Think Local Employment and Skills Services
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Page 3</td>
<td>Section A</td>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 5</td>
<td>Section B</td>
<td>Services Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 8</td>
<td>Section C</td>
<td>Think Local Contribution to the Sandwell Scorecard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 12</td>
<td>Section D</td>
<td>Think Local Marketing Strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION A

Executive Summary

What is Think Local Employment & Skills Service?
Think Local provides employment and skills support primarily for Sandwell residents with a mix of local authority responsibility and accountability coupled with the best of private sector business practices in the field of recruitment and training, adopting an ethical approach to recruitment in the interests of both employer and job seeker.

Think Local................
- Puts local people first
- Puts local businesses first
- Champions apprenticeships and opportunities for young people
- Provides first class training, mentoring and support
- Helps grow Sandwell’s economy
- Raises aspirations and expectations
- Raises Sandwell’s profile locally and regionally in terms of employment and skills.

Why is Think Local needed?

The Employment and Skills Service has been in existence since 1997 providing support for Sandwell residents to re-enter the labour market and access qualification frameworks. There were 13,682 Job Seeker (JSA) claimants in October 2011, representing 7.4% as compared with 4.8% across the West Midlands region and 3.8% in Great Britain.

The Job Seekers Allowance claimant count for 18-24 year olds at July 2012 is 4,155 (15.3%), which is the 7th highest out of 406 local authorities across the UK.

In June 2013 there were 13,103 JSA claimants (6.7%) compared with 13,849 (7.1%) in April 2013. West Midlands JSA stands at 4.3% and Great Britain stands at 3.5%.
West Midlands and Great Britain have both decreased by 0.2%, Sandwell has decreased by 0.4%.
Background

Think Local’s potential to deliver contracts in line with new initiatives around worklessness has grown through increased partnership working both regionally and sub-regionally and expertise in attracting funding.

More recently, challenging public sector budgets triggered a need to review the service including, its focus, delivery and longer term future. In April 2011 the service underwent a wide ranging restructure with staff resources reduced by 36%.

The Think Local Team comprises of three areas:

- **Employment** – recruitment team and youth employment /apprenticeship team; the latter is a dedicated team focussed on apprenticeships working alongside Future Skills Sandwell, colleges and private training providers to maximise the apprenticeship programme.
- **Sector development** - developing new markets and opportunities.
- **Training and skills** - (Future Skills Sandwell)

The new Think Local service aims to help make Sandwell an economically prosperous area that encourages investment, supports business development and enables local people to achieve their full potential. Action is being taken to increase employment in Sandwell, attract new private investment to the area and ensure that people from all walks of life choose to live and work in Sandwell.

The focus and means of delivery of the service has changed with a shift from client towards employer, the establishment of outreach facilities, working with the Third Sector, becoming better equipped to create stronger links with both companies, and workless individuals.

Our scorecard indicators around getting people into work and trained up to at least NVQ level 2 are intrinsically linked with providing the best possible means for local businesses to expand and develop their market share.

Employers are encouraged to adopt the “Think Local” principle to recruit and train local labour. This principle is the underlying theme of sustainable communities, contributing to the company’s reputation as a local employer. Supporting people to gain recognised qualifications for sustainable employment Think Local understands that it is vital that individuals acquire the skills and qualifications necessary for them to make the best possible contribution to employers and help to stimulate local business growth.

The service has always been driven by the need to address high levels of unemployment and tackle problems of low or no skills and poor educational attainment and this is no different today. Think Local is operating within an even more challenging economic environment but against this background has been extremely successful in sourcing new vacancies and apprenticeship posts. The
biggest challenge, one shared by our colleges and other training providers, is to ensure that Sandwell residents have the appropriate skills to fill those vacancies.

SECTION B

Services Available

The service has been designed to maximise the impact that can be made on the local economy by delivering a “Single Offer” to local business. This approach reduces multiple council contacts with employers and ensures that the companies and individuals have access to the right people dependent on their needs; a single point of entry for both clients and businesses.

Employment Team
- Think Local Recruitment supports employers to find the right people - sifting, screening and assessing applicants according to business needs. The team identify individuals’ level of experience and skills before forwarding applications to the employer.
- Developing partnerships with DWP and SFA Prime Providers particularly with regard to the Work Programme
- Youth Employment & Apprenticeships Team works with a range of colleges and training providers to identify training opportunities for young people, they support and advise employers interested in employing apprentices offering ongoing mentoring support and mediation between the apprentice, their family, the employer and the training provider to ensure a successful outcome. The manager of the Team manages the councils Local Government Apprenticeship Programme working particularly closely with the Leaving Care service. The team works closely with Future Skills Sandwell and the Sector Development Team particularly around the training outcomes from public sector procurement.
- In2Work is a recruitment and retention service for people with mental health problems, supporting them to find employment and to stay in employment. Based in West Bromwich the team is made up of specialist mental health employment brokers.
- Work Choice is a small specialist team delivering an employability project supporting people with learning disabilities to find employment or work experience.
- Workwise is part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme and provides bus passes for those individuals who gain employment or are attending job interviews. For those who have secured a job the bus pass is for one to two months and reduces the financial pressure during that initial first few months of work.

Sector Development Team
- Linking with major development projects, employers and stakeholders throughout the West Midlands bringing benefits and opportunities to Sandwell.
• Working closely with a wide range of partners the team enables local businesses and residents alike to benefit from investment, developments and regeneration in Sandwell.
• The team works alongside the Voluntary and Community Sector as well as private training providers to help ensure that education, employment and skills services within the borough support the needs of Sandwell residents.
• Sector Development working with policy and strategy colleagues will respond to priority growth sector needs and emerging government initiatives.

Training & Skills - Future Skills Sandwell
• Quality training in a variety of areas including construction, business administration and customer services. The service is currently expanding, providing solar panel installation and acting as a gateway for all apprenticeship enquiries arising from Think Local activity. The service is flexible, enabling people to learn in the best way for them and their organisation.
• The HUB – Building Futures – this is a training centre based a few hundred yards from the main Rolfe Street site which is helping to support young ex-offenders and those on the fringes of crime to gain hands on experience within the construction industry. Young people can gain a recognised qualification and improve their chances of finding sustainable employment. The HUB is the result of collaboration between Think Local and Vinci Facilities.

The 3 areas of Think Local are intrinsically linked and together with economic development services to provide a coherent offer to businesses.

There are significant benefits to working through such a model, to manage the interaction between the Council and these services a CRM (Customer Relations Management) System, Tractivity, is now in place. This enables all elements of the service to be kept up to speed with contact around any one specific employer.

Partnership Activity

Think Local works with a wide range of partners and initiatives on the employability agenda.

Job Centre Plus – an obvious partnership which delivers great benefit to both organisations:
• Regular meetings with the District Partnership Manager
• Collaborative working with the JCP District Employment Manager particularly around the delivery of large scale recruitment.
• JCP receives all new vacancies sourced by the recruitment team
• JCP works with the recruitment team to deliver “job days”, targeting jobseekers in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance.
• JCP Flexible Support Fund is currently being used to extend the existing Work Wise Programme which removes barriers to transport by providing bus passes for individuals gaining employment.
Prime Contractors – There are several DWP contracts which have been awarded to Prime Contractors in the region:

- The Work Programme – EOS, Pertemps People Development Group and InTraining- Regular meetings are held between the team and the Primes at a local and also a Black Country level. The team also liaises between the Primes and Sandwell’s Voluntary and Community Sector. The ongoing relationships with these contractors helps to ensure that the local authority is aware of the Work Programme activity and the impact it is having on Sandwell.

Sector specific companies – Together with Policy colleagues Employment Brokers are working with Sandwell’s growth sectors; we have worked with employers in the Advanced Manufacturing and Food industries to conduct business surveys around company needs for growth in Sandwell, including skills assessments.

Voluntary & Community Sector – The team has a long history of working with the Sector particularly stemming from Neighbourhood Renewal and Working Neighbourhood funds.

- Think Local has been successful in obtaining ERDF monies which funds the Sandwell Employment Network across the borough until December 2013, maximising engagement and opportunity for Sandwell job seekers.
- Recipients of the Voluntary Sector Main Programme Grant delivering employability outputs are monitored and supported by the Sector Development team.

16 – 19 Commissioning Team – Think Local have worked closely with the Commissioning Team in the development of the Apprenticeship Strategy for Sandwell.

Local Authorities Sub regionally and regionally. – Particularly in working collaboratively with regard to funding applications.

Black Country LEP - As the Sandwell representative on the Black Country LEP Education, Skills and Employment Work stream we are able to ensure that the employment & skills priorities of Sandwell businesses and residents are reflected in the LEP implementation plan, City Deal and Black Country Growth Plan. We are currently working with colleagues on the development of an EU Structural Funds Funding Strategy for 2014-20.

Skills Funding Agency – In addition to Future Skills Sandwell SFA contract Think Local has also worked with the SFA on a variety of ESF contracts (see Section A). The Youth Employment/Apprenticeship Team works closely with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) acting as a conduit between young people and employers using the NAS website.

Anti-Poverty Action Plan 2010-2013
The Think Local team contributes to several of the plans’ strategic objectives:

*Routing to skills, qualifications and jobs, support to business and enterprise in key skills sectors*
and the shared priority actions around “improved & relevant education and training; raising aspirations for children, young people and families; raising standards and achievements; improving NEET opportunities; creating jobs”.

To develop quality accessible and affordable services which also provide routeways into work, support local jobs and workforce progression.

and the shared priority actions around …….“deliver comprehensive social and economic regeneration; create jobs by new business start ups, supporting existing industry………..”

SECTION C

Think Local’s contribution to Sandwell’s Scorecard

Clearly alongside the financial benefits which Think Local brings to the council the service has a direct impact on Sandwell’s Employment and Skills issues; along with employment and training come other wider positive benefits for the Local Authority. Research has demonstrated that being in work vastly improves an individual’s “well-being” which in turn has a positive impact in terms of the need for health services; addressing worklessness in turn addresses child poverty issues as families become more economically active. Tackling unemployment also addresses issues facing the wider economy, individuals in employment have a level of disposable income which can support the local economy and in so doing assist in retaining jobs and services. The table below identifies key interventions where the Employment and Skills service supports the Council’s wider strategic priorities, being “in employment” cuts across many of the key issues facing Sandwell communities.

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<tr>
<th>Strategic priority – Great People</th>
<th>Divisional responsibilities</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Our Children : Sandwell’s future</strong></td>
<td>Youth Employment &amp; Apprenticeship Team working with training providers, employers, Leaving Care Team, National Apprenticeship Service. Future Skills Sandwell and the Training Hub</td>
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<td><strong>Supporting vulnerable children and young people</strong></td>
<td>“We want to make sure that all of our young people have opportunities to learn and work. We are trying to get as many 17-year-olds as possible into further education or training for jobs.” ( NI 91)</td>
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<td><strong>Diverting young people from crime</strong></td>
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<td>“We want to encourage young people who have previously been involved in crime to study, work or train and turn their lives around.”</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Changing NHS, improving health</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>“We will improve access to health services, especially for those people with a learning disability or a mental health need”</td>
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<th><strong>Strategic Priority – Great Place</strong></th>
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<td><strong>West Bromwich: Top Town</strong></td>
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<td>“<strong>Tesco</strong> was granted planning permission in mid-2010 for the 540,000sq ft development, which could create thousands of jobs. Work started on site at the end of October 2011 and is scheduled for completion in 2013”</td>
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<td>The <strong>New Square</strong> development will:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create more than 2,000 jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Providence Place</strong> office development</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It is expected to generate tens of millions of pounds in new investment for West Bromwich and create hundreds of new jobs for a wide range of skills.”</td>
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| Future Skills Sandwell and the Training Hub works with Youth Offending Service, Probation to provide training opportunities in the construction industry for young ex-offenders and those on the periphery of crime. |
| Specialist employment support for people with mental health problems, and disabilities through In2Work and Work Choice – part of the Think Local Employment Team. |

| **Sector Development Team, Recruitment Team, Youth Employment Team working with developer, local job seekers. Not just construction but end user jobs and supply chain.** |
| Recruitment Team worked with BT and a private recruitment agency. Open days were held for local people supported by the Think Local Recruitment Team. |
“The recruitment of hundreds of BT new jobs is now under way.”

**Better look and feel for West Bromwich town centre**

“The improvements will:

- Have a positive impact on the local economy
- Encourage inward investment and job creation”

**YMCA: Help for the homeless and more**

“The YMCA Western Gateway will:

*Deliver training and employment programmes, including social enterprise opportunities*”

**Homes that meet people's needs**

**The Lyng new housing development**

“The Lyng development will:

Create employment, training and enterprise opportunities”

**Strategic Priority – Great Prospects**

**Investing in businesses, people and jobs**

**Bringing new jobs to Sandwell**

“We want to bring new jobs and money into Sandwell by boosting enterprise and working with businesses. We are aiming to create up to 1000 new jobs by April 2013.”

Recruitment Team working with Sector Development and Economic Development.

Sector Development Team, Recruitment Team, Youth Employment Team, Future Skills Sandwell providing apprenticeship and employment opportunities.

Sector Development & Recruitment Teams working with Economic Development. The recruitment team has contacted over 700 companies assisting not only with their recruitment needs but also signposting them to other services provided through the “Single Offer”
<table>
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<th><strong>Level 2 apprenticeships</strong></th>
<th>Future Skills Sandwell and Youth Employment/Apprenticeship Team working with National Apprenticeship Service and other training providers.</th>
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<td>“Sometimes not having the right skills prevents people from getting the job that they want. We are working to make sure that people find the right training up to NVQ level 3 and are supported throughout, and to help young people find an apprenticeship to suit their needs.”</td>
<td>Recruitment Team, Youth Employment/Apprenticeship Team, In2Work, Work Choice. Working with Work Programme Providers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Getting people jobs</strong></td>
<td>Recruitment Team working with employers and Economic Development.</td>
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<td>“This year we are aiming to help around 700 people to find jobs.”</td>
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<td><strong>Helping businesses get good advice</strong></td>
<td>Sector Development, recruitment Team.</td>
</tr>
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<td>“To bring money and jobs into Sandwell, we help businesses start, grow, and find new buildings. This year we are going to advise and support 750 companies.”</td>
<td>Sector Development, Recruitment Team, Youth Employment/Apprenticeship Team working closely with Right Care Right Here and SSWB Hospital Trust.</td>
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<td><strong>A better deal for Smethwick</strong></td>
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<td>“Developments already under way - and in the pipeline - will improve housing, job opportunities and education for people and families in Smethwick.”</td>
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<td>“Healthcare in Smethwick - and Sandwell as a whole - will get a boost from a new hospital in the Grove Lane area. The new hospital will also provide better long-term job prospects for local people and give an uplift to the local economy as building work goes ahead.”</td>
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<td><strong>Strategic Priority – Great Performance</strong></td>
<td>Recruitment Team are based out in the community working with residents and businesses assisting</td>
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<td>“We've said we will make it easier for people contacting the council to get the information they need.”</td>
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SECTION D

Think Local Marketing Strategy

Based on the “Think Local Construction” brand which is recognised by a substantial numbers of employers “Think Local” was chosen to represent the ethos of the service, “local jobs for local people”. Equally in terms of expansion of the service across the Black Country “Think Local” could be used in all areas e.g. Think Local Dudley. The strategy and thinking behind the brand would be appropriate to all local authorities.

We already have a communications toolkit and strategy which aims to:

- To promote the Employment and Skills Service, improve its visibility to the wider public and demonstrate the value the service delivers for Sandwell MBC and its wider partners
- To raise awareness of the Employment and Skills Service with a wide range of partner organisations, and enable the delivery of local and sub-regional objectives.
- To promote the services it offers and its successes along with the promotion of joint partnership working
- To ensure that through the promotion of the service that it continues to open up and investigate new opportunities.
- To communicate the successful delivery of projects and initiatives
- To secure the widest possible media coverage,
- To present achievements on the successful delivery of projects and programmes
- To publish project outcomes and funding allocations secured.