

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

**15<sup>th</sup> March, 2018 at 5.30 pm  
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Hickey (Chair);  
Councillor Ashman (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Ahmed, Allcock, Crompton, Dhallu, and  
Rouf.

**5/18 Minutes**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2017 and 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2018 be approved and signed as a correct record.

**6/18 Employability and Skills Update**

The Principal Adviser, Education and Lifelong Learning and the Senior Training and Employment Liaison Officer provided an update relating to employability and skills in Sandwell.

The Board considered the current statistics for employment and skills in Sandwell, an update relating to Universal Credit and information about the Apprenticeship Levy based on Sandwell Council's performance.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board, about employability and skills, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:

- The number of workless households had begun to decline in Sandwell but was still high with 22.6% of Sandwell households

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that were workless compared with 16.4% in the West Midlands and 15.1% in Great Britain.

- The percentage of children that were in workless households in Sandwell was particularly high at 24.1% compared to 13.7% in the West Midlands and 11.4% in Great Britain.
- There were hotspots of unemployment identified in Smethwick and Tipton.
- The statistics available were national statistics and Members requested a breakdown by ward data, to pinpoint hotspots and target resources.
- The additional data would be demographic information to highlight more detail about ethnicity, age and other factors which may impact on employability or moving into employment.
- More information was requested relating to migration mapping of new to UK residents and those moving to Sandwell from other areas of Great Britain.
- Sandwell Council shared information about jobs and training opportunities, and it worked with partners and voluntary organisations to share the information in Sandwell using job bulletins, social media and job clubs.
- There was an enquiry email in box available to all residents to register interests or enquire about opportunities. All enquiries would be recorded, any time of the day or night and the enquirer would be contacted to discuss their enquiry or be signposted to the relevant person to respond.
- Sandwell Council worked with employers and businesses in Sandwell to identify vacancies and apprenticeships opportunities.
- Low level skill opportunities were targeted by the Council to match the skill set for many of unemployed people in Sandwell. Higher level skill opportunities tend to be recruited by agencies due to the skill set required and attracting those in employment.
- The Council provided a range of training opportunities and support to prepare individuals for the work place and for interviews.
- Council employment events were attended by people actively seeking employment in a range of areas including the following:
  - Engineering and manufacturing
  - Administration and Customer Services
  - Retail
  - Care
  - Horticulture;
  - Construction.
- Recent large-scale redundancies in Sandwell had resulted in the Council working with businesses, partners and training providers

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to re-deploy apprentices. The apprentices would complete their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training with organisations or companies that would be able to move them into similar roles or to upskill them for new roles.

- ‘Reverse marketing’ was being used to identify an individual’s skills and qualifications, and to approach businesses where their skill set would be needed to find employment opportunities.
- There was no age limit on apprenticeships and many older apprentices were diversifying and developing skills to move into new job opportunities and in new directions.
- The Board welcomed that in the region of 80% of Council apprentices move into employment at the end of their apprenticeship and was advised that a tracking process was in place. Apprentices in private sector were not monitored, but it was believed that once a company had made an investment of time and money the apprentice would move into employment. The voluntary sector generally had no resources to employ all apprentices but would have contributed to their development and prepared the apprentice for employment.
- A delay in the arrangements for the Apprenticeship Levy had caused a backlog of apprenticeships but this was being monitored and an update would be provided to a future scrutiny meeting.
- Apprenticeships could be at any employment level, to support employees to the next stage of their career.
- The apprenticeship levy funds were required to be spent within 24 months of being added to Sandwell Council’s digital apprenticeship account and had to be spent on apprenticeship training delivery.

The Chair thanked officers for their update and welcomed the work being done to make people aware of vacancies, hold events, signpost opportunities to improve their chances of employment and to support people into work.

#### **Resolved:**

- (1) That an Employment and Skills update report be requested to a future meeting of the Board, to include the following issues:
  - A breakdown of unemployment data by ward
  - Information about migration mapping by ward
  - An apprenticeship levy and apprentices update

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- Work with Small and Medium Enterprise (SME's) to develop apprenticeships (all ages)

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**Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Plan - Consultation**

The Executive Director – Neighbourhoods and the Service Manager, Highways provided the Highways Asset Management Plan – Consultation Report.

The Service Manager highlighted that the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) defined the council's policies, strategy and plan for the future maintenance of the highway network and that the Board was being asked to consider the policy, strategy and plan to refer comments that it had about the plan to the Cabinet in advance of the decision being taken at its next meeting 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

The Service Manager outlined that the HIAMP demonstrated long term highway infrastructure plans to facilitate the Council's strategic ambitions. A key aspect of the HIAMP was the development of risk based lifecycle plans for each critical infrastructure asset, including;

- 800km of carriageways,
- 1,400km footways and cycleways,
- 35,000 street/lights, signals, illuminated signs, traffic signals
- 450 bridges and structures,
- 3500km drainage and culverts including 35,000 gullies
- A wide range of other street furniture

The service manager indicated that the highways in Sandwell were increasingly fragile and less resilient to damage from wear and tear, increasing traffic and severe weather. He advised that the Council had to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of a new Code of Practice to firstly provide a Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) and then develop this with risk based lifecycle plans by October 2018.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board about Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) the following responses were made and issues highlighted:

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- Highways England was responsible for motorways and trunk roads in Sandwell, the problems and delays due to reduced capacity on the motorway had an impact on the highways that were the responsibility of the Local Highways and Traffic Authority.
- Delays to local highways improvement schemes were highlighted, but were not contained in the HIAMP. The focus of the HIAMP was the infrastructure assets, which included the condition of the roads and other assets outlined in the report.
- Performance against targets for asset management were monitored and could be reported to a future meeting of the Board.
- The Council maintains 30,000 street lamps in the Borough. There was a need to replace 11,000 SOX lanterns (amber street lights) due to the spare parts becoming unavailable.
- The replacement of the 11,000 lanterns may be resourced through an interest free SALIX loan of £3.3 million possibly supported by prudential borrowing (subject to a separate Cabinet approval). The new lanterns would have LED lights that would be beneficial to the Council. LED lights use less electricity over an eight-year period the cost of the replacements would be recovered from energy savings.
- The West Midlands Combined Authority was funding more sustainable travel across the area which it was expected would mitigate the increasing use of cars and the associated impact on the highway networks.
- Reductions in volume of traffic would potentially be beneficial to reduce congestion, air pollution and road traffic accidents.

The Chair thanked officers for the opportunity to comment on the HIAMP. The Board was satisfied with the plan.

### **Resolved**

That the Board recommend to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment that the Highways Infrastructure Assets Management Plan be approved.

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**Chair and Vice- Chair Work Group Updates**

**Town Centre Revitalisation**

The Chair provided a summary of the work groups progress to gather local knowledge and map out the current offer in relation to the night time economy and the visitor economy.

The Chair advised that a number of mechanisms had been used to gather feedback, including emails to Town Centre Managers and all Members of the Council, attendance at five out of six Town Chair meetings and attendance a Vision 2030 event. A summary of findings table had captured feedback and been shared with Town Centre Managers and relevant officers to inform and highlight attractions, issues and suggestions to shape the Town Plans.

Members highlighted the importance of promoting attractions and events through social media and the internet to promote Sandwell as a place to visit. The Board highlighted the need to prepare for the Commonwealth Games in 2022 and for the world to be able to see what Sandwell had to offer visitors.

The Executive Director – Neighbourhoods advised that the findings would inform work she was undertaking on the wider cultural offer in Sandwell.

**Employment and Skills**

The Vice-Chair provided a summary of the work groups activity to gather information relating to employment and skills. She advised that there had been a visit to the Job Centre in Oldbury in November 2017 which had helped to focus the work group on employment and skills for people over 35 and the 'Fuller Working Lives: a partnership approach' initiative from the Government which recognised as the population ages, employers need to draw on the skills and experience of older workers and build a multi-generational work force.

The work group had attended a Fuller Working Lives presentation at Business Solutions and met with Adult Education skills training provider (SAFL).

The Vice-Chair highlighted emerging messages from the work group: to raise awareness of the value of the skills, experience and

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opportunities for older workers, and to recommend a directory for employment and skills to be developed. The intention would be to capture contact details, guidance and a list of training providers for Sandwell.

(Meeting ended 7:01 pm)

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