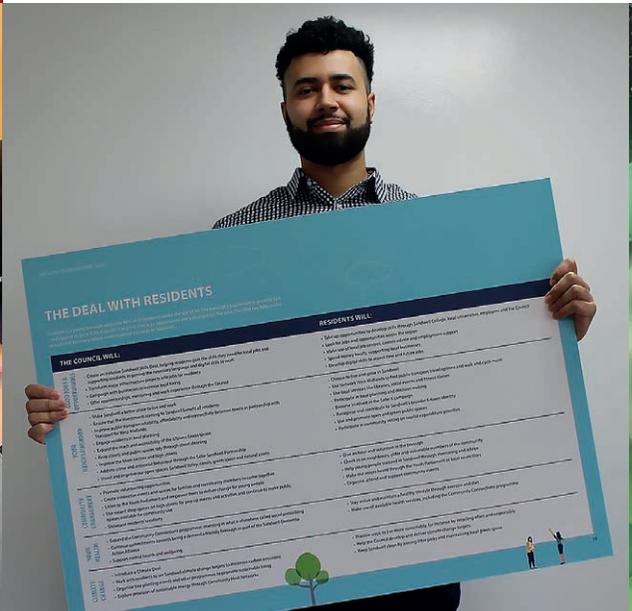


Sandwell

Metropolitan Borough Council

THE REAL DEAL

Sandwell's pioneering Inclusive Economy Deal and how it will create a place that works for everyone





The real deal

Sandwell is embarking on a new approach designed to help everyone play a part in

It's apt that a place that was at the heart of the industrial revolution is now driving what could be another seismic economic shift.

The difference is this one will benefit everybody.

Strategically well-positioned between Birmingham, whose city centre is just 10 minutes away by tram, and its Black Country neighbours, Sandwell is a big player that tends to go under the radar. It's the West Midlands' third largest borough and has a growing economy worth £6.2bn.

Over the next few years, unprecedented levels of investment will pour into Sandwell in the shape of a new Midland Metro tramline extension, an Aquatics Centre for the 2022 Commonwealth Games and a whole host of other major developments.

But as Sandwell Council's new corporate plan, *Big Plans for a Great Place*, concedes, up to now the borough hasn't punched its weight and it is home to some of the most deprived wards in the country.

Sandwell has worked hard to secure the investment now coming its way. But if that economic growth is to make a real, lasting difference then history tells us it will need to adopt a fundamentally different approach. And that's where the borough's Inclusive Economy Deal comes in. The first of its kind in the country, the Deal is about everyone – the council, wider public sector, VCS, businesses and residents across Sandwell's six towns – playing their part in the area's future success. It sets out in detail what the 'ask' is of each player, from residents taking up opportunities to get 'job-ready' to businesses working to promote Sandwell to the wider world.

'We have the right ingredients,' says council chief executive David Stevens. 'Our businesses and other partners understand that unless we pull together and recognise Sandwell as a place and how all the things we do interrelate to each other, we just aren't going to gain traction.'

The Deal is one of the pillars on which the new corporate plan stands, he explains, and is the culmination of intensive work over the last two years.

Engagement with all stakeholders helped to create Sandwell's Vision 2030 – a set of 10 ambitions designed to create 'a thriving, optimistic and resilient community' that the Inclusive Economy Deal and future Deals around areas such as skills and climate change will turn into reality.

Further engagement last year helped to shape the first Deal, including highly successful 'community fridge' events in which free healthy food donated by supermarkets was distributed to residents in exchange for pledges.

It's resulted in clear synergy between the council's role set out in the new corporate plan, the overall ambition of Vision 2030, and the roles everyone must play through the Deal.

'It's about creating the borough we want to be and developing a culture of participatory policy that focuses on priorities,' explains Amy Harhoff, director of regeneration and growth. 'We expect our approach to evolve over time. Although there are some great examples nationally of a deal-based approach we don't have a blueprint for an economy-focused deal, which has been part of



our journey to do something that's relevant for our borough. It's a new way of working that approaches priorities through the lens of "how does this contribute to our inclusive economy, sharing both the design and the benefits of what we do with our communities?"

Anchoring the Deal

Alongside the Deal, Sandwell is also working to embed a community wealth building approach across the borough. This is the critical link between driving economic growth and maximising the benefits locally and is also the most tangible way for the council and partners to lead by example.

Community wealth building is essentially about reorganising the local economy so that income is recirculated and 'leakages' minimised. Anchor institutions, such as the council and NHS, have a key role to play in purchasing more goods and services locally and making better use of their assets.

Sandwell Council has been working with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, which has helped a number of local authorities to embed community wealth building. It's now taking forward its recommendations including progressive procurement that puts a greater focus on extracting more social value from the £150m a year the council spends with suppliers.



Drawings of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre (above and below)



CLLR YVONNE DAVIES
LEADER OF SANDWELL COUNCIL

Delivering an inclusive economy

Like many areas, we are always trying the best we can to attract investment in but we're not particularly good at looking at how our expenditure travels out.

Whether it's local government, the NHS or the voluntary and community sector, imagine the impact it would have if we all focused on spending more money locally.

Procurement is just one part of our Inclusive Economy Deal but it's an area where we can have an impact quickly and that's important when you're embarking on a completely new way of working.

I think Sandwell Council does quite well with 15% of procurement spent within the borough. If we can increase that to 25% it would make an enormous difference to our local economy and people's lives. But if we can persuade others in the public sector and VCS to do the same, it will be transformational.

Sandwell's Deal is about everyone working together for the common good.

As a council we're leading by example by developing our own training programme so that all staff and members understand what it means to be an inclusive economy council.

But it's also about the council spending more locally and supporting businesses and residents to make the most of the opportunities; firms doing their bit by investing in training and apprenticeships and promoting this as a place to do business; the VCS being exemplary employers and reaching out to disadvantaged groups; and, crucially, residents ensuring they're ready to take up opportunities and be active citizens.

We have a symbiotic relationship with our neighbours in the Black Country and wider West Midlands and that's why I hope these inclusive economy principles are embraced across the region. Imagine the impact that would have.

Sandwell: in numbers

6 towns - Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich

327,000 residents - the third largest borough in the West Midlands

£6.2bn economy that's growing faster than the UK average

32,700 people from across the Black Country travel to Sandwell to work

40% of residents are under 30

12th most deprived borough in the country

28,000 residents commute to Birmingham

Backed by business

Creating a genuinely inclusive economy will only be possible if local businesses are fully engaged. Back in 2016 the council set up Sandwell Business Ambassadors (SBA), a collective of business leaders who are the voice of the borough's private sector and help to champion the local economy.

Alan Taylor, chair of SBA, describes the move as 'the single most important commitment from the council' and a key factor in getting businesses involved in the Deal at an early stage.

'As a group of ambassadors our remit is to work with the council to create a conduit for better procurement so we can grow our businesses better, get the area to become more aspirational and get the training and education correct so we have fit for work youngsters coming through.'

'The Inclusive Economy Deal puts down the road map where we are all aligned. It gives us a plan and a direction - not just goals but a route to get there.'

He is managing director of MiGlass, a manufacturing firm based in Smethwick that's been around since 1936.

Sandwell: major investments

£449m	is being invested in an extension to the Metro tramline that goes through Sandwell and links it to Birmingham, Dudley and Wolverhampton
£605m	of investment is going into the new Midland Metropolitan Hospital in Smethwick
£62m	will be spent on building the Sandwell Aquatics Centre for the 2022 Commonwealth Games
£50m	is being invested in the West Midlands 5G testbed, including public sites in Sandwell
£69m	is going into the upskilling of residents via the WMCA Skills Deal
£50-75m	is set to be invested in regenerating West Bromwich, Rowley Regis and Smethwick after the towns were selected for support from the new Towns Fund

'We've been through a world war, three-day weeks, power cuts and recessions and we are still here and fighting. Every time something happens we go for it again.'

'We need to create a sea change to tackle deprivation. The Deal is a real opportunity to pick things up and take advantage of our location close to Birmingham. We know it's not an easy ride. But it's about the long-term sustainability of our business and the borough.'

One of the defining features of the Deal is its emphasis on practicalities.

As chief executive David Stevens puts it, 'it's easy to write a glossy plan, the important thing is making it accessible so everyone can understand and buy into it.'

The Deal has a set of clear goals for 2030 around closing the gap between Sandwell and the West Midlands average on areas including healthy life expectancy, unemployment, productivity and skills. It sets a high bar and paves the way for fundamental change, but the borough already has a track record for dramatic turnarounds. Formerly director of adult social care, health and wellbeing before he became chief executive this year, David points to the way in which Sandwell eradicated delayed transfers of care from hospital.

'It's indicative of when Sandwell puts its mind to it and everyone pulls together - in this case health and social care and care homes, local businesses, voluntary sector and people themselves - against a single strategic outcome.'

in the local economy's success

A joint inclusive economy and community wealth building board made up of representatives from the council, community, VCS and business is now being established.

All in all, it's 'a really positive shift', says Mark Davis, chief executive of Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations.

'We've had various meetings and events and all of the feedback we have had from our membership is pretty much 100% in support of what this aims to achieve.'



'The tone of the engagement from the council suggests there's been a shift. There's a very strong consensus that this is something we need to do. This time it does feel different.'

It also builds on an already strong relationship between the council and VCS based around the Sandwell Compact, he says.

'As much as we will always want to maximise the money we can draw into the borough, what we do have is a range of different assets such as buildings, people, knowledge and trust', he adds. 'There is more focus and momentum around the things we can do, things we can control.'

