

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

30 July 2025 at 6.03pm at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

**Present:** Councillor Davies (Chair)

Councillors: Hackett Hemingway	Councillors: A Singh J Singh
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**Apologies:** Councillors Ashraf, Gavan, Jeffcoat and Pall.

**Also present:** Adele Smith - Programmes Manager Strategy & Partnerships and Anthony Lloyd - Democratic Services Officer.

Meeting ended at 7.25pm.

### 22/25 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### 23/25 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2025 are confirmed as a correct record.

### 24/25 **Urgent Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider

### 25/25 **Sandwell Skills and Employment Strategy; Addressing Young Unemployment**

The Board was provided with a presentation on the effectiveness of the Sandwell Skills and Employment Strategy which was launched in September 2024. It specifically focused on the rise in Youth Unemployment within the Borough and outlined the provision and services that were in place to address the challenges faced by residents.

As part of the Strategy, several Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been identified to support the Council to monitor the progress of activity, ensuring the needs of Sandwell residents and businesses were met.

Since the launch of the strategy, it was reported that there had been a number of national and global factors that had affected the progress that had been made to date. This included an increase in National Insurance contributions by employers, increase in wages, tariffs and a fragile national and global economy.

It was noted that although the number of those not in education, employment or training had reduced by 0.4% since September 2025, the number of apprenticeships starters had reduced, the overall employment rate had reduced, and claimants of unemployment benefits had increased. Additionally, the number of residents with no qualifications had increased to 13.9% in May 2025 as opposed to 11.8% in September 2024. This indicated that residents with higher qualifications were potentially moving out of the borough.

Following further discussion and questions from members, the following information was established:-

- "Connect to Work" was an initiative that supported those looking for work before, during and after their work journey;
- 10% of the local budget for the area was invested in "English as an additional Language" training;
- "English as an additional language" training was funded via Sandwell's Public Health team and delivered by a range of voluntary sector organisations;
- Some apprenticeships prioritised vulnerable groups, including care leavers, however no schemes were in place to assist young carers;
- Initiatives like the "Accelerate" programme encouraged people to attend leisurely activity classes first, before then signposting them to useful programme to encourage work;
- There were numerous "outreach" venues in the borough with many locations being on accessible routes or deep within community spaces;
- Assistance with non-conventional routes to work, such as via entrepreneurship, was also available throughout the borough.

Although members were pleased with some of the initiatives on offer, concerns were raised in relation to the increase of unemployment benefit claimants in the borough and the impacts that this could have on the local economy. Members thanked officers for their work on addressing employment in the borough.

**Resolved that:-**

- (1) the Cabinet Member for Business and Skills is recommended to consider the introduction of specific schemes to ensure that young and older carers alike in Sandwell are prioritised for work placements and other forms of employment.
- (2) the Cabinet Member for Business and Skills is recommended to consider implementing "addressing unemployment in the borough" as a corporate priority.

- (3) in collaboration with partners, including those in the private and voluntary sectors, the Cabinet Member for Business and Skills is recommended to consider the creation of a focus group to address concerns around unemployment in Sandwell.

26/25

### **Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2025-2026**

The Board received an overview of the Board's Work Programme for the 2025-2026 municipal year. It was noted that a work programming session had taken place on 18 June 2025 which allowed the Board to discuss services, key issues and priorities.

Suggestions for scrutiny topics that had been received from members of the public were addressed accordingly. It was noted that recommendations received from the public regarding street cleanliness, fly tipping, graffiti and pavement parking would be incorporated to existing items already on the work programme.

Additionally, in relation to suggestions to consider Sandwell Council's partnership with SERCO, it was highlighted that extensive work had already been undertaken by the Budget and Corporate Management Scrutiny Board in 2024-2025 regarding the contract.

The Board also agreed to establish a working group to continue its work to support the development of the Sandwell Local Plan.

#### **Resolved that:-**

- (1) the work programme for the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board for the 2025 - 2026 municipal year is approved.
- (2) a Working Group comprised of all members of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board is established to consider the Sandwell Local Plan.