

## Sandwell Council Local Campaigns

### Summary

Sandwell Council will develop Enterprise Hubs for self-employment and strengthen partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to maximise business engagement. Sandwell Council's Enterprise Hub will provide a self-employment resource based within the local community. This will enable local residents to learn the practicalities of setting up a business and access business resources and support. Sandwell Council's voluntary sector partnership will deliver an SME engagement programme to enable more businesses to access funding, finance and benefiting from wage subsidies available for recruitment.

### Sandwell Enterprise Hubs

Sandwell Council's Enterprise Hubs will provide a self-employment resource based within the local community. The library service will provide/host the resources that business information customers need both in the library and remotely (where subscriptions allow) and linked through key websites e.g. 'Think Sandwell' to deliver a seamless front end. Trained information specialists will be on hand to support customers in accessing all business resources and to make referrals.

Local residents will have the opportunity to learn all the practicalities of setting up a business including sector specific information. They will be able to access financial/business information on all limited companies e.g. directors, shareholders, profitability, employee performance. This can be used to develop marketing lists, identify potential clients, prospective employers, look for competitors and customers, and identify opportunities for business growth. Software will also be available to develop and nurture business ideas giving the individuals the opportunity to drive their own career and business.

The initiative supports those wishing to start-up their own business, invest in existing businesses or help their existing business to grow. It also supports the Library Services' employability offer by providing existing Library job clubs with the tools to support those wanting to make a career change, to start out on their own or to understand whether to take that job offer. The project can also support students under taking GCSE's or higher education marketing and business courses.

The resources will be clearly linked to job clubs delivered within the Library locations to expand options available to jobseekers. Projects specifically designed to provide advice and support to small businesses will be aligned including the Community Finance Partnership and Social Entrepreneurship programmes. Specialist support will be made available to individuals including Information, Advice and Guidance, Clinics and Business Networking with support from local specialist organisations.

## **Sandwell Council – Voluntary Sector Partnership to support SMEs**

Sandwell Council are proposing to maximise our engagement with business by working in partnership with local Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations. Whilst engagement of strategic companies and SMEs is a priority for the Council, limitations on staff resources do not allow a full engagement programme. Therefore, this proposal is for an SME engagement programme with support of the Voluntary Sector.

Case study evidence from employers accessing the Sandwell Guarantee has confirmed a large number of SMEs are not aware of the support available to them including funding, access to finance, wage subsidies and recruitment support. SME employers complain they do not have time to attend meetings and conferences or to research the minefield of services available to employers.

Voluntary sector organisations are often engaged with businesses in their local area but do not have full information or knowledge of the package of support available to businesses. It is anticipated the Voluntary sector approach to engagement may suit certain SME employers more than a Council corporate engagement.

Sandwell Council are proposing to pilot a joint approach with a small number of Voluntary Sector organisations to maximise the economic benefits of employers utilising the services available to them. This will involve delivering workshops to the Voluntary Sector to expand their knowledge and provide training on the use of a shared Customer Relationship Management system (CRM). The CRM system will be used to share information, for referrals and to capture outcomes from the pilot.

The Voluntary sector organisations will engage with businesses in their local community whilst cross selling business support services and refer to the Think Sandwell Website. The Think Sandwell website will be amended to ensure information is clear, concise and fully engaging providing information on all the services available.

The anticipated benefits of this joint approach are more businesses accessing funding, finance and benefitting from wage subsidies available for recruitment. Also, additional vacancies generated due to businesses accessing business support.