

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

8th November, 2018 at 5.30pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Rollins (Chair);
Councillors Ashman and Singh (Vice-Chairs);
Councillors Ahmed and Chidley.

Apologies: Councillors Ali, Allcock, E M Giles and Preece.

In attendance: Jenna Langford, Regeneration Manager
Alison Knight, Executive Director - Neighbourhoods

15/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th September, 2018 be approved as a correct record.

16/18 **Growing What We Have Got and Supporting Local Business**

The Executive Director Neighbourhoods and the Regeneration Manager provided a report and presentation relating to the level of support services provided to the Sandwell Business Community by the Regeneration and Growth Team through initiatives including Sandwell Ambassadors.

The Regeneration Manager advised that the Regeneration and Growth Team provided:

- the right support to teams in Sandwell;
- business support and advice;
- location and relocation advice, information about inward investment linked with development ready locations (regeneration funding);
- it recruited businesses;
- it worked with community businesses;
- it informed about jobs and apprenticeships;

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- it engaged with local supply chain;
- it connected into projects.

Think Sandwell was Sandwell Council's initiative to support business in our Borough. The Council gave free expert advice on matters such as accessing finance, recruiting staff, finding premises and forming partnerships so that businesses had the knowledge and contacts they needed to thrive. The brochure of the top 50 fastest growing companies index was circulated at the meeting and discussed by the Board.

Also circulated was 'Development Ready' an approach used to support development in Sandwell that actively sought to market sites to developers and investors to progress regeneration throughout the Borough by preparing a prospectus outlining the potential development requirements. Taking the sites to the potential customers proactively marketing sites in Sandwell.

Sandwell Council had been recognised as Local Planning Authority of the Year in 2014 and the Team continued to perform at a high level and to develop the ways of working to support the customer and improve the service. The Regeneration Manager had recently been recognised for her achievements and was leading the team in developing an APP which was being developed to take forward in 2019 which would integrate with the business planning.

The team priorities moving forward included the following:

- taking forward the 'Regeneration and Inclusive Growth Strategy Action Plan';
- ensure the Borough reaches economic growth targets;
- to truly understand Sandwell strengths and challenges;
- to priorities and focus the work of the team;
- to continuously engage with the business community;
- to consider all things that link into the skills gap;
- to consider ways of keeping channels of continual engagement.

All the team priorities would be planned in line with the development of the team.

The Sandwell Business Ambassadors Programme was currently being reviewed by the Director of Regenerations and Growth. The grant and loan initiatives included the following:

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- support and advice;
- financial support through grants or loans;
- Black Country Transformation Gold/ Sandwell Business £302,000 in grant to support needs.
- Growth – Businesses – minimum £50,000- Maximum £1 million; Sandwell businesses £2 million from the fund;
- The fund was coming to an end. There would be a new programme and a report in December.
- In relation to the grant fund – there would be access to minimum of £45,000 - £50,000 per business (could go over if needed more).
- Current performance was in the report.

When the team was merged it would give us more, taking on the team was a great way to try new things and new initiatives.

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

- Companies were going into schools to advertise career opportunities and to give young people an idea of the type of work they could work towards.
- The Executive Director of Regeneration advised that the same issue had been raised as part of the SHAPE conference recently, that young people were not getting enough advice from schools. She agreed to give further consideration to the issue.
- The Regeneration Manager agreed to give further consideration to matters related to the Business Ambassadors. It was recognised that this was a good area for the Cabinet Member for Regeneration to make recommendations how businesses could link with local schools.
- The Executive Director advised that schools advice was given in sixth form and the Board wondered if the career advice should be something the Board picked up at a future meeting for an update.
- The Regeneration Manager advised that she and Directors from Sandwell Businesses would work together to connect with schools and to promote Sandwell. She advised that a new Chair of the Sandwell Ambassadors would be appointed soon and that details of the refreshed scheme and webpage could be shared with the Scrutiny Board.

The Executive Director agreed that the Business ambassador scheme needed revitalisation. The Board was advised that the business

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Champion was Councillor Mohammed Rouf and that the business support unit was working with Councillor Rouf to meet with the Top 50 companies to discuss how the Council could help. It was confirmed that there were regular meetings that information was reported back. The establishment of the ambassador scheme was complete, the revitalisation may highlight other roles for the private sector to become involved in the work the team were doing to support businesses in Sandwell. There may be a social responsibility role and other roles to be explored, the team wanted to keep it fresh for businesses to keep the momentum going for business ambassadors.

Small businesses had the Think Sandwell site and the Council advertised funding opportunities for all to see. Other funding for planning and land development was also posted and there was real opportunity to synergise and work together.

From further comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board the following responses were made and issues highlighted:

- The Council needed to understand more about where businesses would look at and what more they needed to know about Sandwell.
- Sandwell and the Regeneration Manager had recently won another award with the Federation of Small Business Black Country and Staffordshire. The Council needed to look at how it promoted Sandwell and got the message out to business. Many businesses were not members of the Federation of Small Businesses and would not know of Sandwell's success, the Council needed to use social media to get the message out to small businesses.
- Sandwell Councillors could engage with small businesses in their wards to advise them of the success of the Regeneration Team and to pass on the Teams contact details. The Board agreed that there was a need to spread awareness of the Regeneration Teams success with Small Businesses in Sandwell.

In relation to the Top 50 companies it was indicated that 23 companies related to manufacturing, a few were construction and one related to robotics. In response to a question about creating more opportunities around large projects such as HSE, construction skills and future skills such as robotics the Board was advised as follows:

- Events were run in relation to large projects. One at the start of the year in relation to the Metro. The events coincided with when they could procure, put the bid in etc.
- A framework was being prepared for the work towards the Aquatics centre for the Commonwealth Games 2022 with Waites.

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- A Paper was being prepared relating to bring the Headquarters of an organisation to the Midlands.
- There was a need to look at Artificial Intelligence(AI) and robotics with West Midlands Growth to see what more businesses and Regeneration Team in Sandwell could be doing.

The Executive Director Regeneration advised that a report could be provided to a future meeting to consider the development of an Industrial Strategy including proposals for how we would work with our Partners.

Resolved:

- (1) That a briefing note be circulated to all
- (2) That the Development Ready booklet be refreshed and circulated
- (3) That the link to Think Sandwell be circulated
- (4) That a report relating to the Development of the Industrial Strategy for Sandwell be included in the Work Programme for the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board.

17/18

Review of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP)

The Executive Director Regeneration provided a document in relation to the review of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) entitled “Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships”. The report asked Members to consider the implications for Sandwell MBC as a member of the Black Country LEP.

The Executive Director explained that the Black Country Consortium (BCC) had been formed in the 1990’s. The BCC set up the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Sandwell MBC was a member along with the other 3 Black Country local authorities. The BCC was set up before the West Midlands Combined Authority had been established in 2016 and was Chaired by Stuart Towe.

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

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- Walsall MBC was the accountable body for the BC LEP, the City of Wolverhampton has responsibility for some matters and Sandwell MBC has responsibility for some things;
- The LEP has had responsibility for £9 billion funding that has gone to LEPs including European funding.
- The Government review of LEPs was to make sure that the LEP organisation could carry out the Industrial Strategy.
- There were a number of areas that were in more than one LP area. This was common across LEPs, but not in the Black Country LEPs.
- There were 14 LEPs where boundaries overlap in the country.

The LEP review paper made clear that the longer-term aspirations of Government was to have a LEP geography that mirrored the WMCA which would mean LEPs merging.

The report set out ministerial outcomes under five headings:

- Roles and responsibility
- Leadership and organisational capacity
- Accountability and performance
- Geography
- Mayoral Combined Authority.

The following points were highlighted from the report:

- In the BC LEP gender balance was an issue on the LEP Board, by 2020 it would be balanced.
- The Government wanted the LEPs to be properly constituted.
- A decision had to be made and submitted about the geography and boundary of the BC LEP. The WMCA would be setting out the issues in a report to discuss the matter.
- The WMCA geography was co-terminus geographically with Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull. The key issue may be whether Government would be asking the West Midlands to consider merging the LEPs.
- The danger highlighted by the Board was that the LEP in the West Midlands could become very Birmingham centric.
- £20 million of funding had been made available and LEPs have been asked for their views on the potential merge.
- The BC LEP had advised that it wanted to remain as a separate LEP.
- A report would be shared at Sandwell leaders meeting in November 2018.

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From further comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board the following responses were made and issues highlighted:

- Other LEPs in the West Midlands such as Solihull had also expressed the wish to maintain their economic geographies in particular in relation to housing etc; Stoke and Staffordshire had expressed the wish to see change; Birmingham wanted to keep them separate.
- Concerns from the Board that historically the Black Country had to compete for funding with Birmingham and a consensus that the Black Country would be better served by the BC LEP not a WMCA LEP.
- Members of the Board strongly identified with the need for the Black Country LEP Members to maintain their identity, particularly Sandwell with the proximity to Birmingham.
- The Members welcomed the recommendations for improvements for accountability. When the Government Select Committee had reviewed scrutiny there had been questions raised about how LEPs were scrutinised and feedback about the need for more openness and answerability of LEPs to scrutiny.
- LEPs were working with monitoring to try to approve accountability but the Board were advised that the arrangements in place for BC LEP for getting funding approved were already robust and an Advisory Board was in place to oversee the rigorous process.
- It was suggested that it was the scrutiny element that comes back to Scrutiny Board that needed to be strengthened.
- Further down the line scrutiny would look at what was being duplicated in LEP and WMCA.
- In relation to developing Local Industrial Strategies, the LEPs would set out a collective and shared strategic course for the long-term and aim to agree a strategy by early 2020.
- The WMCA were working with the LEP towards developing a way forward but it was only day 5 into the process and very early days.
- There would be a report back to the Scrutiny Board next autumn with an update about how the four areas could benchmark themselves in the four areas and this would be added to next year's work programme.

The Board agreed to issue the following statement:

The Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Board welcomed the aimed improvements in diversity and accountability outlined in the

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‘Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships Strategy’ and agreed that the Black Country and Sandwell best serviced by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership.

Members thanked the Executive Director Regeneration for the report and responses to questions.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships report be received;
- (2) That the Board agreed to issue the following statement:

The Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Board welcomed the aimed improvements in diversity and accountability outlined in the ‘Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships Strategy’ and agreed that the Black Country and Sandwell best serviced by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership.

(Meeting ended at 18:45 pm)

<p>Contact Officer: Deb Breedon Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3896</p>
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