

BIG PLANS FOR A GREAT PLACE: **THE SANDWELL PLAN**





Foreword by the Leader of Sandwell Council, Councillor Rajbir Singh

During the COVID pandemic, councils have been at the forefront of providing vital services, supporting local action and bringing partners together. In Sandwell we have been proud to collaborate with our residents and partners, and we have worked together to understand the needs of our communities and respond rapidly and appropriately. We will take what we have learned over the past months into our refreshed corporate plan – Big Plans for a Great Place.

This has been a hard time for many people. The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and both the direct impact of the virus and the consequences of infection control have affected Sandwell profoundly and disproportionately.

But we know that there are things we can do to address this. This plan aims to build a fairer Sandwell, building resilience by investing locally, developing services with our communities to meet their needs, leaving no one behind and looking to the future in everything we do, including taking our environmental responsibilities seriously.

As well as addressing the challenges that lie ahead, this plan aims to maximise the great opportunities in Sandwell, putting us on the map. We will capitalise on the exciting new Sandwell Aquatics Centre, new housing developments and infrastructure such as the Midlands Metro Line and the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital as catalysts for wider regeneration.

As an organisation, we will ensure we have robust, transparent governance and decision-making processes in place.

The way we work has changed immensely since the pandemic hit, driving innovation and resource sharing. We will continue to modernise and transform the council at pace.

I look forward to working with you all in rising to this exciting agenda and delivering our Big Plans for a Great Place.

Our borough

Sandwell is a local government administrative area created in 1974 following successive local government reorganisations that brought together six boroughs: Oldbury, Rowley Regis and Smethwick in the south, and Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich in the north.

So Sandwell covers many historically disparate towns and urbanised villages at the core of the Birmingham-Black Country conurbation; places with distinctive identities that flourished along with their many world-class firms.

With postwar economic decentralisation and deindustrialisation, this urban core entered decline. Deprivation intensified from the 1970s, and some neighbourhoods became stigmatised, unpopular and needed housing clearance.

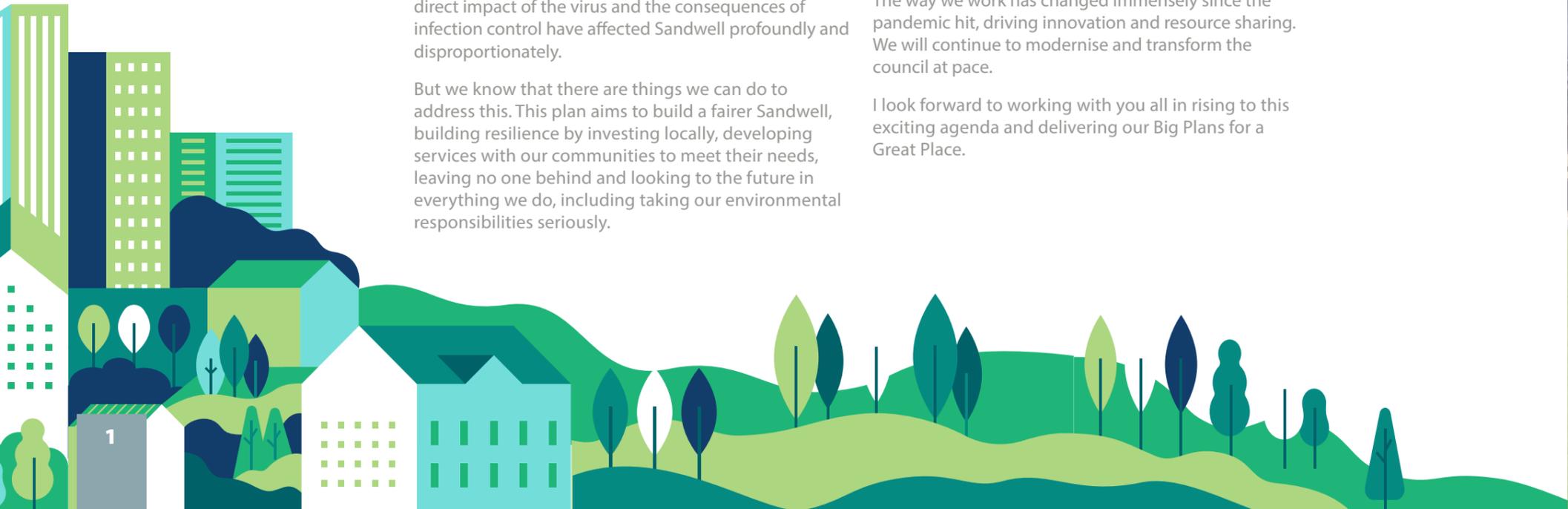
Most twentieth-century housing was council-built, especially in the north and was often of high quality but eventually culminated in concrete estates of flats. In an area of low incomes, some 28,600 homes were still managed by the council in 2019 accounting for 21.6% of the borough housing stock.

A legacy of intensive manufacturing and extractive industry, rail and canal corridors, and pockets of Victorian housing marks Sandwell today, but so too do its many parks, and quality open space like the Rowley Hills and Sandwell Valley.

It is an increasingly complex area, with varying internal dynamics and cross-boundary relationships affecting housing markets and travel to work within the conurbation. These differences are outlined in the next section, 'Our Towns'.

Sandwell has since the 1980s attracted significant government regeneration investment, often through area-based initiatives. This has addressed many physical problems such as dereliction, poor transport and local facilities, underpinned by a sustained focus on West Bromwich Town Centre. The borough's strategic advantage as a business location has been reinforced. And investment continues with a new hospital, a new Aquatics Centre, the extension to the West Midlands Metro line, and funding through the Stronger Towns Fund.

Significant new housing (4,727 units in 2012-20 alone) built on 'brownfield' ex-industrial sites has expanded and fused residential neighbourhoods, supported the historic centres and since the turn of the century, helped retain and attract working-age aspirational households. Serious long-term population decline has sharply reversed (Figure 1).



Our borough

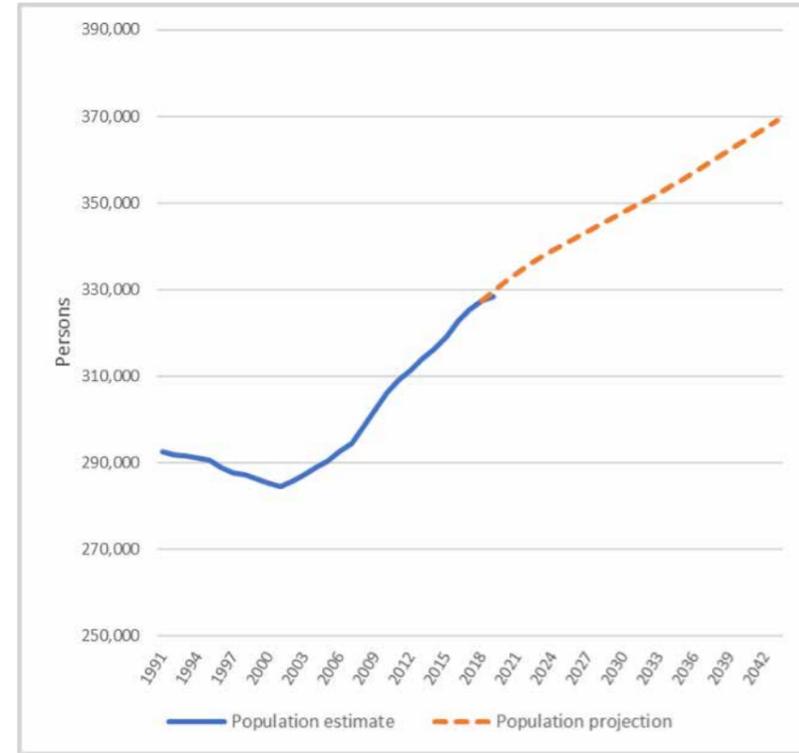
The £6 billion local economy has 8,775 businesses employing 136,000 people. It retains a significant manufacturing sector, with strengths in logistics, health and social care as well as retail and wholesale. Sandwell has nevertheless been better at adding population than jobs (Figure 2) with employment growth generally in low-skill and pay occupations.

International migration has been a major driver of change, first from the Commonwealth then from Europe and globally, including asylum seekers and refugees. From 2002-20, some 58,000 national insurance registrations were given in Sandwell to overseas nationals from 136 countries, although many have not remained. So it is now increasingly ethnically diverse, with an estimated 37% BAME population in 2019, when 37% of births also were to women not UK-born. This contributes to a young age profile, with 40% of people under 30 in 2019, although some neighbourhoods are rapidly ageing.

The number of localities in the worst 1% nationally has noticeably dropped but overall Sandwell remains the eighth most deprived English district. This reflects place-based issues but most seriously, people-based outcomes: low skills and educational attainment leading to labour market exclusion; child and family poverty; and poor health and life expectancy. Its demography and urban structure recently exposed it to Covid. This is why the six strategic outcomes identified in this plan are so important.



Figure 1 Sandwell Population



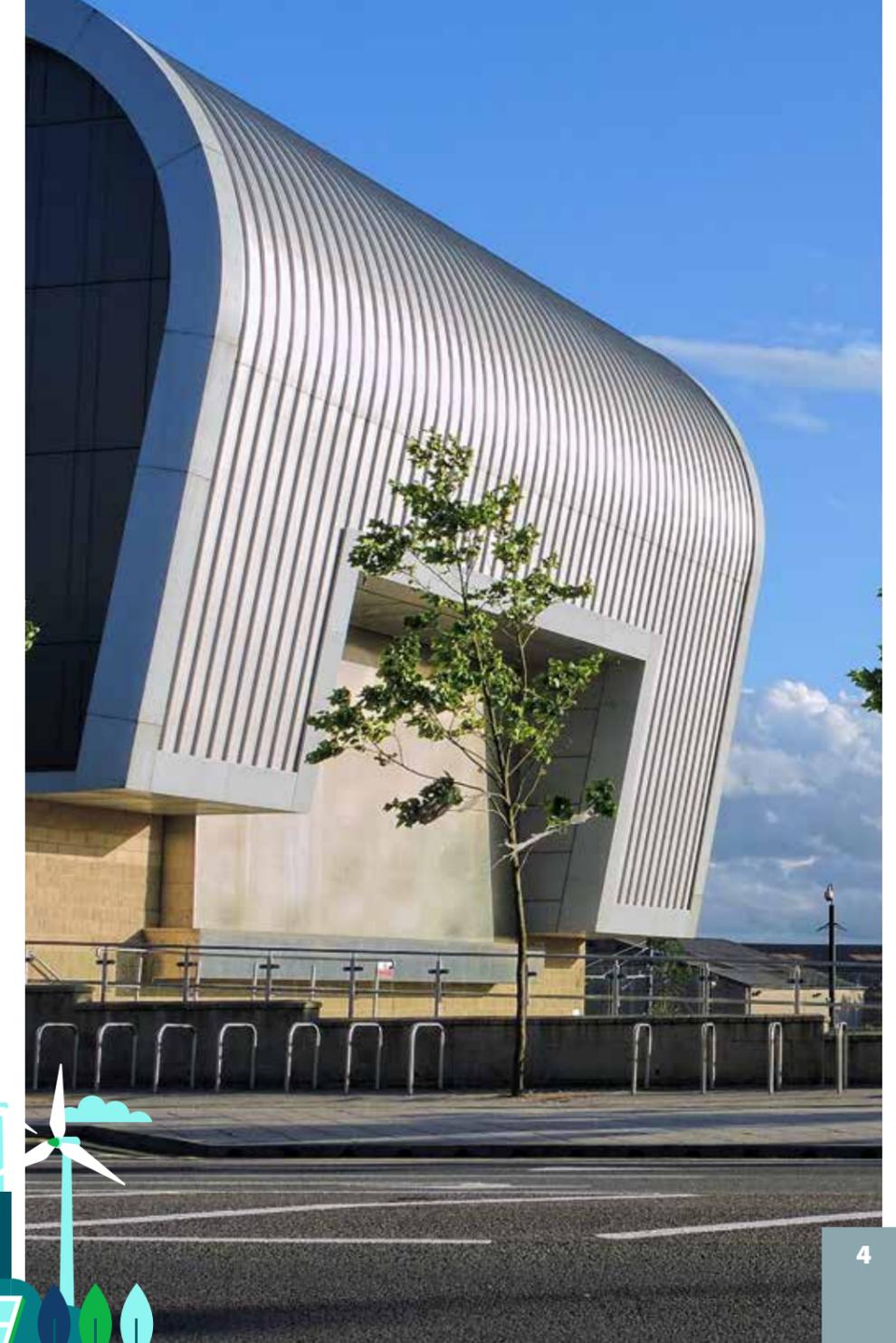
Source: Population estimates and projections – Local Authority based via NOMIS

Figure 2 Sandwell Jobs



Source: Jobs density via NOMIS.

Job density is the number of jobs in an area divided by the resident working age population.



Our towns

Oldbury

The population of Oldbury has grown by 4.9% since 2012 to 53,734. This is the same as the regional average and like the UK average, but slightly slower than the borough as a whole. Of the six towns, it is mid-rank in terms of population density, close to the borough average. It remains an industrial centre with suburban neighbourhoods in the south. It includes the administrative centre of Sandwell.

Oldbury has the second largest amount of jobs (27,500 jobs) and has experienced a 2.7% decrease in jobs over the past five years.

DID YOU KNOW?

Oldbury began as an Iron Age settlement and hill fort on the south-eastern slopes of the Rowley Hills, until its move to the current site of the town centre in the 15th century to take advantage of the improved road built between Birmingham, Dudley and Wolverhampton.

Rowley Regis

Rowley Regis includes Rowley Village and settlements ringing the Rowley Hills including the towns of Blackheath, Cradley Heath and Old Hill. Its population is growing slowly at 1.9% – far below the borough, regional and UK averages. It has an older age profile than the West Midlands and UK and has the highest proportion of over 65-year-olds and lowest proportion of under 19-year-olds of all the towns. The amount of businesses in Rowley Regis has grown by 3.1% in the last five years to 1,310, bringing job numbers to 14,250.

DID YOU KNOW?

The highest point of the Black Country is Turners Hill, part of the Rowley Hills, now the location of digital radio transmission aerials. During WW2 it was the site of a heavy anti-aircraft battery protecting the Black Country and Birmingham from German air attack.

Smethwick

Smethwick was marked by heavy post-war population loss after housing clearance in places like Windmill Lane. The town has grown by 9.4% since 2012 to 61,097, far outstripping the borough, regional and national average. It is the most densely populated town in Sandwell. It has a strong travel to work and retail relationship to Birmingham which is adjacent. It is ethnically highly diverse. Smethwick has the youngest population with the highest proportion of young people aged 0 to 15 (25.9%) and lowest proportion of over 65-year-olds (10.8%), making it younger than the region and UK. The amount of businesses in Smethwick has grown by 13.4% in the last five years to 2,165, bringing job numbers to 20,000.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of the Birmingham ironmasters moved to Smethwick and built grand houses with extensive gardens to escape the growing pollution of the city. Few survived the 19th century industrial growth, one noted exception being Lightwoods House and Park, now splendidly restored by the council.

Tipton

Tipton is the second smallest town by population. It has grown by 5.6% since 2012, slightly under the borough average but higher than the West Midlands and UK. Tipton is the smallest town by area and has a relatively high population density. New build housing has been significant over the past 25 years. Demographically, Tipton is young with a higher than average proportion of young residents and lower than average proportion of older residents. The amount of businesses in Tipton has grown by 11.6% in the last five years to 1,055. Employment has remained constant at 11,500 for the past three years.

DID YOU KNOW?

Being about as far from the sea as anywhere in the UK (it's about 70 miles to the nearest coast) it is perhaps remarkable that the world's first iron ocean-going steamship was built in Tipton. This was the Aaron Manby, designed by Aaron Manby, owner of the Horseley Ironworks, in 1822.

Wednesbury

Wednesbury is the smallest town by population with 39,499 people, it is growing slower than the regional and national average. Its population is slightly older than the Sandwell average, although it is still younger than the West Midlands and UK overall.

Despite being the smallest town by population, Wednesbury has a higher number of jobs than Rowley Regis and Tipton at 17,250. The amount of businesses in Wednesbury has grown by 9.9% in the last five years to 995.

DID YOU KNOW?

The earliest evidence for coal mining in the Black Country comes from Wednesbury, showing the industry was well-established in the town by the early 1300s. Extensive iron and pottery industries developed through the 1400s and 1500s, with Wednesbury's ceramic production so prolific the term 'Wedgbury' ware came to be applied to a specific type of pottery produced not only in Wednesbury but across the Black Country.

West Bromwich

West Bromwich is the largest town with a population of 81,304, giving it the lowest population density in Sandwell. It includes the main commercial and retail centre of Sandwell. Its housing markets include older terraced housing in the town centre, extensive council-built neighbourhoods to the north and the more affluent suburban Great Barr area. It has the second oldest age profile with 16.6% of its population aged over 65. It has the highest number of jobs at 35,000 and the highest amount of business at 2,370, which have grown by 10.7% in past five years.

DID YOU KNOW?

West Bromwich was originally a scattered series of hamlets (known locally as 'ends') where pottery and metal working – nails, springs, locks and buckles and latterly guns – developed as cottage industries, exploiting the coal, clay and ironstone, found just beneath the surface.





Sandwell Vision 2030

Sandwell has a clear vision for what the borough should look and feel like by 2030:

In 2030, Sandwell is a thriving, optimistic and resilient community.

It's where we call home and where we're proud to belong - where we choose to bring up our families, where we feel safe and cared for, enjoying good health, rewarding work, feeling connected and valued in our neighbourhoods and communities, confident in the future, and benefiting fully from a revitalised West Midlands.

This plan sets out what the council will do to deliver Vision 2030 and Sandwell's 10 ambitions over the next five years. It is not intended to include an

exhaustive list of all the functions of the council but sets out our priorities over the next five years.

Our Vision and everything we do is underpinned by our values - trust, unity and progress.



 Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.

 Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.

 Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.

 Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.

 Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.

 We have excellent and affordable public transport that connects us to all local centres and to jobs in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, the airport and the wider West Midlands.

 We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes.

 Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.

 Sandwell has become a location of choice for industries of the future where the local economy and high performing companies continue to grow.

 Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.





Building our Plan together

We want to be a Council that listens and responds. We want to make sure what we prioritise as a Council are the things that matter to our communities. To achieve this, we have had lots of conversations which have helped us build our refreshed plan.

We've embraced the principles of co-production in designing our refreshed plan and we want this to become the norm for everything we do, doing things with our communities and harnessing the understanding, intelligence and creativity our communities hold.

Young People

We know that our young people are the future of Sandwell and we want to make sure that their views influence the detail in our plan. We ran virtual workshops with seven schools in the Borough and attended the SHAPE Forum and Care Leavers Forum.

In designing our approach to talk to young people we used Sandwell's Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy as this sets the standards for engaging with young people in the borough.

We had a fantastic time talking to young people and want to say thank you to the schools that agreed to run workshops with us:

- Grove Vale Primary School
- Christchurch Primary School
- St Phillip's Primary School
- St Michael's Secondary School

Shirelands Secondary School

Q3 Langley

Q3 Tipton

Going forward we want to do further work with young people to develop a young person's version of the Corporate Plan.

Voluntary & Community Sector

Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations helped us organise a workshop for the sector so we could hear first-hand what their experiences had been over the past 18 months and what they felt the challenges would be going forward.

Member Workshops

Our 72 elected members hold a wealth of knowledge about their local communities and neighbourhoods. We ran six member workshops, one for each town in Sandwell.



Resident Survey

We want to make sure that what we do as a Council reflects the need within the community and that we build a Sandwell everyone can be proud of. To collect the views of residents on services the council provides and those that we work together with partners on we ran a survey to which we received over 1,200 responses.

This survey is the start of an ongoing project to create a Residents Panel. This Panel will provide regular feedback to the Council on key issues and services throughout the year. This intelligence will be fed into our strategic development and directly to service areas.

Our Staff

Not only do our staff have an amazing amount of knowledge about their specific areas of work and beyond, many are also residents of the borough. We want to make sure we harness the creative intelligence of our workforce to deliver improvements for our residents.



SECONDARY SCHOOL QUESTIONS

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SANDWELL

AGE: ...12..... NAME OF SCHOOL: Stratford Collegiate Academy

SECONDARY SCHOOL QUESTIONS

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SANDWELL

AGE: ...12..... NAME OF SCHOOL: Stratford

PRIMARY SCHOOL QUESTIONS

DRAWING THE FUTURE OF SANDWELL

AGE: ...9..... NAME OF SCHOOL: Goose Vale Primary School

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP? DRAW A PICTURE.

Name: Amrutha Khan
Job: Pediatrician

WRITE DOWN THREE THINGS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

The three most important things to me are my family, my friend and my education as they make me who I am.

WHAT NEW SKILLS WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN IN THE FUTURE. DRAW A PICTURE.

Being confident with what I do
Basic first aid
Speak multiple languages
Doing things I enjoy

HOW WOULD YOUR NEW SKILLS HELP YOU IN THE FUTURE. WRITE DOWN THREE THINGS.

1. They would help me with what I want to do when I'm older for example speaking multiple languages. 2. First aid would help me if I ever needed to help someone. 3. Hobby throughout.

WHAT ARE THE 3 THINGS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

My mental health
my family & friends
my peace

WHAT ARE YOUR AMBITIONS FOR THE FUTURE?

as an individual in this community, I would love to be a lawyer. This is because I want the chance to help make the world a better place.

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE?

I am a little anxious about my future because I will have to take over responsibilities and be mindful for things like bills.

I FEEL THAT I BELONG TO A COMMUNITY AND WE ALL WORK TOGETHER?

YES NO WHY? Because everyone is very warm and welcoming!

I FEEL THAT I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

YES NO WHY? Because of the support around me and support from school!

I FEEL THAT I AM BEING LISTENED TO?

YES NO WHY? Because when a certain group of people listen!

WHERE WOULD YOU LIVE AND WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE? DRAW A PICTURE.

WRITE DOWN THREE THINGS TO IMPROVE WHERE YOU LIVE AND HOW IT CAN BE IMPROVED?

- We could improve better in more areas
- We could encourage more people to walk, jog or cycle to school
- We could do more community events.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP? DRAW A PICTURE.

MP

WRITE DOWN THREE THINGS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

- Helping people
- Self-esteem
- believing in my self



Our Partnerships

One of our great strengths in Sandwell is our partnerships. We work with our partners to ensure our vulnerable residents are safe, to make sure our services are meeting people's needs and to look at how our services can be improved. The only way we can deliver our Vision for Sandwell is by everyone working together.

Regional Level

Sandwell plays a large part on the regional stage as one of seven constituent members of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The WMCA is made up of 18 local authorities and three Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). It aims to drive economic prosperity across the region and is one of our key partners for bringing forward opportunities both in Sandwell and for Sandwell people across the West Midlands.

At the Black Country level, we work in close partnership with the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP). The BCLEP is a joint private and public sector body created to drive forward economic development in the Black Country. It is focused on increasing employment and improving the levels of business and enterprise.

The council is working hand in glove with both the WMCA, BCLEP and our business partners to shape Sandwell and deliver the key regeneration priorities contained within this plan.

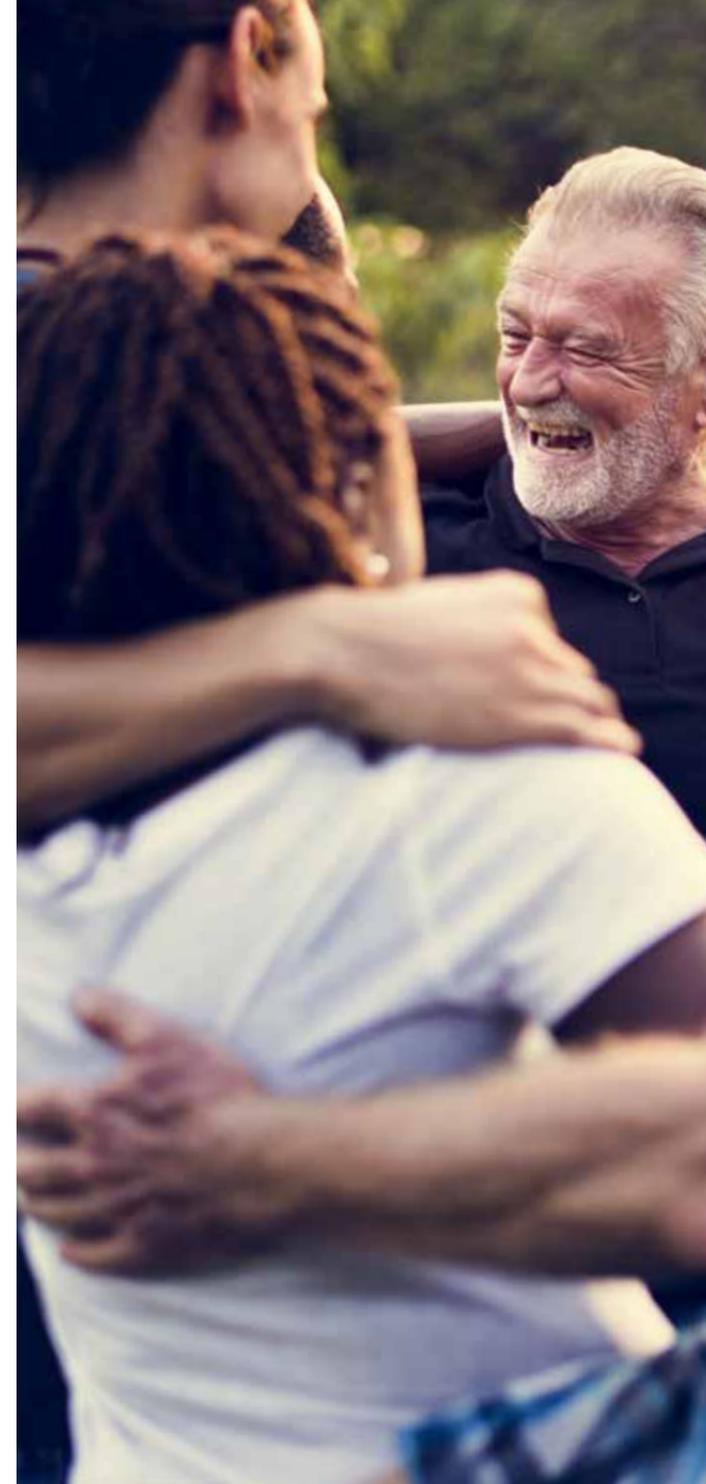
Local Level

Amongst a multitude of hard-working partnerships at the local level, we have four statutory partnerships that form the foundation of our collaborative working:

- Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board
- Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership
- Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board
- Safer Sandwell Partnership

Voluntary and Community Sector

Sandwell is immensely proud of its thriving local voluntary and community sector, who are key to the delivery our vision for the borough. Active and visible voluntary and community groups play a crucial role in building resilience in Sandwell and we will continue our long-standing history of working collaboratively.



The Plan

Our engagement with local people and partners in developing Vision 2030 has been invaluable in helping the Council shape this plan – Big Plans for a Great Place. The plan is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of everything we do as a council but sets out those outcomes that are strategically important for delivering Vision 2030.

Big Plans for a Great Place sets out six strategic outcomes. This is supported by our vision for one team, one council to create a modern and efficient council to deliver this exciting agenda. This plan will provide the framework for delivery plans.

The six outcomes:

- The best start in life for children and young people
- People live well and age well
- Strong, resilient communities
- Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
- A strong and inclusive economy
- A connected and accessible Sandwell

Realising our vision in Big Plans for a Great Place is a huge undertaking and will mean breaking the cycle of poverty, improving support and outcomes in a child's early years, increasing skills and education attainment, reducing health inequalities, creating an environment for more inclusive economic growth and ensuring all residents are able of benefiting from new opportunities.



Our Resources

MAKING IT HAPPEN

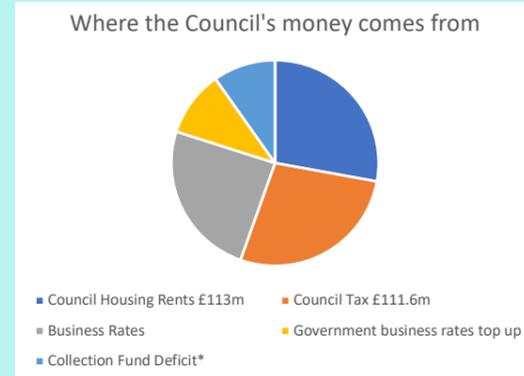
The diagrams, Figures 1 and 2, show where the council's money comes from and where it is going to be spent for the financial year 2021/22. Figure 3 shows the spend for the Housing Revenue Account, which for 2021/22 is £113million. In addition to this, we spend approximately £25m on Public Health which is funded from a separate grant. We also distribute £380 million of government money to schools and academies to fund children's education.

For the last 10 years, we have met the financial challenges of austerity and we will continue to manage our resources within the context of uncertain funding in the future; doing our best to deliver the best services we can within the resource limitations placed upon us.

To make this plan a reality we shall be aligning our resources to deliver our priorities set out in this plan. We recognise we cannot do this alone, so we will make sure that we are working in tandem with our partners to co-ordinate spending where possible. We will maximise our assets and build community wealth, spending more of the council's money with local businesses. This supports the local economy, it means more jobs and apprenticeships for local people-meaning more people earning, better spending power and more money going back into the local economy.

We want to hear from our residents when planning our spending and so we will be developing plans for involving the public in budget decision making.

FIGURE 1



* this is the shortfall in business rates and council tax from the previous year. This is much higher than normal because of the impact of COVID

FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3



Impact of COVID

Since the beginning of 2020, the global Covid pandemic has resulted in desperate loss of life as well as widespread social and economic costs. The successful programme of mass vaccination has now reduced the risks of Covid infection but the virus is likely to remain a key challenge over the life of the corporate plan.

Sandwell's demography and urban structure exposed it to Covid, most notably its central corridor of older, poor quality housing and BAME communities where infection rates were highest.

The impact of successive lockdowns in 2020-21, needed to contain the pandemic, has caused significant economic damage. Sandwell was already in recession when Covid hit and has subsequently experienced many business failures, most visibly in our high streets, and widespread rises in unemployment, particularly among young people. Self-employed people suffered greatly and many jobs were sustained only through short-term government furlough support. The economic scarring of Covid is expected to be considerable.

The pandemic has deepened hardship and inequality in our already deprived area. Reliance on Universal Credit more than doubled and household debt has grown. Also of concern is the impact on mental health from bereavement, money worry, social isolation and family pressures, often exacerbated by digital exclusion. Young people have been badly affected by school and university disruption and by lockdown restrictions.

Impact on council services has also been great. Lockdown led to the suspension or rapid recasting of many services as facilities and offices closed. Home

working became the main way of keeping services running. In conjunction with the voluntary sector, the council supported thousands of households with food packages, and acted to prevent homelessness while also giving a financial lifeline to many businesses. Agencies like the NHS and the police worked with the council seamlessly to keep people safe. The council lost significant income during this time and this has fundamentally affected our financial position. Staff have been under intense pressure but working together they responded magnificently.

There are many lessons to learn from the pandemic. Both Sandwell's people and our place have been profoundly affected and the impact of inequality has been magnified. Yet we have also responded to challenges and new ways of working rapidly, built trust and relationships with our partners and our community has pulled together to support each other. This plan sets out how we will respond to the challenges and seize the opportunities.



Our Strategic Outcomes



THE BEST START IN LIFE
FOR CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE



PEOPLE LIVE
WELL AND
AGE WELL



STRONG
RESILIENT
COMMUNITIES



QUALITY HOMES
IN THRIVING
NEIGHBOURHOODS



A STRONG AND
INCLUSIVE ECONOMY



A CONNECTED
AND ACCESSIBLE
SANDWELL



ONE COUNCIL
ONE TEAM



Creating a Fairer Sandwell

The pandemic has affected Sandwell in many different ways, but one thing it has done consistently is to make existing inequalities present in Sandwell worse. We want to redress this balance and make Sandwell a fairer place. We've come up with a set of principles to measure everything we do against, at the heart of it is creating a fairer Sandwell.

These principles will put in practice our aspirations for Sandwell. They are simple, clear messages of our intent.

Local Investment

We are a major investor in our local economy, but we can do more along with our partners.

Local investment should be at the heart of what we do, it's how we create opportunities for our residents and keep the Sandwell pound in Sandwell. By pushing forward our Community Wealth agenda, focusing on Social Value and maximising opportunities to draw in external funding we can start to architecturalise a new Sandwell. This together with our house building programme and other local regeneration programmes offers significant opportunity.

This alongside our skills agenda will mean our residents have opportunities for well paid, local jobs.

Doing things with the community

This is about designing projects and services with the people so that they are part of the solution. We know that this approach delivers better outcomes, better outcomes that fit community need. This approach has added benefits of improving relationships and partnerships

and buy in to making things work, ultimately it can make better use of limited local resources.

Building on the strengths of the community in our approach, together with looking at how we can support local organisations to come together to do more, will also help to deliver better outcomes and keep Sandwell money in Sandwell.

We also need to acknowledge and celebrate when things go well, this is really important in building momentum to deliver bigger and better.

No one gets left behind

This is really about putting the growing inequality that has been experienced as a result of the pandemic front and centre. It picks up the need to break growing health, social and economic inequality.

It is about addressing the reasons why people maybe excluded, for example digital exclusion.

Green in everything we do

Climate change is the biggest threat facing humanity and has a massive impact on inequality. The green agenda is another principle that should permeate through everything we do. In all our decisions and projects we should ensure that we are having a positive impact on climate change, making sustainable decisions in order to reach our carbon neutral targets. Part of this is about raising our awareness and understanding of climate change as an organisation and about encouraging culture change in the wider community.



The following pages contain our strategic outcomes together with our aspirations for making these a reality.





The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People

The critical early period from pregnancy to a child's second birthday provides the foundation for how they will develop, grow and learn; and for their future life chances.

We know that poverty can limit nutrition, affect cognitive development, the ability to do well in school and ultimately earn a good living later on. It can contribute to vulnerable environments. This is why we have placed the emphasis on the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life and the importance of families securing the support available to them.

We want children to be ready for school and for schools to be ready for children. Families and communities being able to support that readiness are vital, so we are introducing specific additional measures for this early period and to prepare young people for adult life and skills, with a particular focus on vulnerable children. This chapter outlines our commitments to giving all of our children the best start in life.

- Local Investment
- Green is Everything we do
- Doing things with the Community
- No one gets left behind

First 1000 days	
B1	We will bring together all partners to transform services through an Early Years Transformation Academy.
B2	We will work with partners to deliver the EY Outcomes Framework and specifically, create new pathways for support that meet the needs of our residents and fill in the gaps in services for children aged 12-24 months.
B3	We will ensure that culturally sensitive and accessible service hubs are in all six of our towns, and that community-led support is available.





The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People

Ready for school	
B4	We will establish programmes that specifically address language development, in partnership with other local authorities.
B5	We will support improvements in home learning environments.
B6	We will promote the importance of communication and language to parents, and we will provide earlier support to children who need it.
B7	We will ensure that professionals work together, across agencies, to develop their expertise in early childhood matters by delivering a multi-agency workforce development plan.
B8	We will seek additional support for social mobility projects that address early language, with an intention to increase aspiration and ability.
B9	We will provide enough good school places that offer families choice and confidence that their children can experience high quality education and achieve good outcomes.
B10	We will work with schools and other learning providers to improve educational outcomes for children and young people.



Children and young people that need more support	
B11	We will work with partners to make sure that vulnerable children in our community receive the right support to enable them to thrive and have successful adult lives.
B12	We will be a council that understands the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma, with a workforce that provides services with compassion and understanding.
B13	We will work with Sandwell Children's Trust to improve the quality of children's social care.
B14	We will be a good Corporate Parent for the children in our care, ensuring that those children are fully a part of our 'family', and promoting fostering and adoption.
B15	We will work with partners to ensure early help is available to children and young people at the earliest opportunity depending on their need.
B16	We will ensure that children and young people with SEND can access high quality local services when they need them, by working with partners to ensure there is a comprehensive local offer available to children and families
B17	We will ensure that emotional health and wellbeing support is in place for children and young people.





People Live Well and Age Well

The pandemic and lockdowns have worsened existing health inequalities. We will work to redress that balance by investing in the community, voluntary and faith sectors, playing our part in the vaccine roll-out and ensuring that local communities are connected.

Living healthy lives is also paramount. From an early age, health is an issue for residents, with Sandwell underperforming for prevalence of obesity as well as mental ill health. People are living longer but are often in poor health as they get older. We want people to live well for longer. And we will put in place the measures to reverse this trend by working with local people to create community-based opportunities leading to healthier lives

It is also vital that people with care and support needs are enabled to make choices about the life they live. Being able to choose where you live, how you are supported, if you work or attend college and how

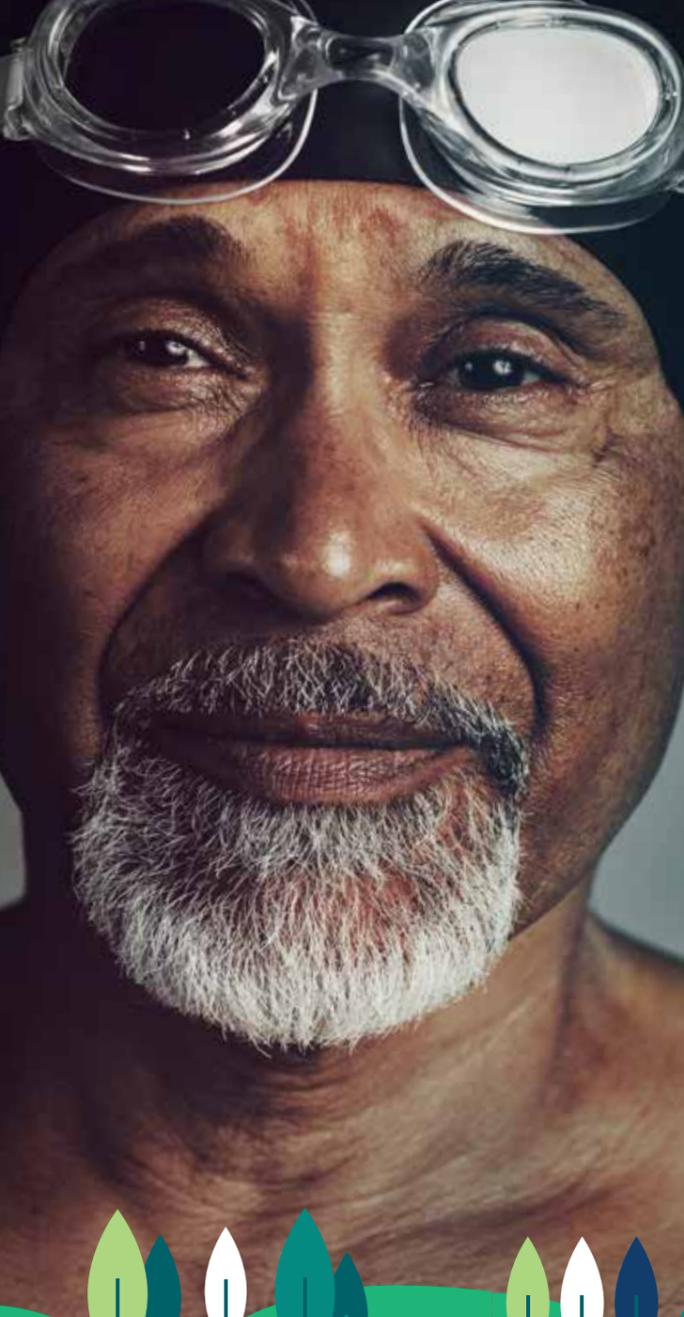
you spend your free time are basic decisions that many people with care and support needs find it difficult to make without support. We will help people make everyday choices around not just how they are supported, but also how they choose to live their lives.

We'll make sure that people don't stay in hospital for longer than they need to and we will share information across health and social care staff to reduce duplication. We will do this by working with partners to integrate health and social care.



Rebuilding	
L1	We will work with the Council's Equalities Commission to ensure that no one is left behind. In particular, we will identify and tackle health inequalities that have been widened by the Covid pandemic, including inequalities emerging across ethnic groups.
L2	We will increase investment of public health funds into community, voluntary and faith sector grants to support Covid resilience and recovery.
L3	We will continue to respond to the pandemic and play our part in the vaccination roll out.
L4	We will work with our partners, including the community and voluntary sector, to reduce social isolation and ensure people are connected within their local communities and beyond.





People Live Well and Age Well

	Healthy lives
L5	We recognise our responsibility to invest in our community to promote wellbeing and help people live healthy lives. We will increase the role of local people in initiating, designing and delivering health improvement initiatives.
L6	We will create lots more community-based opportunities with local people, working across our partnerships, including the Voluntary and Community Sector, and we will commission a range of services that make the most of Sandwell's assets (including leisure centres, libraries, parks, community centres, youth centres, museums, canals and Sandwell Valley).
L7	We will develop a strength-based approach to further develop a Stronger Sandwell, by working with our public-sector partners and voluntary and community organisations.
L8	We will support people through easily accessible information, advice and guidance.
L9	We will continue to support access to food through food banks and opportunities for children in school holidays.
L10	We will ensure that we have sufficient mental health provision and we will promote good mental health through a range of initiatives, ensuring equitable access to mental health support.
L11	We will contribute to better air quality and climate change through raising public awareness, increasing active travel and supporting organisations to reduce carbon emissions.
L12	We will ensure new investment into health and wellbeing services including drugs and alcohol, adult obesity and smoking cessation.



	Choice and independence
L13	We will help people make everyday choices around not just how they are supported, but also how they choose to live their lives.
L14	We will promote access to employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities and those with mental ill health.
L15	We will review access to day care provisions to ensure that people have access to community resources to improve independence and choice.
L16	We will ensure our safeguarding processes are effective. We are committed to continuous learning to keep vulnerable adults safe from harm.
L17	We will ensure the right provision to enable people to stay independent for longer.
L18	We will work with our partners to ensure that everyone who needs it receives the good, personalised care they should be able to expect at the end of their life.
L19	We will ensure that all carers in Sandwell are offered support in a timely way and that they have access to the information, guidance and advice that they need.

	Joined up Health and Social Care
L20	We will develop a workforce strategy with partners





Strong Resilient Communities

Sandwell is an area rich with heritage and culture, with historic town centres and a legacy of metalworking to celebrate. Our residents tell us that vibrant local towns are really important for encouraging families to stay and have pride in where they live. This together with our programme for enhancing our green spaces and commitment to becoming carbon neutral will deliver positive outcomes for all of our communities.

We know that people want to feel proud of where they live and that part of this is about getting the basics

right, ensuring that our neighbourhoods and towns are clean and well maintained.

We will ensure that Sandwell is a safe environment, whether that be the safety of our road network, our parks and open spaces, adequate street lighting or, for instance, that our residents do not get caught out by rogue traders.



Vibrant community

C1	We will ensure our grant funding of community/voluntary sector activity supports the priorities we're outlining in this plan.
C2	We will deliver the Towns Investment Plans in West Bromwich, Smethwick and Rowley Regis, secured through £64.5m of Town Deal funding.
C3	Through working with the SHAPE Forum, we will make sure that our towns become welcoming places for young people and that they have jobs, activities and facilities to give them a part in the local community.
C4	We will put the needs of our residents at the heart of what we do, establishing processes to engage with them to ensure that our residents guide and influence our services.
C5	We will strive to maintain Green Flag status, whilst also working to enhance our existing green and open spaces, create new places to play and committing to plant a tree for every child starting school in Sandwell up to 2030.

Culture

C6	We will develop and deliver a libraries strategy that works together with the community. We will start to roll out the Open+ model which represents a different way of working for public libraries.
C7	We will deliver the operational requirements to ensure the smooth running of the Commonwealth Games and ensure a lasting legacy for Sandwell.
C8	We will showcase local, regional, national and international talent in an engaging and inspiring programme.
C9	We will explore and develop a Sandwell Valley phased investment programme over the next five years – towards the Valley becoming a key Visitor and Destination Gateway into Sandwell.



Strong Resilient Communities

Green	
C10	We will work with partners to deliver initiatives that will help up to achieve our climate change strategy and the target of being a carbon neutral borough by 2041.
C11	We will embed climate change considerations into our decision making to enable us to become a carbon neutral council by 2030.
C12	We will invest in our buildings and fleet, so both are low carbon and compatible with 2030. Working with our partners, we will make refuse collection and street cleansing greener with the rollout of electric street cleansing vehicles and participation in pilot projects to test other green vehicles.
C13	We will work to make our own housing stock greener by implementing minimum energy performance standards for existing and new build council homes and exemplar schemes for modern methods of construction.
Clean	
C14	We will recover, improve and transform our street maintenance programmes post Covid.
C15	We will increase recycling rates and encourage cultural change.



Safe	
C16	Sandwell's Community Safety Strategy will be reviewed and priorities will include ongoing work around prevention of violence and exploitation, reducing offending, reoffending and serious organised crime and supporting victims. We will develop a revised Domestic Abuse strategy in line with the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the new statutory duty on local authorities
C17	We will continue to work with partners and agencies to ensure that there is a joined up and effective approach to hate crime.
C18	We will strengthen our approach to supporting victims of modern slavery, developing an understanding of the threat, risk and harm modern slavery and human trafficking poses and target resources to the best effect.
C19	We will raise awareness across partner agencies, businesses and communities, to address modern slavery and work collaboratively to target perpetrators and victims.
C20	We will strengthen our multi-agency Tasking processes steps to foster resilience, shared understanding, support networks and cross-community working
C21	We will deliver more responsive, robust and co-ordinated enforcement across the council. To do this we will establish an Enforcement Co-ordination Board that will bring together intelligence and expertise from across the council to tackle issues by theme or by geographical area.





Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods

Having a warm, safe and secure home in an attractive environment is vital for improving living standards. There are 133,000 homes in Sandwell and more than a fifth of those are managed by the council.

We continue to have a active council house building programme and to work productively with partners to deliver quality homes in Sandwell. We are rightly proud of our council house building programme and we are looking at developing the second Council House Build Programme, this will enable us to deliver more homes that meet our residents' needs.

By 2030, we aim to have 8,000 more new homes in the borough. This will be a mix of council house building and homes built by registered housing providers and the private sector. We will also be working with our communities to explore the potential of community-led housing schemes and self-build.

We will also want to improve the quality of existing homes in terms of making sure our properties are safe and comply with fire and building safety requirements and that they are energy efficient. As a Council we want residents to inform service delivery and help to shape our services, this is no different in housing. We want to ensure that our tenants can participate in activity that helps to develop our offer.

More than 4,000 Sandwell families or individuals declared themselves homeless in 2020/21. In 70% of these cases we worked to prevent individuals and families losing their home. We will work to identify the needs of the most vulnerable people in Sandwell and work to support families who are at risk of becoming or who are homeless.



A home for everyone

H1	We will deliver much needed new homes across the borough, especially affordable homes, on our own land and other viable sites in order to help meet the demand for affordable housing in our communities
H2	We will help keyworkers to access affordable housing in order that Sandwell can attract and retain a strong local health and social care workforce for the benefit of our communities.
H3	We will aim to keep people independent in their own homes as long as possible which includes incorporating lifetime homes adaptable standards in to as many new homes as possible.
H4	We will focus more of our ambitious house building programme on the needs of our children and young people who have complex needs and those who have been in care, so we have a good housing offer for them in Sandwell when they become adults.
H5	We will focus more of our council house building on the needs of people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs.
H6	We will develop the second Council House Build Programme.
H7	We will incorporate more renewable energy measures into the design of new-build Council homes, including modern methods of construction and heating.
H8	We will work to identify the needs of the most vulnerable people in Sandwell and work upstream to prevent homelessness where ever possible.
H9	We will work to prevent and end rough sleeping.
H10	We will explore all options for housing delivery, including community-led schemes.
H11	We will raise the standard of homes in the private rented sector and bring more empty homes back into use.



Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods

Regeneration and resources	
H12	We will introduce town centre living in appropriate locations ensuring council developments maintain excellent standards in urban design.
H13	We will continue to progress the review of the Black Country Plan to ensure the policy base is robust and meet the needs of Sandwell and the Black Country.
H14	We will take a proactive approach to accessing national funding for Sandwell that benefits our tenants and people who are homeless or in housing need.



Existing estate	
H15	We will modernise our tenancy and estate management offer, delivering a more proactive service, early identification and intervention to mitigate risks to tenancy sustainment and a new neighbourhood management working in partnership with communities to address their priorities.
H16	We will work to ensure our tenants live in safe and thriving neighbourhoods and that social housing is a tenure to be proud of.
H17	We will ensure that council homes are safe places to live by fully complying with fire and building safety requirements and regularly reviewing compliance. We will support people in the private rented sector to ensure their landlords comply with safety standards too.
H18	We will deliver a rolling programme of upgrades to our stock that improves energy efficiency and plan for the installation of alternative heating systems.
H19	We will aim to be a Borough of Sanctuary, offering a safe place for asylum-seekers and refugees to live, while recognising our leadership role in promoting integration and community cohesion.
???	We will increase our engagement with tenants, including tenants in high rise blocks.



A Strong and Inclusive Economy

Sandwell is the third largest borough in the West Midlands with a population of almost 330,000 and a £6.3 billion economy, the largest in the Black Country. But for our size our economy is not yet punching its weight and reaching its full potential. It is well understood that working and having a good income is one of the determinants of health and wider social benefits.

We are committed to working together with all our partners to create a strong and growing Sandwell, built on fairness. An economy where no one is left behind, that benefits everyone and where we build on the collective strengths of our community. We also want to work with our partners to make sure that, wherever possible, we spend our money directly with local suppliers so that the economy in Sandwell benefits and the money stays in Sandwell.

As a council, we really value our local businesses and want to continue to deliver high quality support that helps them thrive and prosper; and encourage the growth of new businesses. Part of this is ensuring that local people have the skills and knowledge to fill any vacancies by offering local training and development opportunities.

We want our young people to have access to good jobs and we will work with education providers and local businesses to guide young people to the pathways that enable them to meet their aspirations.



Spend our money and invest locally

E1	We will lead our partners in Sandwell to make the most of all our assets, spend local wherever possible and make long-term investment decisions that benefit our borough.
E2	We will spend more money directly with suppliers in Sandwell. We will do this by developing better intelligence and improving our knowledge of local supply chains, as well as working with major contractors to encourage spending and sub-contracting with local suppliers.
E3	We will develop and commit to delivering a Commonwealth Games Legacy Plan which ensures sustainable economic, wellbeing and cultural benefits of the Games for our communities.
E4	We will work proactively with our partners at the Local Enterprise Partnership, West Midlands Combined Authority and in central government to take maximum advantage of funding opportunities to secure additional funding for Sandwell regeneration projects.
E5	We will work with our health partners to deliver the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital and to maximise the significant regeneration benefits to the wider surrounding area, including training, traineeships, apprenticeships and employment opportunities.
E6	We will deliver the agreed Town Deals in collaboration with our partners across Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich
E7	We will work with the Department for Education to deliver a facility for a new school aligned to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.
E8	We will work with local providers to ensure local spend also has green outcomes.
E9	We will have a current strategic plan for the Borough that feeds into the Black Country Plan and ensures we allocate appropriate development land to meet our future needs for housing, employment opportunities, amenities and community facilities.
E10	We will develop an overarching Regeneration Strategy supported by an approved Pipeline of Regeneration Projects to support economic recovery from Covid19.

A Strong and Inclusive Economy

Working with businesses	
E11	We will work more closely with strategic businesses to develop shared opportunities
E12	We will strengthen our business sector so that local people can benefit from quality jobs that are stable and well paid through our work with Stronger and Inclusive Economy Board
E13	We will develop and implement an economic recovery strategy to support businesses and deliver economic growth in Sandwell following the impact of Brexit and Covid
E14	We will work with our partners to support the development and growth of business start-ups in Sandwell
E15	We will support local businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and work towards carbon zero targets
E16	We will establish more business networking and support events utilising Sandwell's Business Ambassadors



Jobs and training	
E16	We will ensure that local people have the skills and knowledge to fill any vacancies by reducing the number of residents with no/low qualifications and offering local training and skills development opportunities via the Adult Education Budget.
E17	We will work with our partners and voluntary sector to improve and develop digital skills in the community to minimise digital exclusion and maximise employment and training opportunities.
E18	We will work to ensure our young people have access to good jobs and we will work with all education institutions to guide young people to the pathways that enable them to meet their aspirations. We will do this through the provision of independent advice and guidance.
E19	We will support people into employment through the delivery of the Skills Strategy with our strategic partners in the Employment and Skills Partnership.
E20	We will offer quality work experience placements within the council.
E21	We will continue to deliver the Apprenticeship Levy and increase the take up of apprenticeships, particularly within small businesses in Sandwell through transferring some of the Apprenticeship Levy to that sector.





A Connected and Accessible Sandwell

Sandwell is located right in the heart of the West Midlands and is well connected both regionally and nationally. Sandwell's five motorway junctions, extensive canal network and 12 train stations are critical connectivity points, with easy access to Birmingham and Coventry.

Recognising that transport can be a barrier to work, we will work with our partners such as the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to ensure that our residents can access employment opportunities across the region particularly by public transport.

We want to make sure that all public transport options available locally are as green as possible. So, we will continue to invest in green infrastructure, alongside the investment we will continue the implementation of the Sandwell's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to develop more cycling and walking routes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide that exists in our communities. So now more than ever it is important that we address digital exclusion when designing services and making key council decisions. We also need work with our partners at WM5G to ensure Sandwell maximises opportunities for 5G infrastructure, so that internet users in Sandwell have the best connectivity.

This chapter outlines our commitments to make Sandwell more connected and accessible.



A connected and accessible Sandwell

A1	We will work with the WMCA to ensure that our residents can access employment opportunities across the region, particularly by public transport.
A2	We will continue to work with partners to deliver the Midlands Metro extension connecting Wednesbury to Brierley Hill and the SPRINT scheme.
A3	We will ensure improvements to the highway network are facilitated to support the local economy and the movement of goods and people across the borough.
A4	We will ensure that the responsibilities of the Local Highways Authority are delivered and continue to maintain standards in relation to highway condition.
A5	We will deliver accelerated funding projects relating to connectivity as part of the Town Deal.
??	We will work with our partners and voluntary sector to improve and develop digital skills in the community to minimise digital exclusion and maximise employment and training opportunities.



A Connected and Accessible Sandwell

Clean & green	
A6	We will enable people to get around in a healthy and sustainable way, supporting our health and wellbeing and our climate change strategies.
A7	We will continue to implement Sandwell's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and deliver a programme of infrastructure improvements across the borough.
A8	We will ensure that all public transport options available locally are as green as possible, including lobbying for clean green buses for our borough.
Partnerships	
A9	We will maximise government funding opportunities for infrastructure through working with our partner organisations including the Black Country Transport Team and Transport for West Midlands.
A10	We will develop and maintain relationships with Midlands Connect to profile major transport interventions in Sandwell.
A11	We will continue our partnership work with the Canal and River Trust to enable us to make the best use of our waterways.
A12	We will work with the Environment Agency in our role as Lead Local Flood Authority to adopt a Flood Risk Management Plan for 2021 to 2027.



Key infrastructure projects

A13	We will continue to deliver our key transport infrastructure projects, namely the major upgrade of Birchley Island, metro corridor walking and cycling programme, and Blackheath interchange.
A14	We will continue to develop and deliver projects that reduce barriers to the use of public transport and sustainable travel choices including working with Transport for West Midlands in relation to bus and metro provision and the Rail Alliance.
A15	We will ensure Sandwell is well placed to support the move towards electric vehicles by delivering key infrastructure requirements.
Digital	
A16	We will ensure that Digital Inclusion matters when designing services and making key council decisions.
A17	We will work with WM5G to ensure Sandwell maximises opportunities for 5G infrastructure.



One Council One Team

To deliver our ambitious plans we will create a modern, outstanding council, one where our organisational structure, business systems, process and people and cultural working practices are fully aligned to deliver our strategic outcomes. We will build a One Council: One Team ethos, breaking down departmental barriers, building collaborative team working and setting a sustainable budget aligned to outcomes.

At the centre of everything we do are the services we provide on a day-to-day basis, that make life better for people in our communities. The pandemic has changed the way we work significantly, and our residents are interacting with the council increasingly online. We want to make sure that Sandwell people get a good quality, consistent level of service, however they choose to contact the council. Central to this is the development of our digital services and supporting those people who want help in improving their digital skills. We are committed to becoming a listening,

responsive council that enables our residents to influence the design of services.

Our key strength as an organisation is our staff and their commitment to give Sandwell people the very best. A skilled, diverse, motivated and healthy workforce is key to this success. We will create a modern workplace and give staff technological tools that encourage creativity, collaboration and transformation. We take the health and wellbeing of our employees very seriously and will build the resources available to support them.



Council organisational structure

- O1 We will create a modern, outstanding council, one where our organisational structure, business systems, process and people and cultural working practices are fully aligned to deliver our strategic outcomes.
- O2 We will complete a review of all directorate and departmental structures to ensure they are aligned to supporting the successful delivery of the Corporate Plan.
- O3 We will build a One Council: One Team ethos, breaking down departmental barriers and building collaborative team working.
- O4 We will implement new operating models for the delivery of services in a safe way and ensure that staff are supported to work in the most appropriate location.

Access to services

- O5 We will design a corporate approach to improve both the accessibility of Council services and the quality of service we deliver; to make sure that Sandwell people get a good quality, consistent level of service, however they choose to contact the council.
- O6 We will ensure that support is in place where people need support to access services digitally.
- O7 We will invest in digital platforms to enable better access for our residents and other service users and to build on the benefits of increased digitalisation of our services
- O8 We will exploit the potential of new technology and 5G to deliver services more effectively and efficiently across the organisation

One Council One Team

Organisational development	
O09	We will invest in a range of opportunities, qualifications and experiences for our workforce. We will do this through workforce development plans to ensure our workforce is an enabler for current and future service delivery.
O10	We will enable all our staff to fulfil their full potential and have opportunities to progress within the organisation regardless of their protected characteristics by understanding the barriers faced by employees, establishing stakeholder staff groups and implementing the approved workforce action plan.
O11	We will continue to build on existing workforce mental health and wellbeing resources, by proactively responding to emerging challenges and trends, enabling our employees to effectively support their own, and their colleague's, positive mental health and wellbeing.
O12	We will develop and embed excellent people management practices, by effectively leading, supporting and improving our workforce, fostering a workforce that is engaged and productive.
O13	We will promote our successful work experience, apprenticeship, intern and graduate programmes to local people.
Systems and Governance	
O14	We will build robust and effective systems which improve transparency and co-ordination around decision making and service delivery.
O15	We will review all governance arrangements including a Constitution refresh, completion of the scrutiny review and refresh of the council's decision-making and performance management arrangements.
O16	We will deliver the Equalities Commission and implement its recommendations in order to ensure we meet our specific equalities duties and drive the equalities agenda at the heart of our organisation.
O17	We will develop the social value policy and implement the social value portal
O18	We will review and refresh the organisations digital strategy and digital platforms
O19	We will embed the newly designed Communications and Corporate Affairs Strategy to ensure we are communicating effectively with both our internal workforce and external stakeholders.



Listening, learning and accountable	
O20	We will embed co-design and collaboration as the standard approach for designing our services and developing our future priorities.
O21	We will listen to and work alongside Sandwell residents and partners to make sure that everything we do is focused on achieving the best outcomes.
O22	We will make sure that vulnerable groups who find it difficult to make their voices heard, influence and shape all of our plans and decisions and those of our partners.
O23	We will review how we manage complaints and customer feedback within the council to make sure that when things don't go to plan, we put them right and learn from what has happened.
Making the Most of Our Resources	
O24	We will set a sustainable and balanced budget each year
O25	We will update the Medium Term Financial Strategy in line with the 2021 Spending Review, Settlement and longer-term impact of COVID-19
O26	We will ensure all our services provide value for money and are run as efficiently as possible.
O27	We will implement a new Corporate Asset Management system to ensure the Council has sufficient, comprehensive information to make best use of its assets and assist with timely and accurate completion of annual accounts.

