

Report to Cabinet

15 November 2023

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| Subject: | Sandwell Business Growth Plan |
| Cabinet Member: | Regeneration & WMCA, Councillor Peter Hughes |
| Director: | Regeneration & Growth, Tony McGovern |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Contact Officer: | Business Manager Regeneration & Growth, Jenna Langford jenna_langford@sandwell.gov.uk |

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to the Sandwell Business Growth Plan as set out in Appendix 1 which sets out the Services & Programmes available from the Sandwell Business Growth Team for Sandwell Businesses in the pursuit of Sandwell's Economic Growth.
- 1.2 That Cabinet rescind the Inclusive Recovery Plan for Business approved by Cabinet on 23 March 2022.
- 1.3 That the budget profile and outputs and outcomes of the Business Growth Plan for period 23/24-24/25 financial year be noted.

2 Reasons for Recommendations


- 2.1 The 'Inclusive Recovery Plan for Business' was approved by Cabinet in March 2022 and included an action plan detailing how Sandwell Council would work in collaboration with partners to support Sandwell's Economic Growth. From 1 April 2023 the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership



and the Black Country Growth Hub were disbanded, resulting in a significant service gap for Black Country Businesses with two key partners no longer being able to support Sandwell Businesses.

- 2.2 In addition, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which funds Local Business Support activity until 31 March 2025, was devolved to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and a proportion of that was double-devolved to Local Authorities along with the requirement for Black Country Local Authorities to plug the gap in service provision as a result of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and the Black Country Growth Hub disbandment.
- 2.3 This has meant the Sandwell Business Growth Team have been required to re-design their customer journey, resource the team differently and write a new plan for how Sandwell Council will support Businesses and Economic Growth within a new framework of funding (UKSPF) and a different partner landscape.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

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|  | <p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy</p> <p>The Sandwell Business Growth Plan articulates how Sandwell Council will work in collaboration with partners and utilise funding to support Sandwell Businesses and Sandwell's Economy to Grow.</p> |
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The WMCA have established 'Business Growth West Midlands' (BGWM) as the centre of a 'hub and spoke' model for Business Support Services in the West Midlands. BGWM are the hub, with each Local Authority being a spoke. BGWM is responsible for devolving UKSPF to the Local Authorities, collating Monitoring and Evaluation information for reporting to Government as the Accountable Body for the fund. They also utilise this brand as a contact for all West Midlands Business Support Services and triage business clients to the relevant Local Authority spoke. It is important



to note that Businesses will continue to contact Local Authorities direct for support.

4.2 The Inclusive Recovery Plan identified 7 priorities for the Sandwell Business Growth Team which have been updated in the Sandwell Business Growth Plan by merging the ‘Local Spend’ and ‘Good Jobs’ priorities into the ‘Social Value in Sandwell’ priority, and the addition of the ‘Support in Sandwell’ priority capturing the customer journey and the council’s commitment to supporting Sandwell Businesses. The Economic Data contained within the Sandwell Business Growth Plan has been provided by the Economic Intelligence Unit to provide an updated evidence base for the plan. The 7 priorities of the Sandwell Business Growth Plan are:

1. Support in Sandwell
2. Start Up in Sandwell
3. Grow in Sandwell
4. Innovate in Sandwell
5. Invest in Sandwell
6. Social Value in Sandwell
7. Net Zero in Sandwell

4.3 The Sandwell Business Growth Plan sets out the aims of each priority and articulates why this is a priority and how the Sandwell Business Growth Team will deliver against them. Detailed activity, outputs and outcomes for each priority are also included, and identifies outputs which are contracted for delivery through UKSPF and outcomes that the team will measure to determine performance. Contracted outputs are set annually, so on this basis the outputs and outcomes profile will be monitored quarterly and set annually. This report will now provide an overview of each priority within the Sandwell Business Growth Plan.

4.4 **Support in Sandwell** captures the customer journey, developed by the Sandwell Business Growth Team, and aligned to the BGWM offer to ensure a consistent regional service as part of the hub and spoke model. To articulate the Sandwell Business Growth Teams’ commitment to Sandwell Businesses a Customer Charter has been established by the



Sandwell Business Growth Team which includes our service standards. To make the Sandwell Business Growth Team services more accessible we have re-named and re-branded the service from 'Think Sandwell' to 'Sandwell Business Growth' and this has included the development and launch of a new website www.sandwellbusinessgrowth.com and telephony connection through the council's contact centre. To deliver the customer journey, the Sandwell Business Growth Team have recruited 3 additional officers on a fixed-term basis, funded through UKSPF until 31 March 2025.

- 4.5 **Start Up in Sandwell** aims to make Sandwell Home of the Successful Start Up. Following confirmation of Sandwell's UKSPF allocation the Sandwell Business Growth Team have established Sandwell Council's first Start Up Hub, located on the 2nd Floor of Jack Judge House, Oldbury. The Hub provides wrap-around support for eligible Start Up businesses comprising access to free office space (the hub); free access to specialist support and advice; free access to support events, workshops and training; free access to our Sandwell Start Up Business School; and are also able to apply for Start Up Grants. Sandwell's Start Up programme launched on the 26 September 2023 and is funded through UKSPF until 31 March 2025.
- 4.6 **Grow in Sandwell** aims to support Sandwell's Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to grow through providing specialist advice and access to growth programmes and funding. Through UKSPF the Sandwell Business Growth Team have secured funding for grants to be administered to eligible SMEs, in addition to the Access to New Markets programme developed by the team to provide SMEs with importing and exporting advice. In addition, the Sandwell Business Growth Team have conducted a review of Sandwell's Top 50 Fastest Growing Businesses and Sandwell's Strategic Businesses to ensure Key Account Managers have been allocated to work with them on their growth ambitions.
- 4.7 **Innovate in Sandwell** aims to support Sandwell Businesses to innovate and to encourage innovation cluster activity within the borough. The West Midlands Plan for Growth identifies Sandwell within the 'Manufacturing of electrical light vehicles and associated battery storage devices' and



'Modern and low carbon utilities' growth clusters and the Sandwell Business Growth Team over the next financial year want to investigate further as to what Innovation looks like in Sandwell and how the council can support it.

- 4.8 **Invest in Sandwell** aims primarily to support inward investment, welcoming businesses from elsewhere to the Sandwell area, creating new jobs. The Sandwell Business Growth Team will work with the Department for Business & Trade and the West Midlands Growth Company to support this activity.
- 4.9 **Social Value in Sandwell** aims to enhance Social Value in Sandwell by enabling our contractors and partners to provide employment and skills opportunities for local people, provide local supply chain opportunities for our businesses, and community benefits for our voluntary organisations to create a more inclusive and thriving local community. This priority merges two priorities from the previous Inclusive Recovery Plan of 'Good Jobs in Sandwell' and 'Local Spend in Sandwell'. The priorities have been merged firstly make Social Value more prominent in the council's priorities and, also Social Value supports both local spend and good jobs.
- 4.10 For good jobs, this priority aims to increase both the volume of jobs and quality of employment within certain sectors of our economy. The Business Growth Team have developed the four pillars of Social Value for Sandwell which include creating employment opportunities locally. This delivery includes jobs, apprenticeships, and work experience placements achieved through delivery plans, negotiated with leading contractors they agree to deliver employability outputs. The team also work with the council's Employment and Skills Team to support the delivery of these outputs.
- 4.11 For local spend the Sandwell Business Growth Team assist local contractors to understand what Social Value means in Sandwell and position them to submit bids which include a comprehensive and robust approach to Social Value. The team recognise that SMEs winning tenders locally can be challenging for multi-faceted reasons so the Sandwell Business Growth Team will facilitate a programme of tender writing



guidance workshops and host ‘meet the buyer’ events to connect the local supply chain with tender opportunities. The Sandwell Business Growth Team have recruited a Senior Social Value Officer to increase Social Value capacity within the Council to support this priority.

4.12 Net Zero in Sandwell aims to ensure that a range of support projects and funding are available to help Sandwell businesses transition further on their journey to Net Zero. The Aston Consortium will be our main delivery partner helping provide information and advice through free workshops and mentoring support, energy audits and a route to grants. At a more advanced stage a further partner the Warwick Manufacturing Group will additionally provide knowledge transfer activities, R&D support and sustainability software and engage with companies with more developed delivery on their Carbon Net Zero journey.

4.13 The Sandwell Anchor Network Partnership is a key activity supporting the Sandwell Business Growth Plan, particularly the Social Value in Sandwell priority. The Network was established in 2021 and is facilitated by Sandwell Council and the Sandwell Business Growth Team. The partnership is ‘a long-term collaborative commitment to using anchor institution assets to build a strong and inclusive economy in Sandwell.’ The Sandwell Anchor Network is a voluntary partnership supported by Sandwell Council through the dedicated provision of an Anchor Network Co-ordinator funded until 31 March 2025 through the COMF. Representatives from each anchor institution meet quarterly to coordinate their activity, agree on actions, and steer the direction of the Sandwell Anchor Network. Two project groups (one focusing on procurement and one on employment) meet every six weeks to discuss further specific activities. The Partnership then meet quarterly to review progress and give direction to the focused project groups. The Partnership is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce and the Network is also championed by the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Economic Intelligence Unit.

4.14 Sandwell Business Ambassadors are an independent group of Business Leaders who volunteer their time to be a critical friend to the council and to support Sandwell Businesses – acting as a voice for local businesses.



The Sandwell Business Ambassadors are crucial partners to the Sandwell Business Growth Plan and are provided with administrative support by the Sandwell Business Growth Team along with a dedicated website www.sandwellbusinessambassadors.co.uk The Ambassadors meet monthly to share ideas for future projects and campaigning and to hear from local businesses. They lobby buyers and contractors to commit to responsible procurement and social value practices, to retain and recycle wealth in the local economy, and more work for people in Sandwell. Another key role undertaken by the Ambassadors is to attend business events and career days to promote Sandwell and business practice and to support their new focus of raising aspirations through education and work opportunities for young people and the long term unemployed. The Ambassadors also meet with the Cabinet to discuss their focus and ensure alignment to the council's vision.

- 4.16 The activities within the Sandwell Business Growth plan are funded through a combination of funding streams - UKSPF, COMF, Brexit, and standing Business Growth Team budgets allocated to Local Business Support activities representing a total investment value of £4,416,598.00 between 22/23 and 24/25 financial years.
- 4.17 The Sandwell Business Growth Plan has been shared with our Sandwell Business Ambassadors who are a group of independent Sandwell Business Leaders who are a critical friend to the council on Business matters. The plan has been endorsed by the Chair of the Sandwell Business Ambassadors.
- 4.18 Governance arrangements have been established for the monitoring and reporting performance against the Sandwell Business Growth Plan. Should the plan be approved by Cabinet, it will then become part of the Governance arrangements for the Regeneration Programme which is governed by the Regeneration Programme Board that reports into Leadership Team quarterly and Cabinet bi-annually. This is appropriate given the Sandwell Business Growth Plan, if approved, will replace the Inclusive Recovery Plan as an appendix to the Regeneration Strategy.



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Retain the existing Inclusive Recovery Plan, acknowledging that the data, partners, and methods of activity delivery are different.
- 5.2 Rescind the Inclusive Recovery Plan and not replace it with an updated plan, acknowledging that the Business Support offer to Sandwell Businesses is not articulated and the level of endorsement unclear.

6 Implications

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| Resources: | <p>Financial Resources for the Business Growth Plan are secured and funded through the UKSPF, COMF, and existing budgets allocated to the Sandwell Business Growth Team.</p> <p>Additional staff have been recruited on a fixed-term basis, funded through UKSPF.</p> <p>The Sandwell Start Up Hub operates from Jack Judge House on a lease agreement, funded by the UKSPF until March 2025.</p> |
| Legal and Governance: | <p>Funding agreements for UKSPF 23/24 are in place between Sandwell Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority.</p> |
| Risk: | <p>The Sandwell Business Growth Plan comprises a number of projects, all of which have risk registers that are managed by the Sandwell Business Growth Team and report into the Regeneration Programme Board on a quarterly basis.</p> |
| Equality: | <p>Not applicable.</p> |
| Health and Wellbeing: | <p>No implications.</p> |
| Social Value: | <p>The Sandwell Business Growth Plan includes Social Value as a priority, comprising activities that support the achievement of Social Value in Sandwell.</p> |



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| Climate Change: | The Sandwell Business Growth Plan includes Net Zero as a priority, comprising activities and grants that support Sandwell Businesses to decarbonise. |
| Corporate Parenting: | No implications. |

7. Appendices

- Appendix 1 Sandwell Business Growth Plan
- Appendix 2 Outputs & Outcomes
- Appendix 3 Budget Profile

8. Background Papers

Not applicable.

