

Sandwell Business Growth Plan

Stronger Businesses, Thriving Communities

November 2023

DRAFT

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Foreword

“Sandwell Council recognises that successful businesses are key to creating and sustaining jobs, raising aspirations, nurturing skills, and generating wealth for our region. Businesses are Sandwell’s lifeblood – and we’re here to champion your Sandwell business at every stage, supporting you to thrive and grow.

Economic circumstances have changed drastically in recent years, and businesses have adapted to the most difficult trading time in living memory. In addition, business support at the regional and Black Country level has undergone significant changes, including with the closure of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and Black Country Growth Hub. Sandwell Council has played an important role in supporting businesses through such challenges, delivering around £85 million in grants and £336 million in loans – more than any other Black County local authority.

With Sandwell’s Business Growth Plan, we seek to build on this good work. This important document updates our 2021 Action Plan and sets out our strategy for supporting businesses over the next two financial years – 23/24 and 24/25 – in a way that reflects changes to the region’s business support infrastructure and strives to unlock the entrepreneurial potential of our population.

By utilising government investment (including from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund under the Levelling Up agenda), regeneration opportunities and other sources of funding, we will implement practical measures that help our Sandwell businesses to become stronger, more resilient, adaptable and innovative: succeeding and growing in a way that elevates local people up alongside them.”

<INSERT SIGNATURE & PHOTO>

Councillor Kerrie Carmichael, Leader of Sandwell Council

“In a world marked by constant change and upheaval, the pursuit of sustainable economic growth has become an imperative for nations and communities alike. As we stand at the intersection of unprecedented global challenges, including environmental crises, technological disruption, and

social inequalities, the need for a comprehensive approach to regeneration and economic growth has never been more pressing.

Sandwell's Business Growth Plan is a thought-provoking and timely exploration of how we can foster economic prosperity while simultaneously revitalising our natural environments, enhancing social well-being, and promoting inclusivity. This plan assembles a suite of priorities and actions Sandwell Council's Business Growth Team will deliver in Sandwell's path towards a more holistic and sustainable economic future.

We have a fantastic business community here in Sandwell, and their innovative, go-getting spirit holds the key to building a healthier, stronger Sandwell. Councillor Pam Randhawa is the Council's Economy Champion representing Sandwell Council's commitment to delivering the right support at the right time, to make the most of the exciting developments coming to our borough."

<INSERT SIGNATURE & PHOTO>

Councillor Peter Hughes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration & West Midlands Combined Authority

"It is estimated that Sandwell will lever in £2.9 billion of regeneration and infrastructure investment by 2027 – presenting huge opportunities to level up. For our borough to feel the full economic, social, and environmental benefits of such investments, Sandwell Council must support local businesses to seize these opportunities. That's why, through Sandwell's Business Growth Plan, we focus on practical actions for the Sandwell Business Growth Team to deliver, which ensures Sandwell businesses have the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to thrive and grow. We will work closely with our businesses, local and regional partners to achieve our aim of increasing local wealth."

<INSERT SIGNATURE & PHOTO>

Shokat Lal, Chief Executive of Sandwell Council

“The Sandwell Business Ambassadors are a collective of business leaders who meet regularly with Sandwell Council officers and cabinet members to discuss challenges and opportunities affecting our borough’s business community. One of our priorities is responsible procurement: seeking to ensure that money invested in Sandwell is, wherever possible, spent with local businesses, to protect, create and sustain jobs, preserve skills, and boost community wealth. We welcome Sandwell’s Business Growth Plan, its recognition of the power of businesses to transform a region, and the proactive vision it sets out to ensure our local businesses (and, by extension, residents and communities) benefit from the huge investments being made in Sandwell.”

<INSERT SIGNATURE & PHOTO>

Alan Taylor, Chair of the Sandwell Business Ambassadors

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Introduction

Sandwell is a great place to do business boasting a £6.4 billion economy with twice the number of manufacturing firms to the national average. It is home to fast growing, high employment, and high turnover businesses. The borough benefits from six interconnected towns, a tradition of locally focused small businesses and an economy driven by private sector employment and growth.

Sandwell's economic strengths are not widely recognised, and as a result the borough is punching below its weight.

Investment is coming to Sandwell; the regeneration pipeline forecasts £2.9 billion of investment by 2027. It brings the opportunity to make real improvements to high streets, public assets, skills provision, and transport to level up the borough. In addition, we can support our businesses to meet the challenge of economic recovery, the carbon net zero transition, and rapidly changing global and local markets and supply chains.

This means focusing on doing the things that the Council and partners can do to create the conditions for new jobs and skills, tackling inequality and keeping wealth local. The borough is part of the UK's largest Combined Authority, and with a range of partners delivering regional business support, the Sandwell Business Growth Team have the resources and expertise to deliver this plan.

We listen to our businesses to understand their challenges and have used this to shape the plan and this means doing some things differently. Despite access to local business support services, across the UK it is estimated that about 40% of businesses have received formal external advice, 20% of which were from the public sector. To maximise the impact of business support amongst those who do take it up, we need to target resources at the areas in which businesses want help and the support that they most need.

This plan establishes seven priorities to support businesses over the next 2 financial years 23/24 & 24/25, setting out the Council's commitment and recognising the important contributions of our businesses and partners.

The ambition of the Sandwell Business Growth team is to accelerate business growth, creating a wealthier Sandwell, gripping investment opportunities, and addressing long term economic challenges – **stronger businesses, thriving communities.**

Plan Priorities

The Plan now provides a summary of what the Sandwell Business Growth Team will do to address local economic and business challenges to maximise growth opportunities against Sandwell's seven priorities. It is not exhaustive and does not capture all activities of the council in supporting economic growth. It captures key activities aligned to the economic priorities with consideration to available resources from the council, government funding, and our partners. The Plan is not for the council to deliver alone and the council will use its role as a place leader to co-ordinate and lever in support from partner organisations to ensure the right resource and expertise for businesses are in place. Detailed outputs and outcomes of the Sandwell Business Growth Plan are included in Appendix 2, with a detailed budget profile in Appendix 3.

1 Support in Sandwell

What - Deliver a consistent, accessible customer service experience to Sandwell Businesses, while striving to understand, anticipate, and exceed customer needs, fostering trust and loyalty through responsive communication, problem-solving, and a commitment to delivering a high standard of service excellence.

Why - To maximise the impact of business support amongst those who do take it up, we need to target resources at the areas in which businesses want help and the support that they most need.

How - Redesign our Customer Journey, so Sandwell Businesses have improved access to our services, getting the support they need. This includes a new brand, website, contact center, and the adoption of our Customer Charter (see appendix 1) setting out our service standards and the adoption of the Sandwell Business Growth Plan.

2 Start Up in Sandwell

What - Make Sandwell the Home of the Successful Start Up by empowering entrepreneurs and providing tailored guidance, resources, and mentorship to help them navigate entrepreneurship challenges, achieve sustainable growth, and realise their full potential in the competitive business landscape.

Why - A high number of residents are starting new businesses but may lack the skills, resources, and information to make these successful. We want to change this through increased and tailored access to advice around starting a business, finance, recruitment, and marketing.

How - Establish a Start Up Hub in Sandwell where entrepreneurs can have a dedicated workspace that is rent and rate free for a period of 12 months, for all registrations up to February 2024. Subsequent registrations will receive dedicated workspace that is rent and rate free until February 2025 from which to grow their business. The hub will provide Start Ups with the opportunity for peer-to-peer collaboration, specialist support, advice, and access to grants for eligible Start Ups. In addition, we will host 'Business Schools' providing Start Ups with a 10-day intensive course on how to Start and Grow a business. The Business Growth Team will host events and workshops from the hub on numerous business topics with SMEs, Partners and Start Ups providing more opportunity for networking and peer-to-peer collaboration.

3 Grow in Sandwell

What - Empower businesses to achieve sustainable and scalable growth by providing strategic guidance, resources, and solutions to drive innovation, enhance competitiveness, and expand market reach, enabling businesses to reach their full growth potential and thrive in dynamic markets.

Why - Sandwell businesses are part of the West Midlands and national supply chains. We want to help them grow and create more good jobs by exporting more and investing in new opportunities.

How - 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. 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 Innovate in Sandwell

What - Champion and nurture innovation, fostering an environment where creativity, collaboration, and exploration thrive in Sandwell.

Why - Innovation Clusters are a major priority of the West Midlands, but innovation support is often focused around the region's cities and not within towns or strategic centers. As a result, Sandwell is not benefiting from innovation investment, skills & business support.

How - Work with our regional innovation partners to understand what innovation support is available for economies such as Sandwell. Undertake deep-dive analysis to determine what innovation means in Sandwell, and what we as a local authority, working with our regional innovation partners can do to encourage cluster activity in the borough.

5 Invest in Sandwell

What - Attract and facilitate investment in Sandwell, creating a dynamic and prosperous environment for businesses, entrepreneurs, and investors by showcasing the opportunities, infrastructure, and resources Sandwell offers, and fostering strategic partnerships to drive economic growth.

Why - With a young population and more affordable land, Sandwell is an attractive location for businesses to locate and grow, creating more jobs locally. However, we have an under supply of employment land and commercial space. Increasing new inward investment & investment from existing business will create more good jobs in Sandwell.

How - Work more closely with our partners to develop an investment offer ready to maximise investment from existing business, attract new inward investment, and create jobs. The Sandwell Business Growth Team have secured investment from the West Midlands Global fund to work with the West Midlands Growth Company to focus specifically on this priority.

6 Social Value in Sandwell

What - 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.

Why - Encouraging Social Value within a local area is a powerful catalyst for local economic growth. It serves as an engine that propels numerous benefits throughout the community and has a ripple effect that contributes to the overall well-being and prosperity of the area.

How - Develop a Social Value Policy & Toolkit to support contract managers across the council, Sandwell's anchor institutions, and contractors to spend locally through embedding good social value practice within procurement contracts and raising awareness of local suppliers. Promote and educate the merits of Social Value and provide wrap-around support to those leading procurement contracts and local suppliers submitting tenders for local opportunities. Work with the Employment & Skills Team to broker employment and training opportunities for local people with our contractors.

7 Net Zero in Sandwell

What - Empower and guide businesses in their transition to carbon net zero, helping to reduce their carbon emissions and support them to reach their carbon neutrality goals while creating a greener and more sustainable borough.

Why - We want to support Sandwell to have net zero carbon emissions by 2041. Many of our businesses face high demand for energy and premises that are not climate resilient. We want to support them by providing easy access to advice on how to become energy efficient & reduce costs. We also want firms to adopt models of circular economy including recycling and repurposing.

How - Work with our regional partners to deliver the Net Zero programme to Sandwell Businesses, who stand to benefit from specialist advice, energy audits and grant funding to help decarbonise their business.

Evidence Base

Working with the Black Country Economic Intelligence Unit we have reviewed and analysed Sandwell’s economic data to inform the aims, objectives, and actions for the Sandwell Business Growth Plan. It is now presented as the evidence base for the plan, underpinning each of the seven economic priorities.



Figure 1 Headline Economic Indicators

Sandwell is home to fast growing, high employment, and high turnover businesses, with manufacturers accounting for 58% of the top 50 fastest growing companies in Sandwell last year.

There are 124,000 jobs in Sandwell, employed across a diverse sector base. Manufacturing accounts for 21,300 jobs, with subsector strengths in rubber, plastics, and metals. Sandwell businesses create the materials that are used in modern machinery such as automotive and aerospace.

These strengths are important for future success. However, supply chain firms are highly dependent on existing advanced manufacturing strengths in the region. Manufacturing is vulnerable to changing trends in the industry - automation, Artificial Intelligence, and the phasing out of fossil fuels within industries all bring a need for investment in innovation. Industry 4.0, the digital industrial revolution, presents an opportunity if there is support for rapid innovation, with innovation in

products and processes providing an opportunity to make local businesses more competitive and raise productivity levels within the borough.

Sandwell is an employment hub in the West Midlands

Sandwell has the 5th largest workforce across all Local Authorities in the West Midlands and the largest in the Black Country. Residents and businesses benefit from the interconnected labour market with West Midlands neighbouring local authorities. Sandwell is a net exporter of labour to Birmingham, and a net importer of labour from the rest of the Black Country. Every day 46,691 people come to Sandwell from neighbouring areas to work, and almost 53,699 Sandwell residents work outside the Borough. This is set to increase through extensions to the Metro, the Sprint Bus network and HS2. Most of the borough's economic activity is centred on the intersection of Oldbury, West Bromwich, and Smethwick - with areas on the border looking to large urban centres outside of the borough for jobs and opportunity.

To level up means we must tackle the causes of deprivation

High deprivation levels present huge, long-term challenges, which have only been made more complex by the pandemic which has exposed health inequalities. We still do not know the full impacts of the pandemic but areas such as Sandwell who were already experiencing challenges around productivity, skills, and deprivation are likely to see existing challenges exacerbated.

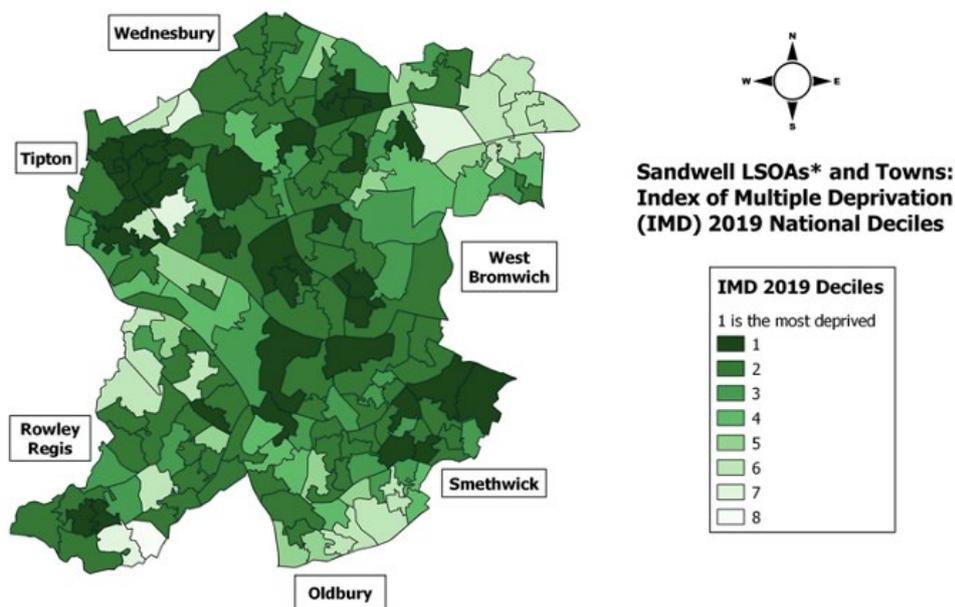


Figure 2 Deprivation Levels Measured Across Sandwell

We face long-term challenges around low wages, low skills, and deprivation. This cycle needs to change. Wages have risen 3.2% in the past year and are below the

Black Country average. More residents are employed in traditionally lower paid roles, with fewer residents in top managerial positions than comparators. The employment rate is lower than elsewhere and there have been large increases in the claimant count since the start of the pandemic.

There are signs that things may be starting to change. In the 2023 data 23.5% of the working age population in Sandwell were qualified to RQF4+ qualification levels, a shortfall of 40,906 to reach the national level of 45.1%. This is also lower than the Black Country average of 32.3% In addition, 11.8% of Sandwell residents have no qualifications and there is a shortfall of 9,932 to reach the national average level of 6.6%. The Black Country average is 10.6%.

It will take time to shift the dial on long term challenges around deprivation. Working alongside Sandwell's Employment & Skills Team, this plan must create the foundations for more good jobs in the borough, supporting residents to develop the skills to access local jobs.

Sandwell's population is young & diverse but there are concerns about inequality

40% of residents are under 30 years old and only 15% of residents are over the age of 65. This provides a supply of talent and labour, which is vital for businesses as workers retire and new jobs emerge based around changing technology and demand.

Sandwell is also diverse, with almost 42.8% of residents identifying within an ethnic minority. Ethnic minority-led businesses make important contributions to the borough's economy (as part of an annual contribution of £25 billion to the UK economy). They tend to be more innovative, more likely to export and are more likely to be led by women. However, ethnic minority-led businesses are often more detached from mainstream business support and struggle disproportionately when accessing finance. This is particularly concerning in the context of the pandemic where many ethnic minority-led businesses were badly impacted. This plan needs to include support for ethnic minority-led businesses, including support to improve access to finance, to help with recovery and growth but also to harness and maximise innovation and exporting strengths.

Sandwell's Productivity Gap

Sandwell has been the most productive economy within the Black Country for four consecutive years and in 2023 has dropped to the second. Productivity is an important driver of economic growth, as economic output can only be increased by either increasing the amount of inputs or by raising productivity. Without productivity growth, an economy can only increase its output of goods and services if more people worked or if they worked longer hours. We cannot lose

sight of the skills and wages challenges facing residents. But we must ensure that success we see in our businesses translates into higher wages for residents and more wealth generated and retained in Sandwell.

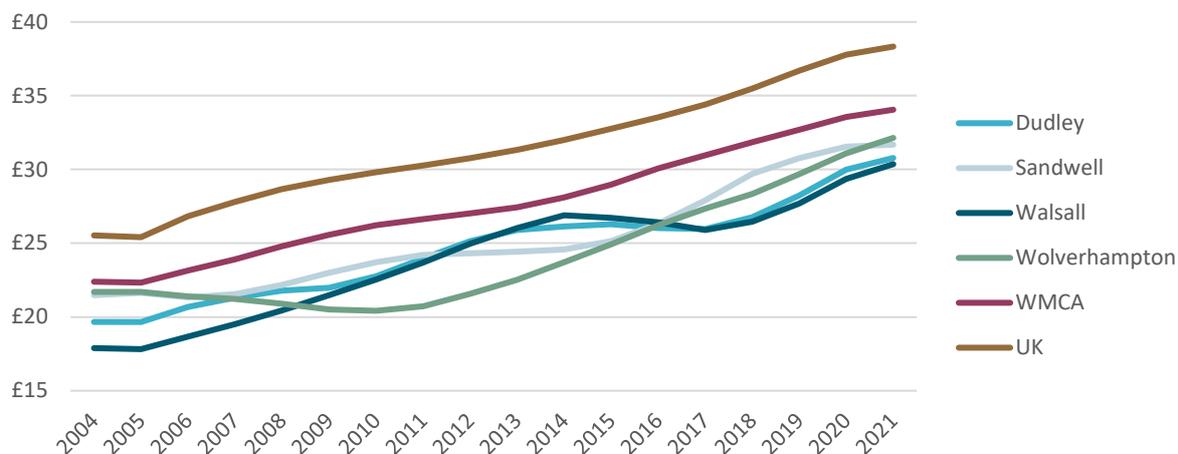


Figure 3 GVA per hr worked compared across Black Country, West Midlands, & UK (released 2023)

Sandwell Business Survival rates have increased but the number of Business Births in Sandwell has decreased.



13,525 new businesses started in Sandwell (2013 to 2021)



37% survive after 5 years (38.4% UK avg.)

Recently, Sandwell has seen a decline in the number of new businesses, which decreased by 4.6% between 2020 and 2021, albeit the longer-term trend has been one of strong growth. Survival rates for businesses after the first five years were 36.9%, above the Black Country (35.7%) but below national averages (38.4%). This suggests a need for more support for businesses to start up along with during the first five-year period in operation, with support targeted at areas where businesses report experiencing difficulty – accessing appropriate premises, finance and knowing where and who to turn to for advice.

This support will need to be tailored to reflect the business needs; it is critical that Start Ups and SMEs think through a financially viable business plan and we need to ensure that we reach out to all of Sandwell so that every business understands the support available.

The number of businesses in Sandwell is rising faster than regional and national growth rates.



11,545 VAT registered businesses in Sandwell
(+6.1% increase since 2020 & +1.4% nationally)



98% of these are small and micro businesses

The number of businesses in Sandwell is rising faster than regional and national growth rates. It is home to 1,033 of the Black Country's strategic companies and over half of the top 50 fastest growing businesses are in the manufacturing sector. Productivity is rising, and there has been an increase in 3,000 jobs (+2.5%). However low wages and skills levels remains a significant issue for residents and the productivity gap.

Many businesses now face challenges to become more resilient and to take advantage of new opportunities around technology and new markets. Businesses may require support to remain competitive in this changing business landscape and to create more higher skilled roles. This support is wide ranging, covering advice around exporting, investing in new opportunities, changing business models, and linking with growth sectors in the wider West Midlands economy.

Sandwell produced 1,306Kt CO₂ emissions in 2021, the highest level in the Black Country.



10% of business base are manufacturers
(cf. 5% national avg.)



1,306Kt CO₂ emissions produced in Sandwell in 2021,
the highest level in the Black Country



-11.3% reduction in emissions over the past 5 years.

In 2020, Sandwell Council declared a Climate Emergency and pledged to be carbon neutral by 2041. To reach this target, all parts of Sandwell will need to play their part in reducing emissions. This includes businesses who currently produce around 31% of the borough's overall carbon emissions and thus have the potential to make a large contribution to overall reductions.

As a manufacturing and industrial hub, companies in Sandwell may see high demand for energy or be in premises that are not climate resilient. To change can sometimes require significant investment in time and money, which not all companies have the capacity to manage alone.

Despite the challenge, there is a big prize here, for the environment, future generations, and in creating new green jobs and cost savings for businesses. Where local businesses have received support, they reported it had been effective with reductions in energy costs. This success must be replicated with all our businesses by raising awareness of sector growth opportunities and providing easy access to advice on how to become energy efficient and reduce costs.

Sandwell is home to over 250 known foreign-owned companies, supporting over 25,000 jobs.



781 FDI projects funded in the West Midlands in the past 5 years
181 FDI projects in the West Midlands 2022/23 (10.9% of total UK FDI)



25% of businesses have parent companies outside the UK
& account for 45% of employment



6,387 jobs created in the Black Country as a result of FDI
(2013/14-2022/23)



8,252 new jobs created in the West Midlands by foreign investors
(+48.1 vs 6.1% UK from 2021/22)

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is an important source of job creation, alongside supporting existing businesses, wider economic growth requires more new companies locating to the region. With a young population and cheap land, Sandwell should be an attractive location for businesses to locate and grow. Yet the lack of high quality, market-ready employment land and an investment offer means the borough struggles to land new businesses. In addition, existing businesses tell us they struggle to find suitable grow-on space in Sandwell.

Working with partners, we need to better support existing firms and attract more investment to Sandwell with an improved employment land and investment offer that showcases the opportunity that comes from being a business in Sandwell.

£2.9b Regeneration investment is coming on stream between now and 2027.

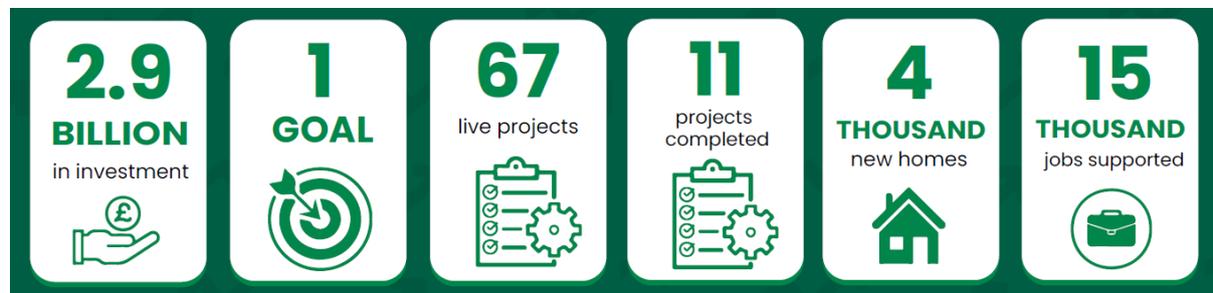


Figure 4 Regeneration Pipeline Figures (Oct 2023)

Close to Birmingham, Sandwell is well-connected and affordable. Significant investment in regeneration and connectivity between now and 2027 is estimated to be worth £2.9b, providing a strong foundation for economic growth. However, Sandwell experiences challenges such as a trend of higher value jobs and skilled residents leaving the borough permanently. The Sandwell Business Growth Plan is appended to the Regeneration Strategy, ensuring the economic growth benefits are maximised through regeneration investment.

Innovation investment and support are focussed to the region’s cities, with little attention on towns or strategic centres.



Since 2018/19, Sandwell organisations received £4.5m of Innovate UK funding



Sandwell received under £1m in funding from UK Research & Innovation (2020-21)

Since 2018/19, Sandwell-based organisations have received £4.5m worth of funding from Innovate UK specifically and recipients include Totally Modular Ltd, Midland Tool and Design, and Hadley Industries. However, Sandwell received under £1m in total direct UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding (including Research Councils, Research England, and Innovate UK) in 2020-21, equal to £3 per person. This is substantially lower than regional and national averages, but comparable to other Black Country local authorities.

Innovation is a priority of the West Midlands and there have been recent successes such as the investment in Birmingham Health Innovation Campus. However, innovation investment and support are focussed to the region's cities. We want to work with innovation partners to determine how we maximise the benefits of innovation clusters for Sandwell through the development of a Sandwell innovation narrative and a programme of support.

A higher-than-average proportion of employees in Sandwell are earning below the Real Living Wage and a high number of jobs in traditionally low wage sectors.



18% of employee jobs in Sandwell are below the real living wage (-25% since 2021)



Sandwell residents earn c.£6k less than the England avg.



Average skills levels are rising but 17% of residents have no formal qualification (c.11% above England avg.)



11.8% are in low skill service or elementary occupations in Sandwell, slightly above that of the national average of 9.2%

Wages are often low with a higher-than-average proportion of employee jobs earning below the Real Living Wage and a high number of jobs in traditionally low wage sectors. We need to work with businesses to increase demand for high level skills and create jobs with good pay and conditions, aligning skills supply with demand. This requires better labour market intelligence and raising awareness of the opportunities available with young people, ensuring that we communicate to the next generation what opportunities will be available in Sandwell based on economic growth areas.

Sandwell Council is spending 40% with local suppliers.



Sandwell Council spent £416m with suppliers



40% of this is spent locally

Sandwell Council as an Anchor Institution wants to increase spend with local businesses by changing how we procure contracts and monitor social value, embedding inclusive economic growth across the Council.

Increased local spend retains wealth in Sandwell and creates jobs. Significant investments from the £2.9b Regeneration Programme will increase tendering opportunities for local businesses. As well as increase our own spend, we want to encourage our businesses to increase theirs by raising awareness of local suppliers.

Listening to Business

The collective insight and experiences of the local business community have been instrumental in shaping this plan. We recognise that businesses are the backbone

of our local economy, and their input has been invaluable in crafting a plan that is both relevant and effective. Through continual dialogue with local businesses, we have gained an understanding of their challenges and aspirations. Their insights have guided us in identifying key issues, prioritising solutions, and tailoring our plan to address the specific needs of our business community.

A range of economic challenges, from access to capital and workforce development to regulatory obstacles and market competition were identified. With this knowledge, the plan combines short-term actions with long-term sustainability, providing immediate support while fostering an environment for growth and prosperity. The voices of local businesses in our plan ensures that our actions are not only well-informed but also reflective of the diverse and evolving needs of our entrepreneurs. The below table demonstrates examples of where business insights have been translated into actions within the plan, demonstrating our commitment to being responsive and solution-oriented, and reinforcing our belief that when our **businesses are strong, our communities thrive.**

| Business Challenge | Business Suggestions | Plan Actions |
|--|---|---|
| Employment Land/ Commercial Space | Address contaminated land from industrial use & create a map of available employment land | <p>Grow in Sandwell – Provide property and land searches service to businesses wanting to locate, relocate or expand within the Sandwell.</p> <p>Grow in Sandwell – Work with Government and the WMCA to lever in funding to regenerate brownfield land for commercial investment.</p> <p>Support in Sandwell - Make the employment land sites map available on the Sandwell Business Growth website.</p> |
| Funding and support for Start-Ups and SMEs | Support entrepreneurs and SMEs with grants, capital & finance | <p>Start Up in Sandwell – deliver wrap around support including grants to Sandwell Start-Ups</p> <p>Grow in Sandwell – provide support and grant funding to Sandwell SMEs</p> <p>Grow in Sandwell – facilitate Sandwell SMEs accessing support and grant funding from the regional SME programme.</p> |
| Access to Research & Development opportunities. | Sandwell needs a strong narrative about the innovative businesses that are already here. The Council could help broker connections into regional assets and development opportunities for these businesses. | <p>Innovate in Sandwell – commission research to define what innovation means in Sandwell and how the council can support it.</p> <p>Innovate in Sandwell - Work with innovation support partners to identify what support is available for Sandwell Businesses and how we facilitate.</p> |
| Clarity around how and who to access for Business Support. | Create a single "front door" through which businesses can access a range of support services; & more proactive and dedicated support services | <p>Support in Sandwell - Produce the Sandwell Business Growth Plan to articulate the support offer</p> <p>Support in Sandwell - Adopt a Customer Charter setting out our service standards to Businesses</p> <p>Support in Sandwell - Improve the customer journey through a new website and contact call centre provision</p> |

Figure 5 Business Insights

Working with Partners

Collaboration with partner organisations is central to our plan for fostering local economic growth and assisting businesses in addressing their economic challenges. By joining forces with like-minded entities, we create a synergy that enhances our collective capacity to drive positive change and ensure the long-

term prosperity of our community. Partner organisations bring complementary strengths, resources, and expertise to the table. Through these collaborations, we gain access to a broader range of tools and solutions, making it possible to offer a more comprehensive and robust support system for our local businesses. Whether it's access to funding, specialised knowledge, or extended networks, these partnerships open new avenues for addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by our business community.

By working together, we can pool resources and share best practice, resulting in more efficient and effective solutions. This collaborative approach allows us to develop and implement initiatives that are more finely tuned to the specific needs of our local businesses. It fosters innovation and encourages the exchange of fresh ideas, ensuring that we remain adaptable and responsive to the ever-evolving economic landscape. Furthermore, partnering with like-minded organisations enhances our advocacy and outreach efforts. It amplifies our voice in promoting policies and initiatives that are conducive to local economic growth, while also bolstering our ability to secure funding and support from government agencies, philanthropic organisations, and other stakeholders who share our vision for a prosperous community.

Together, we are more resilient, innovative, and equipped to overcome economic challenges, ensuring a thriving and sustainable future for our community.



Figure 6 Snapshot of Partnerships

Conclusion

Recent years have been tough on our businesses and residents. During this time, we have worked hard as a Council to support them including providing companies with tens of millions of pounds of emergency business grant support and have been proud of the resilience and adaptability that local businesses have shown.

With the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and local changes to business support organisations, we now start a new chapter.

We are optimistic for the future. Sandwell is seeing major investment from the public and private sector with regeneration leveraging in billions of pounds in capital investment between now and 2027. These new assets, with the right co-ordination, can help support new and existing businesses, creating jobs, attracting inward investment and kickstarting growth across the borough.

We know that businesses are vital to creating jobs and wealth in Sandwell and we want to ensure that they are well-placed to capitalise on this investment. We have developed the Sandwell Business Growth Plan to do everything we can to ensure our businesses and communities thrive. This includes a commitment to work more collaboratively with partners to maximise the resource and expertise available to businesses.

We have listened to businesses and dialogue will continue to ensure we are allocating appropriate resources and prioritising the right interventions. Let's continue to work together to make the most of this opportunity and make this Sandwell's time to prosper.

Appendix 1 Customer Charter

Sandwell Business Growth Customer Charter

Our Commitment to Your Business

The Sandwell Business Growth Team is dedicated to building stronger businesses, thriving communities, and supporting your business to achieve your ambitions.

When your business wins, everyone wins. This Customer Charter sets out our commitment to you, a member of our Sandwell business community, and what you can expect from us and the support we give.

Our standards

- We are helpful, polite, and respectful to you always
- We do not make promises to you we cannot keep
- We use plain language, and avoid jargon
- We provide relevant business guidance and support to your business
- We make referrals to specialist advisers to meet your business needs
- We direct you to alternative sources of information if required
- We assign a dedicated Key Account Manager to your business where applicable
- We ensure our website is accessible, up to date, accurate and relevant.
- We work continuously to improve Sandwell's economic prospects
- We are committed to delivering social value and community benefits
- We are your business link into Sandwell Council and the wider West Midlands region.

What you can expect

If you call our enquiry service:

- Your enquiry details to be captured accurately and referred to the relevant officer for a response
- To receive an initial call back or email response within two working days of enquiry receipt during our published opening hours
- Your data and information to be kept confidential and secure.

If you contact us with an email enquiry:

- To receive an initial call back or email response within two working days of enquiry receipt during our published opening hours
- A response to your enquiry within ten working days of receipt during our published opening hours
- A response that addresses all the points you raised, in plain language
- To be kept informed of progress and, if we are unable to answer your enquiry fully within the ten working day timeframe, to know when you can expect our full response
- To be directed to alternative sources of information if your enquiry falls outside the remit of our service
- That your data and information will be kept confidential and secure
- We will only use personal information you send us for the purposes for which you provide it.
- We will only hold your information for as long as necessary, once we have responded to your enquiry, for these purposes and will not pass it on to any other parties.

Contact us

Email: business_growth@sandwell.gov.uk

Website: www.sandwellbusinessgrowth.com

Call: 0121 569 2700

Opening hours Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm (excluding public holidays and council closures).

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