

**Minutes of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment
Scrutiny Board**

**20th July, 2017 at 5.30 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

- Present:** Councillor Hickey (Chair);
Councillors Allcock and Ashman.
- Apologies:** Councillors Ahmed, Crompton, Price, Rouf and
Tagger.
- In Attendance:** Ajman Ali, Interim Director - Neighbourhoods;
Chris Ward, Director – Education, Skills and
Employment;
Robin Weare, Highway Services Manager;
Peter Yeomans, Property Services Manager.

1/17 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 20th March,
2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

2/17 **Directors Presentation of Key Issues and Priorities 2017/18**

The Director – Education, Skills and Employment, the Highway Services Manager, the Property Services Manager and the Interim Director – Neighbourhoods provided a presentation to the Board relating to the following areas of their Directorates:

- Employment and Skills;

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- Economy (Business Growth Team);
- Transport;
- Neighbourhoods.

The presentation outlined the current issues for the services, the priorities and risks, the focus over the next six months and in longer term.

The Director – Education, Skills and Employment outlined the four ambitions of the Sandwell Vision 2030 that linked directly to employability and skills. He highlighted the need to maximise the apprenticeship levy internally and externally and to increase the take up of apprenticeships from 4% of young people leaving school in Sandwell.

The Board was advised that the roll out of Universal Credit would have an impact on the harder to help into work and they would be informed of the value of moving into work.

The Director – Education, Skills and Employment highlighted the uncertainty over Brexit in relation to the status of EU national staff which could cause labour shortages for employers and would mean European Social Funding (ESF) stopping in 2020. The reduction of workforce and the reduction of approximately £38 million across the Black Country Region will have a significant impact on employment and skills training in the region.

The Board was advised that the focus over the next 6 months for the Council was as follows:

- Apprenticeship Levy- internal: ensuring the Councils apprenticeship programmes is accessible and creating a range of abilities of Sandwell residents;
- Apprenticeship Levy – external: supporting employers in the area to manage their levy and understand the standards and funding landscape;
- Increasing take up of apprenticeships – school to work agenda: working with schools to raise awareness of the alternative career pathways and supporting employers to offer a range of opportunities including higher level apprenticeships.

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It was suggested that a school having success in moving young people from school into apprenticeships should be invited to share best practice at a future meeting.

The Board was advised of the longer-term focus which included the following:

- Uncertainty over Brexit;
- Work with the West Midlands Combined Authority on devolution of funding and applications to support residents and upskill and find employment;
- Set ambitious 20% target for numbers of young people starting apprenticeships.

The Board recognised the increased opportunities arising from investment and development in Birmingham and Solihull and the need to capitalise on the opportunities; the need to work with school advice and guidance to raise awareness and encourage take up of apprenticeships.

The Board heard from a member that the syllabus and contents for apprenticeship courses were expanding and changing, which meant that apprentices were only on site for two days a week; also, that the end users were finding the outcomes unclear. The Director – Education, Skills and Employment acknowledged that the syllabus and content of the courses were continually developing and that company's engaging with the apprenticeship schemes were finding that the syllabus had completely changed, however he clarified that the key skills such as maths and English were still being offered.

The Chair thanked the Director for his presentation.

The Manager – Highways Services provided slides relating to the key transport priorities identified in the Black Country Core Strategy, as follows:

- Improved accessibility and connectivity of an integrated public transport network;
- Improved road network and links to the national M5/M6 motorway network;
- Improved access to the freight railway network;
- Improved walking and cycling provision;

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- Parking traffic and enforcement policy.

The Highways Services Manager advised that the whole of the Black Country was developing strategies and projects that move toward the transport and highways improvements that would facilitate access to HS2, freight services at Bescot Sidings, improve road and motorway junctions, and cycling and walking provision to reduce congestion issues. Funding approval for the Birchley Island work was being sought from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Road safety was always a focus for the service and this year focus would be the reduction of accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists at accident hotspots and increasing travel by bike from 2% to between 5-10 %.

The focus for Sandwell over the longer term would be as follows:

- deliver the Birchley Island and M5 junction1 schemes;
- make better use of Bescot Rail Yard;
- deliver transport proposals to support the continued regeneration of West Bromwich Town Centre and the priority areas;
- support the continued development of the Black Country Rapid Transit Network.

The Board welcomed plans to development West Bromwich Town Centre and the consultation on the area action plan to develop a metro expansion and improve bus services in and out of Birmingham.

The Board was advised that there was a statutory duty to prepare a section 19 flood report to consider flood risk and mitigation in Sandwell as a part of climate change factors. Board was informed that when assessing planning applications, a 25-30% factor was added to take rainfall patterns into account.

The Chair thanked the Highways Manager for his presentation.

The Property Services Manager provided information relating to the economy in relation to the Business Growth Team, the presentation highlighted the priorities as follows:

- Supporting the local business economy;
- account management of Sandwell's Top 50;
- increasing and retaining business rates payable;
- raising Sandwell's investment profile;
- increase Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita.

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The presentation further highlighted the risks as follows:

- Shortage of development land and modern premises;
- Low levels of skills and suitable qualified labour;
- Low innovation, exporting and entrepreneurship;
- Uncertainty of Brexit;
- Enterprise Zones and Limited Opportunity of Council Owned Employment Sites.

The Property Services Manager highlighted the shortage of large sites in Sandwell and that there were some unrealistic values placed on some plots of land which delayed development in the area. Members of the Board referred to land either side of the railway through Sandwell which required development.

The Property Services Manager referred to the list of top 50 companies in Sandwell and indicated that the growth of businesses in Sandwell was not through inward investment but through working to grow existing businesses.

The Board was advised that the longer-term focus was to raise Sandwell's investment profile and to support Sandwell's Business Rate Growth. Also, to continue to focus on issues highlighted in the presentation as follows:

- Business engagement services;
- Account Management of Sandwell Top 50 Companies;
- Support the upskilling businesses and their employees;
- Investor development;
- Supply chain development;
- Co-ordinated partner approach to business support.

The Chair thanked the Property Services Manager for his presentation.

The Interim Executive Director – Neighbourhoods provided a presentation to give an overview of the Neighbourhood Services functions and key issues which fell within the remit of the Board and the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board. He highlighted the overlap between the economy and housing in Sandwell; the development of difficult sites and the money going into the economy and house building.

The Interim Director indicated that Neighbourhoods had a large part to play in developing the right conditions to grow the economy,

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including the right technology through digital access, the right leisure and community facilities and, places to stay and visit.

He highlighted the programmes and projects planned to develop and put in place the right conditions to grow the economy, access housing and leisure facilities, and to make Sandwell a good place to live and work.

The Chair thanked the Interim Executive Director for his presentation.

3/17

Parking and Traffic Enforcement Policy 2017

The Highway Services Manager provided a report to outline the process to consult on the 2017 Parking and Traffic Enforcement Policy. He advised that appropriate policies and procedures had been investigated and included in the draft policy concerning:

- the scope of the Red Routes enforcement;
- parking across dropped crossings;
- the CCTV enforcement of West Bromwich Bus Lane;
- the provision of H Bar and disabled markings.

He advised that a six-week consultation period had been approved by Cabinet in June 2017 and that public consultation with several key stakeholders was ongoing.

In response to questions relating to parking enforcement around schools and the potential to use CCTV as a mechanism the Highways Services Manager advised that mobile CCTV vehicle cameras and zig-zag lines were deterrents used to discourage parking in the vicinity of school gates. He confirmed that there was to be a second enforcement vehicle to be introduced to improve parking around schools.

The Board was appreciative of the need to move forward with agreeing the Parking and Traffic Enforcement Policy, communicating the plan to the wider public and implementing the policies and procedures.

Resolved:-

- (1) that Scrutiny Board note the changes to the Parking and Traffic Enforcement Policy 2017 outlined in the report and

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forward any comments to the Director- Regeneration and Planning as part of the consultation process.

4/17 **Work Programme 2017/18**

The Board was asked to consider its work programme for 2017/2018 and the establishment of any working groups as a vehicle to deliver the work programme.

Following a review of the Council's governance structure, at its meeting on 16th May, 2017 the Council had established four scrutiny boards and a scrutiny management board - Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board - to deliver Sandwell's scrutiny function. The Council had also appointed two vice-chairs to each scrutiny board, who would take the lead on a topic from within their respective Board's terms of reference, reporting back to the Board on the findings of that work.

As well as reflecting the Council's 2030 Vision, work programmes were to reflect local needs and priorities. Suggestions had therefore been sought from the public and partners via the Council's social media platforms and newsletters and the Board noted the suggestions received in respect of its terms of reference.

The Board considered the list of potential issues and topics for scrutiny in 2017/18 which were raised through consultation, brought forward from 2016/17 Scrutiny Boards or raised by members present at the meeting. During consideration of the items the Board referred to the terms of reference of the Board, the topic filter tool, the Council's visions and ambitions and the presentation of priorities and risks for the service areas as highlighted by officers.

It was also reported that, at its meeting on 22nd June, 2017 the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board had requested the Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board review the Council's approach to identifying suitable sites and programmes for the Black Country City Deal and the West Midlands Combined Authority Land Reclamation Fund.

Resolved that, subject to the approval of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board:-

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- (1) a working group be established comprising Councillors Ashman (Vice-Chair), Allcock, Ian Jones, Ahmed and Rouf to undertake scrutiny of employment skills for under 35's including help into work for 18-21 year olds and apprenticeships levy;
- (2) A working group be established comprising Councillors Crompton, Dhallu, Frear, Hickey (Chair), B Price and Taggar (Vice -Chair) to undertake scrutiny of transport including congestion (M5/ Birchley Island), air quality and efficient travel;
- (3) that the Director – Regeneration and Planning provide a briefing note to the Board to detail the Council's approach to identifying suitable sites and programmes for the Black Country City Deal and the West Midlands Combined Authority Land Reclamation Fund;
- (4) that the following items be placed on the Board's work programme for 2017/2018:-
 - a) Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Investment
 - b) Black Country Core Strategy
 - c) Road Safety Strategy
 - d) Statutory Section 19 Flood report
 - e) Cycle routes
 - f) The night-time economy
 - g) What is Sandwell's identity
 - h) The visitor economy
 - i) Digital access for businesses and access to job applications
 - j) Digital strategy
 - k) Councils approach to identifying suitable sites and programmes
 - l) Canals – from an economic regeneration perspective
 - m) Review the Council's approach to identifying suitable sites and programmes for the Black Country City Deal and the West Midlands Combined Authority Land Reclamation Fund (B&C SMB request)

(Meeting ended 7:20 pm)

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