

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

**4th February, 2020 at 5.30 pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Rollins (Chair);
Councillors Allcock, L Giles, M Hussain and
Singh.

Apologies: Councillors Crumpton, Hackett, Padda and
Sandars.

In attendance: Dr Alison Knight, Executive Director
Neighbourhoods;
Alan Caddick, Director of Housing and
Communities;
Tammy Stokes, Service Manager, Growth and
Spatial Planning, Neighbourhoods;
Nicky Denston, Service Manager Business
Excellence, Neighbourhoods.

1/20 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 7
November, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

2/20 **Towns Fund**

The Board received a report and presentation from the Service
Manager, Growth and Spatial Planning relating to current position
and future implications of applications to the Towns Fund.

The Board noted that accessing funding through the Towns Fund
would provide Sandwell with significant investment and resource,
of up to £25 million, for each of the three selected Towns to
deliver priorities set out in the 2030 Vision.

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The fund aimed to deliver comprehensive regeneration to selected town centres; enabling new housing / employment, developing new skills and providing new digital and physical infrastructure, which were the key drivers in delivering inclusive growth and making Sandwell a fundamentally better place to live, work and raise families.

The Board noted that a Towns Fund Readiness Checklist had been submitted to the Government in December 2019, setting out background information and potential interventions for Sandwell. The Council was developing Town Deal Boards across the three identified areas, which would comprise of stakeholders from community, business, voluntary, public-sector and faith organisations. The Town Deal Boards were required to develop and agree a Town Investment Plan (TIP) for summer 2020. The TIP should outline the proposals for each town and funding would be allocated on the strength of the TIP.

The three town boards would feed into the ‘Super Board’ which would provide strategic directions and ensure that all three town Tips’ were complementary.

The Board noted that there was a proposal to procure consultancy services to lead on the development of comprehensive TIP’s in conjunction with the Town Deal Boards to provide a compelling and competitive case to Central Government in summer 2020.

The following comments and responses were noted:

- the towns identified were Smethwick, Rowley Regis and West Bromwich;
- there was some disappointment that Newton Ward, Oldbury and Tipton were not included in the areas identified and the Board was advised that the locations had been imposed by the Government and although some minor boundary changes may be accepted there was no right of appeal or opportunity for major change to the area map, however, other areas could still apply for other funding;

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- the Board requested clarification whether the Super Board would be a private or restricted meeting, or if ward councillors would be able to observe;
- the Super Board had met once and was due to meet again on 7 February 2020;
- Local Boards would report to the Super Board;
- the Super Board membership would include WMCA representatives, MPs, local business representatives, President of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, SCVO voluntary sector representatives and other partner representatives;
- Sandwell Town Cabinet Members and Ward Members would be involved in Local Boards for their area and stakeholders would be engaged through consultation to ensure that the TIP met the needs of the local community;
- the Board recognised the importance of strong Town Investment Plans to maximise funding and for them to be aligned to existing local strategies;
- there were other Town Centre interventions that would have to be factored into the TIP such as the High Street Task Force Pilot, the WMCA Task Force (West Bromwich was part of this) and the Wednesbury Heritage Action Zone;
- there would be further Town Deal negotiation once it was clear what funding had been allocated, the amount of funding would not be known until the end of 2020. The Board requested clarification of the time frames to spend the funds, once it was known what the amount was but was advised that the time frame had not been announced;
- ‘strengthening town centres’ could mean improvements in the infrastructure, not just physical, it could include 5G and connectivity;
- there would be a period of extensive community consultation as part of the development of the TIP and lots of events to keep it interesting;
- the Council was waiting for the release of second guidance;

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The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and responses to questions. She highlighted that Sandwell was in a great position to have three towns identified for the Town fund and made a series of recommendations to the Board.

Resolved

- (1) to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Economic Inclusion that:
 - a) each Town Deal Board develop a Town Investment Plan designed to attract as much funding as possible;
 - b) scrutiny participates in the consultation process in Spring 2020;
 - c) local Members are involved in relevant local boards;
- (2) to recommend to Cabinet Member for Economic Inclusion that capacity funding be used to procure consultancy services to support best possible Town Investment Plans (TIP)
- (3) an update report be presented to scrutiny in Spring 2021 to consider the final Town Investment Plans.

3/20

Inclusive Economy Deal

The Board received a presentation from the Service Manager Business Excellence to outline the Inclusive Economy Deal which outlined the following themes:

- The opportunity of incoming investments in Sandwell;
- Sandwell the employment hub of the Black Country;
- Black Country residents travelling to Sandwell for work;
- Our economy - starting from a low base but factors that could help it grow;
- The population statistics and growth to 2030;

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- Performance compared to regional and national averages;
- Skills base - low or no qualifications;
- Small medium and large businesses compared to UK average;
- The Six Towns economic profiles;
- The 20-year project to transform Sandwell;
- Shaping the Deal – engagement and co-development;
- Key Principles of the Sandwell Deal;
- Engaging the Community;
- The Community Fridge – themes;
- Deal Development and the Sandwell Deals;
- The Social Contract – Council and residents.

The Board noted that developing and shaping the deal would ensure that everyone in Sandwell could benefit and that Metro Dynamics had been engaged to prepare a 'State of the Borough' report relating to the health, economy and demographics.

The Board considered the information presented and noted the following comments and responses:

- there was a need to encourage people to live and spend in Sandwell;
- Sandwell had the largest economy in the Black Country but was less productive and had the lowest average wages;
- there was a fall in production that needed to be addressed;
- Sandwell residents travelled to Birmingham, there was a need to encourage people to stay in Sandwell MBC;
- Sandwell needs to attract alternative industries;
- over 30% of the workforce was aged under 30. This was a real opportunity for Sandwell to develop skills and engage the young and diverse community. A skills evidence base was being developed, the evidence indicated that Sandwell had a low skills base;
- the key principles of the deal were to work with people in the community compact, co-design, co-own and co-deliver. Over 2000 people had engaged in consultation in the community, there had been workshops in schools, a monopoly game to hear what young people considered important and community fridge events provided volunteering opportunities whilst taking pride and looking after the people and neighbourhoods in the local community;
- the Sandwell deals would compile the resident deal, the business deal and voluntary sector deal, they would maximise

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the Sandwell social and economic dividend, would have equal priority on social and physical infrastructure, would design the social contract with residents, clear outcomes and expectations and would construct a compelling narrative and offer to create the case for investment;

- in relation to funding for the Deals, the Board was advised that there were several funding sources to be explored, including the Town Fund, the Metro Extension funding and other Government funding pots. It was explained that money and grants captured locally would be used locally. Any jobs from metro are local / local people would be trained for local jobs and outputs captured locally;

The Chair advised that her understanding was that the deal was not all about the funding, but that it was about using what we had and having a different strategic approach. The level of deprivation in the Borough had resulted in many of the performance indicators not being met, and indicated as red, for a number of years, this was why the Council was taking a different approach.

The main messages for the Board from the presentation were:

- people moved out of the Borough;
- wages were low;
- skills were the Sandwell priority;
- there was a need to develop skills in Sandwell;
- people came into Sandwell to get the higher skilled jobs.

Members felt that there was a need to focus on high technical skills and automated manufacturing because the traditional metal and heavy industry in the area was declining. They recognised the need to link into the WMCA Industrial Strategy and to focus on skills and investment in new industry such as in the giga factory for making batteries for electric vehicles.

In relation to the communications and marketing strategy it was confirmed that the Council had a plan and was preparing to do what was needed to deliver the Sandwell Deal, by showcasing what was happening.

The Chair welcomed the good work being undertaken and requested to see the draft paper.

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The Board noted that The Sandwell Deal would be considered by Cabinet on 26th February 2020.

Resolved

(1) That further data to be circulated about wages in the Borough;

(2) That the draft Sandwell Deal be circulated to the Board and that any comment be referred for consideration to the Cabinet 26 February 2020.

4/20

Re-Wilding Inquiry Day

The Chair introduced the report from the Director Housing and Communities relating to arrangements for a Scrutiny Inquiry Day to consider Re-wilding of Grass Verges in Sandwell.

The Board was advised that a scoping exercise had been carried out by the Chair of the Scrutiny Board and officers had met on two occasions to consider and gather evidence to inform the Inquiry session. The Chair was pleased that just by asking the question about re-wilding officers from different services had met to discuss re-wilding in Sandwell and to understand what re-wilding was and what it wasn't.

The Chair advised that although the Council does plant flower seeds in areas across the Borough, but this was not re-wilding, the Inquiry Session would help to understand and to highlight what concerns and challenges had to be taken into account.

The Director Housing and Communities advised that re-wilding could potentially save maintenance time but clarified that there was a balance to be had and that litter may gather, and re-wilding areas could be perceived by the public to be unkept land. He suggested that there were other possible benefits of re-wilding to be considered such as planting at certain heights to prevent encampments or parking on verges.

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The following comments were noted for inclusion in the work of the Scrutiny Inquiry Group:

- how much would re-wilding cost?
- the Inquiry should consider how the Council could introduce communications and events to reassure the public perceptions;
- carbon capture and living walls to capture particulates could be considered;
- the issue of litter in grass verges was important and should be addressed by the Inquiry;
- the Inquiry could explore about types of communication and signage to explain to the public about re-wilding and why grass verges had not been cut;
- the need to think through the implications for grounds maintenance workers should be considered;
- there should be a full cost analysis of what we do now and what it would cost to do things differently.

The Inquiry session would focus on evidence of the current processes, costs and benefits, what we do now, good practice, public perception, alternative options, and suggestions for a programme of re-wilding grass verges in Sandwell in the future.

The Chair confirmed that the Inquiry Session would look holistically at the environmental, financial, resource and public concerns raised in the discussion and from the scoping work carried out.

Resolved

- (1) that the Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board agree the scope for the Re-wilding Scrutiny Inquiry

(Meeting ended at 6.42 pm)

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