

**Economy, Skills,
Transport and Environment
Scrutiny Board**

Thursday 19 November, 2020 at 5.30 pm

[Click this link to watch the meeting live](#)

Agenda

(Open to Public and Press)

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Members to declare:-
 - (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
 - (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.
3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September, 2020 as a correct record.
4. Reset and Recovery – Update presentation
5. Draft Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23

Date of next meeting: 4 February 2020

D Stevens
Chief Executive

Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillors Eaves, L Giles, Hackett, M Hussain, Rollins, Sandars and
Worsey.

**Agenda prepared by Deb Breedon
Democratic Services Unit
E-mail: deborah_breedon@sandwell.gov.uk**

This document is available in large print on request to the above telephone number. The document is also available electronically on the Committee Management Information System which can be accessed from the Council's web site on www.sandwell.gov.uk

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

Apologies for Absence

The Board will receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Board.

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

Declaration of Interests

Members to declare:-

- (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.

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

24th September, 2020 at 5.30 pm
Virtual meeting

Present: Councillor Rollins (Chair);
Councillors Eaves, L Giles, Hackett, M Hussain
and Worsey.

Apologies: Councillor Sandars.

In attendance: Dr Alison Knight, Executive Director
Neighbourhoods;
Alan Caddick, Director of Housing and
Communities;
Andy Miller, Strategic Planning and Transport
Manager;
Samantha Holder, Senior Planning Policy
Officer.

8/20 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June,
2020 be approved as a correct record.

9/20 **Reset and Recovery – Phase One Findings**

The Board received a report and presentation from the Executive Director Neighbourhoods to provide detail of the impact of Covid and Sandwell and greater detail on economic aspects of recovery to discuss.

Sandwell experiences of the pandemic mirrored that emerging nationally however the poverty in Sandwell had meant it had been vulnerable to the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic both in the Community and the economy. The Council had continued to deliver services and support the local economy despite the

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board – 24 September, 2020

challenges during this period, but there was a need to think about how to respond and develop the recovery plans.

The road map highlighted that initially crisis reporting had taken place, which moved into a period of consolidation and now there was a move to review the impact assessment and look at what needed to happen to change services moving forward.

The main messages from the Community Impact Group relating to national picture were the direct impact of Covid, major and unequal impacts on society:

- mental health/ personal relationships had deteriorated
- unhealthy behaviours were increasing – alcohol misuse decreased physical activity
- exacerbating the impact poor quality housing
- food insecurity and hardship
- children and young people were hardest hit
- exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities such as digital exclusion

Sandwell evidence highlighted

- Mental Health issues
- Food insecurity
- Digital Exclusion
- Household debt
- Neighbourhood stress - anti-social behaviour (ASB), Domestic abuse
- Health of BAME groups and impact on communities.
- 632 children were shielding
- big increase in volunteering, voluntary sector was under pressure but was working with the Council through the crisis
- some areas were harder hit by Covid and cases were rising
- in addition to personal long-term health, the risks included gender, older age, deprivation, overcrowding and ethnicity.
- Sandwell was a densely populated area, deprivation was widespread but concentrated in the central part of the Borough. The spatial distribution of the risk factors was uneven, particularly parts of Tipton, Central Wednesbury,

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board – 24 September, 2020

Central West Bromwich and Smethwick were emerging as vulnerable to Covid.

Key findings from phase 1 were that Covid had exacerbated existing weaknesses in Sandwell's community particularly poverty and deprivation and more needed to happen to engage with people in a culturally sensitive way, to do things differently and to address the underlying vulnerabilities.

In relation to the impact of Covid on the Sandwell local Economy, the Economic Impact Group focussed on Community Wealth and Economic resilience.

- The biggest impact was around social distancing and restrictions on opening.
- Sandwell was in recession; the epidemic had affected employment rates and business closures.
- The impact was higher in West Midlands, the level of furloughs was higher, the automotive industry has been affected (particularly the supply chain) and there was impact on the high street.
- There was particular impact on different type of skills.
- There was a 36% productivity drop due to closed premises.
- Places with entrepreneurial activities tended to recover quicker and there was a need to look at this in Sandwell.
- The Federation of small businesses in UK expected 25% of SMEs to close this year.
- 6.8% of people were self-employed and were particularly hard hit. Almost 14,000 self-employed people were vulnerable.
- 12.7% of jobs had been affected, with a large impact on young people and a drop in unique vacancies
- Concern around furlough ending in October and a further spike in redundancies.
- Digital exclusion for all age groups due to lockdown and deprivation factors.
- Not enough college or university places when young people return to education because there were no jobs or apprenticeships.

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board – 24 September, 2020

- February to July 2020 had seen a significant increase in unemployment, in spite of furloughing unemployment had more than doubled and was higher than the regional average, also universal credit (UC) claims had doubled.

Financial support had been put in place for SMEs, £55 million in grants had been awarded through the revenue and benefits team, many businesses had been contacted directly to remind them to apply. European programmes had been adapted to help with skills etc and discretionary grants utilised to top up those that had been unsuccessful with grants.

Sandwell was working with West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to try to move forward with schemes, develop further plans and to put support in place to help with jobs in the area.

The Board noted the challenges in Sandwell:

- the disproportionate impact on young people
- low skills base
- impact on over 50's
- skills and employment support demand would be different
- digital exclusion and poverty was still a major barrier
- mental health
- economic impact on BAME.

The key things themes emerging were

- digital exclusion
- wellbeing and mental health
- young people and their skills
- lifting community wealth
- communication with local people

The Board noted the next steps were to work on communicating the messages, to do more work on the thematic working groups and by mid- December consider the refreshed Corporate Plan.

The Board welcomed that the Community Wealth and Economic Resilience Board being set up and working alongside key partners and the business sector to make sure that wealth stayed

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board – 24 September, 2020

in Sandwell and that money was used to encourage jobs and economic growth to get through the recession in Sandwell.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- The impact from an economic perspective of the local lockdown. Local restrictions were quite limited, they had restricted people from going into other people's houses and to stay in their own home, the main impact had been on those that had been working who needed childcare.
- The wider new restrictions as of that week, meant that there would be earlier closures of hospitality and that businesses would have to ensure masks were worn and that they displayed posters showing QR codes to track and trace. There would be further economic impact, what this would be was not yet clear and there was a need to wait to see what happens.
- There was potential for a double impact on businesses if there was a no deal Brexit. People were worried and had started to buy in extra food. The Council was looking at what needed to be done to revisit food hubs to support and protect vulnerable citizens.
- The Board was advised that Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) had been supported throughout lockdown. The SLT position was a separate issue to the reset and recovery plan and was for SLT to consider, a meeting SLT Board would be taking place soon. A further report would be going to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board.
- In relation to the future of the high street, on-line shopping had progressed and accelerated the need to look at high streets and Town Funds. The Board was assured that nothing had gone on hold, there had been some delays with Government guidance, however the three Town Funds bids for £25 million were progressing and a lot of work was going on in the three Town Boards and the Sandwell Town Superboard would meet soon. The Executive Director assured Members that an update would be brought to a future meeting.

**Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board –
24 September, 2020**

- Digital exclusion had been identified as an issue for some young people in the impact assessment, previously young people had accessed IT in libraries, at school or colleges. The issue had been highlighted because the spaces which they normally access were not available. In terms of social media, many young people were able to keep up on their phones, but in terms of work, lessons and job applications they did not have access. There were schemes to access equipment with education services and funding made available for that but there was more to think about making space in the future.
- Approximately 60% of SMEs businesses had adapted to on line services, but there was a need to influence through the business growth package to help businesses and our residents to access them.
- There was an increased need for mental health services, more work was happening to support and signpost people through public health, adult and health services. There was more work and activities through the voluntary sector to help people get back into work, and there was more to be done to build in confidence and working behaviours and integrate into customer support packages,
- The Chair informed members that there was a joint session on mental health planned in October and that the Board could look further down the line at economy and employment.

The Chair welcomed the comprehensive presentation and responses to questions and indicated that it would be beneficial to drill down into specific things arising from the information, such as lessons learnt and things that had to happen due to restrictions, to identify the better ways forward for services in Sandwell.

Resolved

- 1) That the Board receive an update report regarding the Towns Fund.

**Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board –
24 September, 2020**

10/20 **Community Wealth Building & Inclusive Economy Action Plan**

The Board received a report from the Service Manager Business Excellence and noted that Community Wealth building was an important pillar to ensuring an inclusive economy for our communities, and an essential driver for Sandwell's recovery from Covid19 and any impact on the economy particularly for Sandwell residents.

The Board noted that views had been sought from residents, voluntary services and businesses and that the team had worked with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) which carried out a diagnostic of community wealth activity and developed recommendations to deliver improvement, as well as noting strengths around Sandwell's healthy voluntary and community sector for the Council and its strategic partners to build on.

In Sandwell it was found that only 15% of spend in communities was local spend, some areas such as Preston were achieving up to 50%, the Board noted that there was room for improvement.

Sandwell's Inclusive Economy Deal was agreed at full Council 10 March 2020. Sandwell was the first Council in the country to agree an Inclusive Economy Deal to create a better Sandwell and develop wealth for all. Three deals had been developed: A resident deal, a business deal and a voluntary sector deal. It was about creating and retaining community wealth and improving individual and community wellbeing across the six Towns.

The Council had developed the community wealth and inclusive economy action plan, the joint plan ensured there was clear synergy and a focus on the real priorities. The key elements of the plan were looking at some of the opportunities in greater detail and the community wealth building, the economic resilience delivery officer group were developing the programme using existing strengths, looking at gaps and at recovery after Covid to improve things for people of Sandwell.

A Strategic Community Wealth and Economic Resilience Board had been established, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Skills and Employment and involving voluntary sector and key anchor organisations in Sandwell to have oversight of the agenda and

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board – 24 September, 2020

provide the forum for real and effective collaboration on the issues and actions that will support community wealth building in Sandwell and aid its economic recovery.

The Board noted the key themes and proposed activities of the action plan:

- Sandwell as a community wealth building council;
- Pillar 1 – progressive procurement of goods and services
- Pillar 2 – Fair employment and just labour markets;
- Pillar 3 – Socially productive use of land and assets;
- Pillar 4 – Making financial power work for local places;
- Plural ownership of the local economy.

The Board noted that Covid-19 had influenced the development of the plan. WMCA citizen's panel of 36 people had met virtually during the summer. The panel was made up of people from different backgrounds, age and ethnicity to discuss their experiences of Covid. Three had been selected from Sandwell to talk about a range of topics such as health or young people.

- Six priorities arising were:
 - Getting back to normal safely
 - Health care
 - Mental Health
 - Education- preparing for children to go back to school
 - Employment – creating new jobs and skill sets
 - Promoting and supporting business – buy local

Cllr Worsey and the Chair welcomed the presentation indicating that the much work had been done and that this was an excellent summary. Sandwell was in a really good place to progress this work.

The Executive Director Neighbourhoods advised the Board that Sandwell had been invited by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) to present the work it was doing as best practice.

Resolved

- (1) That the Economy Skills Transport and Environment Board note the progress being made and invite a further report in Summer 2021.

**Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board –
24 September, 2020**

11/20 Planning White Paper – Planning for the Future

The Board received a report from the Strategic Planning and Transport Manager to outline the proposed plans to streamline and modernise the planning system, members were advised the consultation would finish at the end of October 2020.

The Board note the following main messages and comments from the report:

- The proposals were a major move away from the current planning process, the applications would not be considered on their merit, this was a move towards developments getting approval in principle with much less involvement from Local Authorities.
- There would be a zoning system for land, but it was unclear how applications would be judged.
- In renewal areas there would be a ‘presumption’ for development, effectively fast-tracking permission.
- There would be a heavily revised Local Plan process; the white paper would end the need for the 12 documents that made up the local plan; the new local plan process would need to be completed in 30 months before change would commence.
- Section 106 agreements would end, and more funding would be drawn from the Community Infrastructure Levy. Essentially this would be a tax on development for housing and retail above a certain size, currently set our own levy locally this would be set nationally.
- The planning system would no longer require a duty to co-operate between neighbouring authorities on development location, significant impacts and environmental protection.
- Design codes would be introduced, and a body set up to assist the Local Authority to design, this would have resource implications for Local Authorities.
- There were concerns that there would be an increase in developments permitted automatically and would reduce the ability of the authority to debate the principle, they would only be able to influence the detail of it.
- Open data would be required– digitising this would be resource heavy.
- A Chief Officer post would need to be established to deal with design and place making, an urban design professional to

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board – 24 September, 2020

draw up bar codes.

- The implications:
 - Regulatory and enforcement, checking with the code after it was built.
 - By moving away from Section 106, to infrastructure levy would be payable once houses were occupied.
 - infrastructure development would have to be paid upfront by the Council and would be claimed back from development receipts.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- There was a lack of detail in the white paper
- There were concerns around proposals, resource implications and protection zones
- The Government had published the paper in the middle of a pandemic - the worst time to carry out this consultation
- No detail about employment land and support, there were implications for developments other than housing
- This would be a significant shift in the way planning was delivered
- The Government's national development policies would be a reduction in local planning control. The local plan design codes did not consider if there was no local buy in for the design codes.
- Communities needed to agree and were being consulted about the white paper proposals, but some people would struggle to get on line to complete the consultation.
- Public consultation at local plan stage would be undertaken online / digitally; some residents would have difficulty doing so in Sandwell if they didn't have digital access, and this was a significant risk for local involvement.

The Chair requested that all of the risks and implications raised in the discussion be included in the consultation response to Government. She highlighted that the Authority needed answers to the big questions, particularly around public digital access to respond to consultations and where extra resources were to be found.

**Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board –
24 September, 2020**

Resolved:-


1. That the Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board request the Executive Director Neighbourhood to include comments about risks and implications in the response to the consultation.

(Meeting ended at 18:51 pm)

Contact Officer: Deb Breedon Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3896

REPORT TO ECONOMY SKILLS TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY BOARD

19 November 2020

Subject:	Reset and Recovery Update
Cabinet Portfolio:	Cabinet Member for Skills and Employment
Director(s):	Executive Director of Neighbourhoods – Dr Alison Knight
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Dr Alison Knight Alison_knight@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board:

1. Consider and comment on the update presentation.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board will receive a presentation from the Executive Director – Neighbourhoods to update the Board on matters relating to communities and economy in the Councils reset and recovery framework.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic with our communities, stakeholders and partners will have a positive impact on all ambitions contained in the Vision

Executive Director of Neighbourhoods – Dr Alison Knight

Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board 19 November

Item 4 - Reset and recovery Update



17



Highway Services

Current demand on services

- Statutory services continue to operate
- Service levels at pre-Covid levels
- Traffic levels likely to reduce allowing traffic sensitive work to continue
- Emergency active travel work under review
- New town centre ,travel schemes are being delivered to tight timescales
- Parking enforcement in place and re-emphasised



18



Development Planning & Building Control

- **Current demands on service**
 - General services continue to operate
 - Significant demand on Land Charges due to pent up demand factors and stamp duty
 - Suspension of H&S at sports grounds and planning committee visits
- **Business continuity arrangements**
 - Remote working to continue
 - Most applications domestic so can be viewed from street
 - Building control requesting video and pictures to aid supervision of sites
 - Planning committee now held virtually still operating effectively using technology
 - Staff attend council house for essential activity only (printing/ scanning/ post/ legal notices)
 - If staff reduce due to COVID phased suspensions of services will be considered
 - Staff can also be redeployed with the service should the need arise



Spatial Planning and Growth

Current demand on service

- No substantive change in operations – homeworking to continue and service provision as existing.

Business continuity arrangements

- Expectation that Business Growth Team will need to support business grants process
- Office access limited to essential access only
- Ongoing reviews based on demand



20



Waste Services

Current Demand on Service

- 27 Staff self isolating
- Services experiencing 30% higher demand requiring additional support
- If further staff are ill will result in disruption

Business continuity arrangements

- Serco plans for agreement with senior officers
- Daily briefings with client and contractor
- Serco updating on staff
- Phased suspension of services option if necessary
- Impact on street cleaning if actioned
- Joint comms updates to residents and members
- H&S in place



21



Strategic Assets and Land

Current demand on services

- **Markets**
 - Essential retailers open only
- **Assets**
 - Corporate buildings open for essential services
 - FM to provide essential services to buildings
- **Urban design building services**
 - Construction remains open
- **Estates**
 - Existing offer remains in place




22



REPORT TO ECONOMY, SKILLS, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY BOARD

19 November 2020

Subject:	Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23
Cabinet Portfolio:	Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills - Councillor Singh
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services - Lesley Hagger
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Kelly Thomas, Employment and Skills Services Manager E: kelly_thomas@sandwell.gov.uk M: 07977270823

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board:

1. Considers the proposed Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23 attached as Appendix 1.
2. Any observations or comments be referred to the Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills and taken into account when the Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23 is considered for approval by Cabinet in December.

1 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Board is requested to consider the Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23 (attached as Appendix 1).

2 **IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030**

2.1 **Ambition1**

Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.

Ambition 3

Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.

Ambition 4

Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.

Ambition 10

Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

3 **BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The Sandwell Skills Strategy is an overarching document which sets out the borough's skills challenges and key priorities. The strategy is aligned to the WMCA Regional Skills plan which similarly sets out the region's skills challenges and key priorities.
- 3.2 The Sandwell Skills strategy brings localised challenges to the forefront and aspirations for the future and is a collaborative approach delivered by key stakeholders from the Employment and Skills sector.
- 3.3 The strategy highlights the requirement for a series of actions plans, both sectoral and for specific cohorts and challenges. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the plan in development as an immediate concern is Reset and Recovery to support actions aimed at mitigating the specific challenges caused by the impact of the pandemic.

4 **THE CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 The skills strategy was in development prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data has been used from before the pandemic to baseline the skills picture as a reference to reflect progression from the pre-pandemic position.
- 4.2 The key skills challenges highlighted for the borough include:

- Low skill levels in the population, with fewer people qualified to Level 4+ and more people with no qualifications, compared to other areas
- Issues of poverty for those in employment, driven by low wage levels
- Skills shortages faced by employers, particularly in roles that require advanced and/or higher skills
- Lower attainment by young people through early years, primary and secondary education.

- 4.3 The pandemic has negatively impacted skills and employment in Sandwell since unemployment rates have increased and accessibility of provision for those digitally excluded has been exacerbated. Brexit also has the potential to impact on skills demand and infrastructure.
- 4.4 Additional challenges highlighted within the Reset and Recovery action plan include:
- Large scale redundancies and a shift in growth sectors
 - An increased need for digital skills and access to equipment
 - Young people facing more competition for opportunities
 - Mental health and lack of resilience.
- 4.5 The strategy sets out the borough's skills aspirations including improving skills attainment, moving more residents into sustainable employment and more people moving into higher positions in employment. There is also an aspiration for businesses to have full access to a skilled and talented local workforce.
- 4.6 A performance management framework will be developed to monitor the key performance indicators and progress towards outcomes of the strategy. Intelligence will be aligned to the action plan for Community Wealth Building and Economic Resilience Board.

5 **CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with a number of groups including residents, businesses, voluntary organisations, Educational establishments, Schools and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 5.2 Workshops have taken place with groups of residents to shape the delivery of the strategy and the feasibility of the recommended actions.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.

- 6.1 There are no alternative options, the strategy has been carefully considered with no other feasible alternative options.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The delivery of the Strategy is predominantly funded by external sources including the Education Skills Funding Agency, European Social Fund, West Midlands Combined Authority, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education. The Sandwell Skills deal was referred to in the Inclusive Economy deal as £69m.
- 7.2 The majority of the funding and grants referenced to deliver the strategy are not owned by the Council, they are funding that comes into the borough into a range of providers such as the Colleges and training providers. The funding the Council is formally responsible for the Adult Education Budget contract delivered by Sandwell Adult Family learning and we are a delivery partner in a European Social Fund contract, Black Country Impact.
- 7.3 Facilitation, co-ordination and monitoring of the Strategy and action plans will be conducted by the Council utilising existing resources.
- 7.4 Activities of internal Council teams also contribute to the delivery of the Strategy with a mixture of Council core budget and external funding resources used.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Governance of the Strategy will be delivered by the Employment and Skills Partnership chaired by the Executive Director of Childrens' Services, with representation from key stakeholders within the Employment and Skills sector.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An equality impact assessment (EIA) screening has been carried out. As the outcome found that there are no adverse impacts on protected characteristics, a full EIA is not required for this proposal.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 There are no specific data protection implications arising from the content of this report.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.
- 11.2 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with - to identify and assess any significant risks associated with this decision/project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.
- 11.3 A risk assessment is being carried out to assess the risks associated to deliver the Strategy. Any risks identified will be addressed with a series of actions to mitigate the risk. At present 3 risks have been identified as significant and are in respect of:
- Sustainable officer resources to deliver and monitor progression and outcomes of the skills strategy
 - Partner engagement to co-deliver on the Strategy
 - Achieving good quality data as skills needs are frequently changing due to the evolving nature of the pandemic.

Measures will be put in place to manage these risks to an acceptable level.

- 11.4 Risk will be continuously monitored through the performance management framework to ensure we meet the needs of residents. The development of the Strategy and action plans is good practice by increasing partnership working and utilising collaborative working practices for issue identification and solution focussed actions. The Strategy provides a collective skills vision for Sandwell with a shared responsibility to respond to the skills challenge.
- 11.5 If the Cabinet Report is not approved and the performance management framework is not developed, then the local authority would fail to respond to the skills challenges in a collaborative approach with key partners and stakeholders.

12 **SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

- 12.1 The over-arching Strategy covers the period 2020-23. A series of action plans for specific themes and cohorts of individuals will sit underneath the strategy. The action plans will be reviewed at regular intervals to respond to new developments and opportunities identified.
- 12.2 A new strategy will be developed in 2023 prior to the scheduled period covered by the existing strategy.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

13.1 The Strategy contributes to the health and wellbeing of residents due to the association of positive health benefits as a result of employment and skills outcomes. Mental health and resilience has been highlighted as a key priority in the Strategy, to ensure any employment and skills provisions developed incorporate this need.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

15 There are no implications on any council managed property or land in relation to this report.

16 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 The Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23 sets out the key skills challenges, opportunities and strategic priorities for the borough. The Strategy has been shaped in a collaborative approach with contributions from key stakeholders to tackle borough wide skills barriers and maximise local opportunities.

17 BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 **Reset and Recovery Strategic Plan 2020-21**

18 APPENDICES:

18.1 **Sandwell Skills Strategy 2020-23**

Lesley Hagger
Executive Director of Children's Services

Sandwell Skills Strategy

DRAFT

2020 - 2023



Contents

1. Foreword – Cllr Rajbir Singh

2. Executive summary

3. Opportunities and Priorities – linked to:

- Key ambitions from the Sandwell Vision
- Sandwell Inclusive Economy Deal
- WMCA Regional Skills Plan (RSP)
- Employment and Skills funding
 - Adult Education Budget (AEB)
 - European Social Fund (ESF)
 - Shared Prosperity Fund

4. Skills for Future

5. Policy and Labour Market Context

6. Key actions

7. Delivering our ambition:

- a. A joint commitment
- b. Next Steps - Action plans for growth sectors and areas of most need

(1) Foreword: Cllr Rajbir Singh

I am delighted to be presenting the Sandwell Skills Strategy, a first in our Local Authorities history. It is both ambitious and challenging as our residents deserve a skills environment where they can thrive and benefit from local investment in the area.

The development of skills is a vital part of all aspects of life. We recognise that those who have a good level of skills are generally more likely to find sustainable employment and earn higher wages. Skills development also has a positive effect on physical and mental health. We recognise the importance of upskilling our local people in work too, giving them the knowledge and confidence to progress within the workplace.

The development of skills is important to business development and growth. We want Sandwell businesses to thrive, to increase their productivity and be able to offer increased wages. It is essential that our workforce can support businesses to compete in the local economy. We encourage local companies to help shape the skills training that is delivered to ensure that local people are best placed to gain the future opportunities.

We are committed to looking at skills needs for the future and we are driving skills development in areas such as the environment and digital. We recognise that these skills will be key to a much wider range of employment opportunities of the future and want our residents to be leading the way. Skills provision needs to be flexible to support individual needs as well as responding to the changes in the economy. We are working with funders to make sure that Sandwell's needs are recognised.

The aims of the Sandwell Skills Strategy support the Inclusive Economy Deal and Community wealth building agendas, providing the best support for individuals to benefit from regeneration opportunities. It also contributes to the wider Sandwell Council priorities such as ‘best start in life’ and ‘thriving communities’. The collaborative approach of partners; working together to the benefit of Sandwell residents will ensure the greatest success. This total commitment and alignment of resources is paramount to enable Sandwell residents to achieve and excel.

(2) Executive Summary

Sandwell is a diverse borough with a rich history of traditional industries, practical skills and deep-set community values. It is a place where generations have followed in the footsteps of their ancestors to support their families. With the advancement of technology and the diversification of business, Sandwell residents too need to adapt and gain skills to support them in the future economy.

Although Sandwell is already moving forwards towards these ambitions, there are still areas which require additional attention. They include:

- Low skill levels in the population, with fewer people qualified to Level 4+ and more people with no qualifications, compared to other areas
- Issues of poverty for those in employment, driven by low wage levels
- Skills shortages faced by employers, particularly in roles that require advanced and/or higher skills
- Lower attainment by young people through early years, primary and secondary education

There is much good work already underway to address these challenges. However, some of the issues require additional focus to transform our labour market and meet the needs of our businesses. We also recognise the growth sectors of future will require skills that are more specialist.

Sandwell partners are committed to developing key actions that will support the skills agenda of the borough. The Sandwell Skills Plan has been developed to lead this work. The main aims of the plan are:

- Improve skills attainment
- More people to move into employment
- More people to move into higher skilled jobs
- More skilled employees available to support business

In March 2020 the country was hit by a pandemic of unprecedented scale. The COVID-19 virus is the biggest threat the UK has faced in the modern world. It has caused thousands of deaths, affected the lives of everyone and has had a devastating effect on business.

The employment and skills needs that emerged from this pandemic will need to be addressed before we are able to focus on our long-term vision. They include:

- Large scale redundancies and a shift in growth sectors
- An increased need for digital skills and access to equipment
- Young people facing the more competition for opportunities
- Mental Health, wellbeing and resilience support

(3) Opportunities and Priorities

There are several wider Strategies and Plans that need to be considered when looking at the key Opportunities and Priorities for Skills in the borough. **Sandwell Council's 2030 vision** sets out the key ambitions to achieve a thriving and prosperous community. **The Sandwell Inclusive Economy Deal** outlines the key opportunities for local economic growth and outlines the specific priorities for the development of Skills. In wider terms, Sandwell needs to align its actions to the **WMCA Regional Skills Plan (RSP)** for the benefit of the region.

The Sandwell 2030 Vision



The Sandwell 2030 vision has been developed to focus on ten key ambitions for the future and aims to unite communities, businesses and public services to strive for the best outcomes for all.

Sandwell's Vision 2030

In 2030, Sandwell is a thriving, optimistic and resilient community.

It's where we call home and where we're proud to belong - where we choose to bring up our families, where we feel safe and cared for, enjoying good health, rewarding work, feeling connected and valued in our neighbourhoods and communities, confident in the future, and benefiting fully from a revitalised West Midlands.

Ambition 1



Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.

Ambition 2



Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.

Ambition 3



Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.

Ambition 4



Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.

Ambition 5



Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.

Ambition 6



We have excellent and affordable public transport that connects us to all local centres and to jobs in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, the airport and the wider West Midlands.

Ambition 7



We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes.

Ambition 8



Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.

Ambition 9



Sandwell has become a location of choice for industries of the future where the local economy and high performing companies continue to grow.

Ambition 10



Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

Find out more
www.sandwell.gov.uk/vision2030

The main ambitions that relate to skills are:

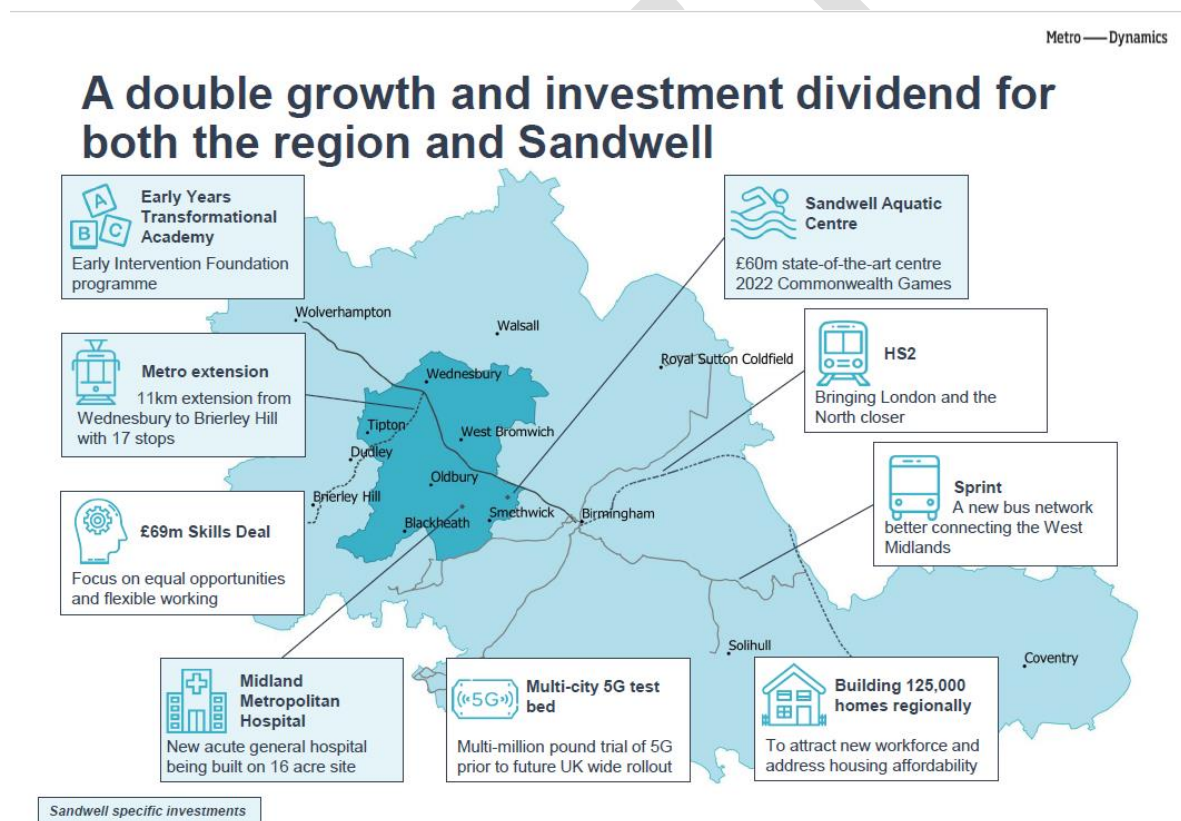
Ambition 1 – Working with individuals and their families to encourage high aspirations for the future. Through the engagement of secondary schools, we can provide more information about skills that can support future employment. Recognising that we are all individuals with different needs and supporting those differences to enable everyone to access the opportunities available.

Ambition 3 – Supporting Sandwell's workforce and young people to gain the skills and experience needed to take advantage of the opportunities available. To ensure that they understand the local business community and the changing economy which will enable them to work towards the jobs of the future.

Ambition 4 – Supporting our children to benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education. Looking at options to support different learning styles and enabling families to be more proactive in providing support throughout their child's school career.

The Sandwell Inclusive Economy Deal

Inclusive growth is also referred to as sustainable economy, social economy, inclusive economy. All these terms relate to maximising the outcomes for the local area in terms of both economic and community benefits. The Sandwell Inclusive Economy Deal pulls together the key opportunities for the borough and looks at the way in which we can gain the maximum impact from them. Some of the opportunities that we want to maximise within the borough are the Sandwell Aquatics Centre and Commonwealth Games, Midland Metropolitan Hospital, Metro Extension, HS2 and the Multi City 5G test bed. The key opportunities for Sandwell's growth can be seen on the map below.



The Inclusive Economy State of the Borough report highlights some of the challenges that Sandwell faces. In terms of skills there is a recognition that aspirations of residents are on average higher, but they are often not aligned to the opportunities that are available locally, with a large proportion of young people wanting to work within the Digital

sector. It is also recognised that aspirations are lowest amongst young people aged 13-14 years old and particularly white British/Irish boys.

Sandwell's local economy is unable to attract high-value jobs due to the large number of residents with low or no qualifications. This in turn means that the average wages for jobs within the borough are much lower than our neighbours.

The Inclusive Economy Deal has brought together residents, businesses and public services to pledge their commitment to supporting and developing the borough to become more prosperous.

Regional Skills Plan

The West Midlands Combined Authority is the largest economy in the UK. The region's young population, excellent connectivity and strengths in advanced manufacturing and digital provide the baseline for future growth and prosperity. It is recognised that to maximise the opportunity for growth, a focus on the development and retention of skills is needed.

In response to this, the WMCA and its partners have worked together to develop the Regional Skills Plan. Its main aims for the region are:

- More people to move into employment
- More people to move into higher skilled jobs
- More skilled employees available to support business growth and productivity
- All communities to benefit from the region's economic growth
- An agile and responsive skills system that is more aligned to the needs of business and individuals

The Skills plan identifies that people, skills and employment are some of the key foundations of productivity and enablers of growth. Twelve key sectors have been identified as those which shape the regions success.

They are:

- Low Carbon technology
- Aerospace
- Logistics/transport technology
- Metals and materials
- Life sciences
- Professional skills
- Rail

- Construction
- Creative
- Food and drinks
- Automotive
- Tourism

Sandwell is in full support of the growth sectors for the region and will encourage skills development within these fields.

Employment and Skills Funding

There are several funding streams that support the Employment and Skills agenda within Sandwell. The programmes associated enable residents to gain the skills and experience needed to progress onto Education and Employment. The most significant funding streams are detailed below.

Adult Education Budget (AEB)

Utilise the Adult Education Budget to maximise the impact for Sandwell's skills development and to address gaps that have been realised through the changing economy.

The devolution of the AEB funding is an exciting development and will mean that the provision is more appropriate to the needs of the West Midlands and specifically Sandwell. As part of the West Midlands Combined Authority we can influence the way funding is commissioned and champion the specific skills needs that our borough has.

Understanding the landscape and mapping the offer that now exists is vital to ensuring that Sandwell residents gain the best outcomes. We are working with providers to understand their offer and the way in which they link to labour market opportunities. The programmes that are on available aim to improve skills and focus on the employment sectors where jobs are available.

We are developing Innovation projects to support specific groups including those with learning disabilities and mental health. The innovation programmes will utilise the core principles of the AEB funding with added flexibilities to enable a wider range of learners to achieve.

The European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2014 to 2020

The European Social Fund (ESF) is part of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Growth Programme for England in 2014 to 2020. In England, the Department for Work and Pensions Managing Authority manages this. The Programme's priorities in England to increase labour market participation, promote social inclusion and develop the skills of the potential and existing workforce. The ESF is designed to increase sustainable economic and social inclusion in the European Union, by helping people who have difficulties finding work, and improving the skills of the workforce.

The ESF is Europe's main instrument for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens. It works by investing in Europe's human capital – its workers, its young people and all those seeking a job. ESF financing of EUR 10 billion a year is improving job prospects for millions of Europeans, in particular those who find it difficult to get work. Due to an underspend across the fund, the allocation is being extended until December 2023, with successful projects being able to apply to deliver until this time. It is anticipated that the Shared Prosperity Fund will begin delivery before this point to ensure that there are no gaps in provision.

Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Government have outlined plans to create a 'United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund' which will replace Structural Funds. This fund is intended to "reduce inequality between communities across the four nations" and to deliver "sustainable, inclusive growth". They promised that "£500 million of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be used to give disadvantaged people the skills they need to make a success of life".

Very few details about the operation of the Shared Prosperity Fund have been released. In the March 2020 budget, the government committed to setting out further plans at the next spending review. There are concerns that the level of funding promised by the UK government will not be equivalent to the Structural Funds. The UK government has however

committed that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will operate in a way that respects the devolution settlements, and allocations should be available at a very local level.

(4) Skills for the Future

There is a need for Sandwell to plan and look towards the skills that will be needed by the general workforce.

- Digital skills – Sandwell Digital Strategy 2018-2021 outlines the need to upskill the workforce to be digitally led, give improved access to services through the use of technology and support digital inclusion within our communities; enabling them to trust technology and participate in the digital world. Looking to the future it is anticipated that automation and artificial intelligence will become more significant to business development, as well as the growth of areas such as coding and programming.
- Green Skills – Green Skills can be defined as “the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society” (Cedefop, 2012). Green skills will be needed by all sectors and at all levels in the workforce. Some specific Green Jobs of the future include: Water conservation, Biofuels, environmental remediation, Sustainability, Energy auditors, Recycling, Electric Vehicles, Solar power, and Wind energy.
- STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) – These programmes aim to promote innovation and critical thinking. It uses engineering or technology as a basis to develop creativity and problem solving. These skills will support a better transition to work and real-world experiences.

(5) Policy and Labour Market Context (Jan 2020)

Sandwell is made up of a range of diverse communities and businesses. The heritage of the area is longstanding, with many residents descending from generations of Sandwell citizens. It is however an area of vast need with some areas having lower levels of prosperity and skills.

Context

Sandwell is a growing borough with clear economic advantages a wide range of regeneration opportunities planned for its future development. Despite this it faces several key labour market challenges, notably that our residents are not benefitting equally from the economic growth that we have seen and need additional support to move forward.

Low employment rates

The employment rates within Sandwell have significantly increased since the recession hit and stands at 70.7%. Although this is better than it has been for several years, there is still a gap between Sandwell and the wider areas with the West Midlands at 73.9% and England at 75.8%.

The slow recovery in labour demand since the recession of 2008 could be a contributing factor towards the low employment rate. It is also thought that the higher number of people with low/no skills and larger ethnic minority populations could impact on the figures as they are likely to have more barriers in finding suitable employment.

High levels of Unemployment

The level of unemployment within Sandwell has significantly decreased over the last 10 years with 4.9% classified as unemployed. This is in line with the wider Black Country but higher than the West Midlands at 3.8% and Great Britain at 2.9%

Amongst those aged 25 to 49 years old, the figure has also decreased. The unemployment rate is 5.0% for this group, which is significantly higher than 4.1% in the West Midlands and 3.1% in Great Britain

A decreasing number of jobs

Nationally there is an upward trend in the number of total jobs within the economy. This is replicated in Sandwell where the total number of jobs has risen from 132,000 in 2017 to 136,000 in 2018. There is however a need to enable residents to travel outside of the borough to gain the best employment options.

A large and growing, diverse population

The largest Black Country local authority, Sandwell has almost 328,500 residents and is scheduled to grow faster than the Black Country, regional and national averages with growth of 8.4% by 2030.

Sandwell has a young age profile with over 40% of residents under 30, compared to around 30% in the UK, and 15% of residents over the age of 65, which is below the UK average of 18.2%.

The borough is diverse with almost 40% of residents from an ethnic minority, far surpassing the regional and UK average of 18.8% and 14.0%, respectively.

This young and diverse population is a huge advantage and could help to grow the future economy. The challenge is in engaging with these young people to unlock their potential and inspire them to aim high. Youth unemployment has been an issue within Sandwell but the vast range of support on offer to this group is steadily bringing this down.

School attainment is challenging but improving

For **early years**, there are low levels of school readiness with 66.4% of children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception, compared to over 70% regionally and nationally.

During **childhood**, the attainment gap between Sandwell pupils and the national average grows from primary to secondary school. It is around four percentage points at Key Stage 2, increasing to over ten percentage points at Key Stage 4. Although the attainment is improving slightly, there young people in Sandwell that are leaving school with lower levels of skills than other parts of the country.

High numbers of residents with no qualifications

A higher share of **adults** have no qualifications at 20.3% compared to regional (10.2%) and national (7.7%) averages. The number of residents that have achieved a level 2 qualification is very low at 55.8% of the population compared with 71.7% for the West Midlands and 75.6% for Great Britain.

A high number of residents with low paid jobs

Worklessness is common with higher levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, whilst almost 30% of employee jobs earn below the Real Living Wage compared to 22.9% in England. Equally, there are challenges in work for younger people with almost 30% of employee jobs earning below the living wage, compared to 24.7% in the region and 22.9% in England.

Vacancies within the Borough described by Employers as 'hard to fill'

There are a high number of jobs within Sandwell that are classed as high skilled. Within the Black Country there are approximately 32% of jobs that require a level 4 qualification or above. This exceeds the population attainment level, with only 21% of residents qualified to level 4 or above. It is expected that the changing economy will increase the number of vacancies requiring higher level skills.

Different strengths and challenges amongst the six towns

Although Sandwell is one borough it had very distinct towns that can often operate as different communities. They have different strengths and weaknesses that need to be recognised for Sandwell as a whole, to develop and grow.

<p style="text-align: center;">Oldbury:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highest job growth • high business growth • low skills profile. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Rowley Regis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growing slowly with an older age profile • modest job growth • low aspirations. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Smethwick</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most densely populated and youngest town • lower than average job growth • high proportion of residents with no/low skills • young urban renters
<p style="text-align: center;">Tipton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high skills levels but lower than average job growth. • Smallest town • young, relatively fast-growing population 	<p style="text-align: center;">Wednesbury</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growing slower than average • higher levels of mid-level skills. 	<p style="text-align: center;">West Bromwich</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • largest town • older age profile • high employment and skills levels.

(6) Key Actions

A shared ambition to realise change

Within Sandwell there are a wide range of partners that support and drive the development of local skills and work collectively to maximise the outcomes. These include Sandwell MBC, DWP, Sandwell College, The NHS, The Community and Voluntary sector, and many more.

To have the greatest impact on skills within the Sandwell Borough and to maintain a clear focus, a set of key actions has been developed. These include those to tackle the biggest challenges for Sandwell and those that will support the skills development of the wider region. Underneath these key actions will be a series of specific activities that will help to improve Sandwell's outcomes.

The key actions that have been identified are:

1. Reduce the number of residents with no/low qualifications and increase those with level 4 and above qualifications to close the gap with West Midlands and England
2. Increase the skills provision for those with Disabilities and Mental Health
3. Prepare our young people for future life and work
4. Create a local network of specialists, technical education and training
5. Accelerate the take up of good quality apprenticeships
6. Deliver inclusive growth by giving more people the skills to get and sustain good jobs and careers
7. Strengthen collaboration between partners to support achieving more collectively

KEY ACTION 1

Reduce the number of residents with no/low qualifications and increase those with level 4 and above qualifications to close the gap with West Midlands and England

A large number of young people have no or low skills, leaving mainstream schooling without any GCSE's. Many working age residents (18-64) have no or low skills. This reduced the opportunities that are available to the and in turn, the earnings that they will receive.

A lower proportion of working age residents have NVQ level 4 or higher (roughly a degree level qualification or higher), at 21.1%. This is approximately 18 percentage points lower than the UK average (39.2%) and lower than the Black Country (24.5%), West Midlands Combined Authority (30.5%) and Regional (33.1%) averages.

Some key actions that could support this include:

- Widen the delivery of English and Maths provision through Adult Education Providers
- Better promote the opportunities available via the Adult Education Budget (AEB) for Sandwell residents
- Develop higher level skills provision within the borough to support wider careers pathways
- Create a learning pathway from Community and Voluntary Sector support through to formal learning
- Make higher level skills more accessible with the borough with a university presence established

KEY ACTION 2

Increase the skills provision for those with Disabilities and Mental Health

Sandwell has a growing number of residents that identify themselves as having a disability and/or mental health. This can be linked with the level of deprivation within the borough. Disabled people who are not in employment are often classified as economically inactive rather than unemployed which can affect the level of support that they receive. Disabled people have higher unemployment rates compared with the total working-age population. There is a need to provide additional support and varied pathways to enable them to gain skills and enter the labour market.

There has also been an increase in the number of people suffering from mental health conditions, both in and out of employment. There needs to be some additional support to allow them to gain and maintain opportunities.

Some key actions that could support this include:

- Development of more Internship opportunities within Sandwell Businesses
- Create Supported apprenticeship opportunities that can be delivered at the learner's level
- Joint working with the WMCA to run a Disability pilot in Sandwell
- Job Carving to create jobs which are more tailored to the skills and needs of the individual
- A retention service with capacity to support Sandwell employees who develop mental health issues to maintain employment

KEY ACTION 3

Prepare our young people for future life and work

Sandwell has a higher proportion of young people than the national average which means we could have a competitive advantage for the future jobs and earnings. Unfortunately, our young people are not reaching the same levels of educational attainment as their peers during their school life.

For early years, there are low levels of school readiness with 66.4% of children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception, compared to over 70% regionally and nationally.

During childhood, the attainment gap between Sandwell pupils and the national average grows from primary to secondary school. It is around four percentage points at Key Stage 2, increasing to over ten percentage points at Key Stage 4.

Some key actions that could support this include:

- Provide more support for parents of 0-5-year olds to get their children ready for education
- Look at alternative/additional measures that can support the increase of attainment levels in compulsory education (Key stage one and two)
- Actively engage in the West Midlands Career Learning Hub to support and develop an all age careers offer
- Improve the focus and impact of career education to young people
- Inspire more young people and encourage them to access new local and regional opportunities
- Raise awareness of local opportunities and highlight career paths from an early age

KEY ACTION 4

Create a network of specialists, technical education and training

The profile of employers across the West Midlands such as advanced manufacturing, construction and building technologies gives a good basis for strengthening demand for advanced and higher-level skills. We want to encourage our residents to aim high and think outside the borough to gain the best skills and employment opportunities. Some key actions that could support this include:

- Promote work experience opportunities to improve the work readiness of Sandwell residents
- Engage employers to drive skills provision to meet business needs
- Support the development of new skills solutions to meet the ambitions of the West Midlands Local Industrial Strategy
- Make links between local schools and higher education establishments to provide insight to specialist/technical careers

KEY ACTION 5

Accelerate the take up of good quality apprenticeships

The numbers of people taking up apprenticeship opportunities has fallen in recent times but there are many industries that have skills gaps and an aging workforce. It is important for Sandwell that we support local people to gain skills and work experience that will enable them to benefit from opportunities. Some key actions that could support this include:

- Maximise the levy investment within Sandwell including the development of existing staff and supporting future recruitment
- Transfer of levy funding to smaller businesses to support their staff and business development
- Promote the benefits of apprenticeships and encourage the take up by local businesses and residents
- Support young people to access pre-apprenticeship provision on their journey towards skilled employment
- Work with businesses within the growth sectors to develop apprenticeship opportunities to support future workforce planning

KEY ACTION 6

Deliver inclusive growth by giving more people the skills to get and sustain good jobs and careers

Sandwell and the wider West Midlands is set to benefit from a range of regeneration projects that will include the Sandwell Aquatics Centre (as part of the Commonwealth Games 2022), the Midland Metropolitan Hospital, High Speed Rail (HS2) and a variety of housing initiatives. It is vital that Sandwell residents benefit from the apprenticeship and employment opportunities, the end user jobs, the use of the developments and benefit from the increased economic prosperity.

Some key actions that could support this include:

- Include Social Value clauses in all large-scale regeneration contracts to enforce commitment
- Provide pre and post-employment work coaches
- Establish an Employment and Skills group for stakeholders and an Employment and Skills Network for the community/voluntary sector
- Improve the range and impact of the career planning advice that unemployed and low paid adults can access
- Improve the focus on upskilling low paid and low skilled residents, to improve their long-term career and income prospects

KEY ACTION 7

Strengthen collaboration between partners to support achieving more collectively

There is a need for key stakeholders to work together to be able achieve greater skills within the Sandwell area and in term, great economic prosperity. Some key actions that could support this include:

- Recognise the interdependence of partners and provision to provide a meaningful pathway towards a career
- Creation of effective referral processes to enable transitions to happen quickly
- Develop one digital resource/presence where the residents can
- seek help from all partners

(7) Delivering our Ambition

Immediate Considerations

In March 2020 the country was hit by a pandemic of unprecedented scale. The COVID-19 virus is the biggest threat the UK has faced in the modern world. It has caused thousands of deaths, affected the lives of everyone and has had a devastating effect on business.

The collective effort of everyone in the UK to control the spread of the virus means that the economy is safely beginning to reopen. This is not however without cost, with many businesses and communities facing difficult times ahead for the foreseeable future.

Sandwell borough already had low level skills, low level earnings and several disadvantaged groups that were struggling to gain and maintain meaningful employment. The pandemic has had a significant impact on Sandwell and will mean that these issues will become magnified over time if actions are not put into place.

Several emerging themes have been identified to support the skills needs of residents and businesses. A reset and Recovery Action Plan will be developed and implemented across the partnership.

Long-term Aspirations

It is anticipated that as the Reset and Recovery actions are implemented, Sandwell will move closer to stability and longer-term aspirations will be established. Growth sectors for the borough and the wider region will be central to planning.

The Key sectors identified by the Inclusive Economy Deal for Sandwell are:

- Manufacturing
- Logistics
- Health and Social Care
- Retail and Wholesale

These sectors will be reviewed at a later date to ensure that they are still relevant to Sandwell's growth.

Other key sectors which will be considered to support the wider West Midlands are:

- Environmental
- Digital

It is important in Sandwell to also acknowledge the disadvantaged groups that require the greatest support.

Action plans will also be developed to look at:

- Support for those with low/no skills
- Support for those with disabilities and/or mental health
- Support for those where English is a second language

DRAFT