funding will be available for spend.

Improvements from the Levy can enhance community development, education and health but infrastructure improvements are still related to section 106 agreements.

A draft process has been drawn up for spending the funds based on the Councils process for capital funding bids. The Cabinet will determine the process to be followed.

Update on the West Midlands Combined Authority

The Board was advised that the Chief Executive of Sandwell Council has been appointed Chief Operating Officer of the Combined Authority and that the functions of the Integrated Transport Authority (including Centro) have fully transferred to the Combined Authority.

The land reclamation fund stands at £200 million; the funding can be applied for to prepare land for development across the Combined Authority. To secure funding, the detail and timelines have yet to be worked through, but the Board noted the importance of Sandwell applying and keeping a tracked record to demonstrate ability to spend effectively and bring developments forward.

The relationship between house-building and construction work, and training and the skills shortage in Sandwell is a focus for the Board. Solihull Council is leading on matters relating to jobs and skills for the CA and there is facility for construction training at Sandwell College. The Board will receive further information about construction skills and skills gaps and shortages to the next meeting.

Councillor S Jones

Chair of the Jobs, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board