**Strategy and background paper-** updated August 2019

**Our vision: SCL is committed to helping churches address issues of poverty, in the**

**belief that where there is prosperity, opportunity & resources, it should be shared and**

**made accessible to all. By energising the churches of Sandwell in a 21st century drive**

**against poverty we can together have the effect of reducing poverty in the borough.**

**Our aims are:**

• To facilitate, grow and support the movement of individuals, churches and projects who,

motivated by their faith, are committed to serving and supporting the poor and

marginalised in their local communities.

• To create opportunities and explore possibilities for creative and innovative ideas, to

encourage social entrepreneurship, and help develop creative responses to poverty that

are relevant and distinct to a local neighbourhood.

• To enable the creation of strong partnerships and new ways of collaborative working

learning from the local, regional and national.

• To encourage churches, Christian projects and individuals to listen to and understand

their communities and to reflect theologically on their role and experiences of addressing

poverty in local neighbourhoods, as part of their Christian discipleship.

*We will do this by*

• Engaging, inspiring and resourcing churches, Christian organisations and individuals to

tackle poverty in their local areas.

• Developing and facilitating network groups around specific themes

• Offering bespoke support to churches, Christian organisations seeking to tackle issues of

poverty in their local communities, particularly responding to ‘crisis’ issues

• Recording and publicising the work and contribution of churches, Christian organisations

and individuals in addressing issues of poverty locally.

• Developing and contributing to fundraising activity.

• Developing partnerships and collaborations with other organisations, and actively

supporting other initiatives that coincide with the ethos and aims of SCL.

Background information:

Sandwell Churches’ Link’s (SCL) primary activity is to support churches and other

related organisations, to be known as ‘partners’, to tackle issues of poverty in the

communities of Sandwell in order to meet the needs of people experiencing poverty.

To do this SCL ensures that it is aware of the resources available to organisations in the

area so that they can be directed into places where there is particular need.

The Strategic Coordinator will to spend time with our partners across Sandwell in order to

understand their particular needs and help them locate the resources to increase their impact. This activity benefits from a close working relationship with

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and Sandwell Council for Voluntary

Organisations (SCVO) to build access to additional resources and opportunities.

Because of its strong links SCL is able to facilitate the networking of groups with similar

interests and aspirations and can also enable groups working ‘on the ground’ to have

direct contact with policy makers and those responsible for commissioning services.

In order to promote and develop our vision & aims, SCL:

• Hosts an annual conference to enable partner organisations to network and consider a

focussed poverty issue. The 2019 conference “Faith in Action” explored progress with the Homelessness “Community of Practice” and saw the launch of Sandwell’s “Food Power Action Plan” (introduction by Tom Watson MP).

• Hosts a website [www.sandwellchurcheslink.org.uk](http://www.sandwellchurcheslink.org.uk)

• Issues online updates and news through the Facebook pages: recent topics include:

“The Great Get-together”, Safe Families, Modern Slavery & Financial Inclusion.

• Promotes training designed to raise awareness of the issues faced by people

experiencing poverty or to raise skills & knowledge within organisations- in particular promoting an “asset based” approach, building on existing talents & resources.

• Develops anti-poverty resources in co-operation with local organisations, and from

further afield, to assist the development of new initiatives and resources such as food

co-ops, lunch clubs, support to isolated older adults. These bring together strategic bodies with local organisations, community workers, church leaders and volunteers.

• SCL works closely with Smethwick Church Action Network (Smethwick CAN) and has sought to build connections between partners in the six towns, through the Love Black Country Network. There are currently local ecumenical church networks in Oldbury, West Bromwich, Rowley Regis, and Wednesbury- each with its own style & character.

•SCL supports & develops networks which correspond to four themes:

Food Power: promoting food sovereignty & sustainable food as part of a national network coordinated by Sustain (sustainable food and growing).

Homelessness Community of Practice: working on joined up solutions which complement existing provision with statutory, voluntary, church & other faith organisations.

Financial Inclusion: Sandwell networks support & complement the Just Finance Black Country initiative, led by Transforming Communities Together (TCT).

Social Isolation & loneliness- supporting the development of “Places of Welcome”, which encourages churches & others, to open their doors regularly each week for locals to drop in.

•Trustees, staff & advisors hold annual “away days” to review work & forward plan.

*The material from our July 2019 Away day will be made available to shortlisted candidates.*

**Public Benefit**

Sandwell Churches’ Link (SCL) is established to address poverty in Sandwell. Its aim is to

enable organisations working in the area to more effectively tackle poverty by providing

information, advice, support and infrastructure support and encouraging organisations to

work collaboratively, sharing their skills and pooling resource needs. It will develop

action plans and funding applications to support collectives of partner organisations to

provide activities for people suffering the effects of poverty irrespective of their faith.

Sandwell is the 13th most deprived Local Authority area in England. However, there are skills, talents & resources available. It is SCL’s intention to assist in the building up of those churches & partners individually and together, to strengthen them in their work.

The immediate beneficiaries of the work of SCL are churches and Christian organisations

but we will be able to support other partner organisations who are prepared to collaborate

with us or our partners. We work closely with “Love Black Country” and will work together collaboratively to tackle issues in their community, with ecumenical networks,

deanery groups of the Anglican church; churches and other agencies wanting to engage

with us on solutions which promote “faith in action.”

The reach and impact of the churches and organisations we are working with will be

significantly increased resulting in benefits to 1000s of people living in challenging

circumstances in Sandwell. While we know that these organisations are already doing good

work we also know that they have assets and resources, particularly in terms of buildings

and people, that are largely untapped because they do not recognise them. A priority will

be that there will be no barriers to any residents in an area who are experiencing poverty

accessing provision.

Through the activities outlined under the previous section, SCL enables organisations to:

• be better equipped to recognise the resources and assets they hold and that are

available to use to tackle poverty

• be better informed about resources available to develop their infrastructure and to

meet the needs of those experiencing poverty;

• be better connected to other organisations working in the same field and sharing

similar aspirations and values

SCL is supported in this by our close working with THRIVE and TCT, which lead on anti poverty & regeneration work in the Anglican Dioceses of Birmingham & Lichfield.

**Premises**

SCL Trustees meetings currently take place at Holy Trinity Church of the Resurrection,

Smethwick. There is also workspace available there. SCL registered office is at West Bromwich Methodist Church.

**Benefits received by trustees**

No one receives a personal benefit from carrying out the organisation's purpose. The

constitution recognises a possible conflict of interest for trustees, between their role as

trustees and their involvement in local churches. Therefore trustees cannot benefit

financially from involvement in SCL. The founder trustees of SCL have been selected as

the appointees of the Bishops of Birmingham and Wolverhampton as partners, so that in

the case of potential conflict of interest, they have a right to ask for information and

rationale of proposed courses of action and to challenge trustees.

**How does SCL raise its funds?**

SCL has receives longstanding financial support from the three Anglican Dioceses which operate within the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell (Worcester, Lichfield and Birmingham). With effect from 2019 it has a 3 year associate relationship with the Together Network funded through the Church Urban Fund. It therefore works closely with joint ventures in Lichfield and Birmingham as part of their support to churches tackling poverty in the area.

It is also regularly supported by the Walter Stanley Trust, a charity operating within the Anglican deanery of West Bromwich.

SCL works closely in partnership with borough wide partners and has recently received funding from the following trusts to support a co-ordinating role:

Sustain (from the Esme Fairbairn Trust) – for “Food Power” network development & plans

Eveson Trust and Edward Cadbury trust- for the development of a “Community of Practice” to tackle Homelessness.

Near Neighbours for “Love Your neighbour” campaigns & activities.

Further funding proposals are currently in preparation for the development of this work.

Sandwell Churches’ Link key people:

Chair of Trustees: Rosie Edwards

Vice Chair: Rev. David Gould

Treasurer: Hazel Bloxham

Trustees: Esther Spence, Rev Bev Thomas, Rev Jon Grant

Advisors: Rev Dr David Primrose (TCT), Fred Rattley (THRIVE), Jon Miles (CUF Together Network)