

Sandwell Council

Chief People Officer • Service Director – Customer, Democracy and Neighbourhoods • Service Director – Housing • Service Director – Strategy and Communications • Service Director – Transformation and ICT

Last month saw our 'Making It Sandwell' campaign launched to promote and celebrate a West Midlands borough that for many years simply went under the radar.

The Sandwell Story seeks to challenge perceptions, showcase the area's many strengths and achievements and, most of all, motivate and inspire individuals and organisations around a common and ambitious future vision. As a film accompanying the campaign points out, this is the place that put the glass in Big Ben's face and gave Wembley Stadium its famous arch.

For Shokat Lal, Chief Executive of Sandwell Council, the campaign speaks volumes about the borough's growing sense of confidence. For too long Sandwell has been punching below its weight, outside of Birmingham it is one of the biggest boroughs in the West Midlands.

One of the key building blocks has been a reset for the local authority, which exited Government intervention in 2024 following sustained progress.

After restructuring his senior leadership team last year, Shokat is now turning his attention to the next tier of leaders with the creation of new Service Director posts designed to accelerate Sandwell's improvement journey and transformation programme.

'Everything is heading in the right direction and this is phase two of the organisational redesign,' he explains. 'The aim is to ensure portfolios and responsibilities are more aligned so we have a clear line of sight from a service delivery point of view. It's very much looking at it through the lens of residents, ensuring our workforce can work seamlessly across services.'

'These roles are critical to making sure it's clear where accountability and responsibility sit in the organisation so we're more joined up and better able to deliver the council vision and better outcomes.'

Shokat believes the organisation now offers a rewarding and supportive environment for staff. Values and behaviours are embedded, there are strong and respectful officer-member relations and the council enjoys both financial and political stability.

'You can see the impact of those changes and our growing confidence in the way we work,' he says. 'There's so much happening in the West Midlands. We're the gateway between Birmingham and the Black Country and we're now holding our own at a regional level. Previously, Sandwell wouldn't have been



Chief Executive, Shokat Lal and Leader, Cllr Kerrie Carmichael – Sandwell Council

round the table in terms of the regional space, but now we're at the forefront.'

Whoever becomes Chief People Officer will play a crucial role in maintaining Sandwell's momentum, he says.

'Our workforce has been at the heart of our journey from the outset. You can't progress from intervention to improvement without an intensive focus on the workforce and really good OD interventions. I feel we're halfway into our journey and our aspiration is to be the best in class.'

'This role is critical to making sure HR and OD are front and centre of the kind of organisation we want to be and with a workforce skilled, supported and fit for the future.'

Equally, the Service Director for Transformation and ICT has a pivotal part to play in fulfilling the council's aspirations.

'They will be leading our transformation programme and looking at how we redesign services, better utilise technology and all our assets, work with partners and learn from others.'

With 346,000 residents, Sandwell is a large

borough and it's also one of the youngest and most diverse areas in the country.

'There's an opportunity for the person coming in to shape the next stage of our transformation. They don't necessarily have to be from local government as long as they can evidence experience of delivering successful transformation on a scale like this.'

The Service Director for Customer, Democracy and Neighbourhoods is essential to ensuring the services the council delivers are in tune with the needs of towns and neighbourhoods, says Shokat.

He adds: 'They will need a really good understanding of working in a complex political environment. We speak truth to power and ensure there's a clear demarcation between officers and members, to make sure those relationships go from strength to strength.'

When organisations and places are going through major changes, it's vital residents understand the direction of travel and that's where the Service Director for Strategy and Communications comes in, says Shokat.

'They will ensure we have clarity in terms of what our vision and aspirations are and how we will meet our challenges – and how we convey that to residents of all ages and backgrounds. It's that engagement, relationship and dialogue with residents – and listening with purpose, not consultation for the sake of it.'

Finally, the Service Director for Housing will lead the transformation of an area that is critical to the council's reputation and many of its strategic priorities. Having brought council housing back in-house, Sandwell is now the sixth largest housing authority with 28,000 households.

'We need to make sure tenants get the best council services in terms of managing repairs and maintenance, dealing with antisocial behaviour and making sure we have houses that tenants are proud of through the regulatory framework.'

All five Service Directors have the chance to play an important part in the next chapter of Sandwell's story, he says.

'Sandwell's on the up and this is an exciting time to join us.' ■



Making It Sandwell

Enabling People, Empowering Communities, Enhancing Places

Made 50 years ago from six proud towns, each unique but united by a shared identity and rich culture, Sandwell is a place built on making things happen. It's where industry met innovation, and where strong communities continue to shape the future. We have been through a period of significant challenge, and the creation of our new Service Director posts across the organisation will see us continue on our journey of transformation. This is a unique opportunity to join us, as we challenge perceptions and build a borough our residents are proud of.

If you have the drive, passion and commitment to make things happen in Sandwell, visit our recruitment microsite: www.join-sandwell.co.uk



Closing Date: Tuesday 26th August



