

<b>Report title</b>	Levelling Up Wolverhampton	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Stephen Simkins Acting Leader of the Council	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy	
<b>Originating service</b>	Strategy	
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Strategic Executive Board	22 August 2023

**Recommendation for decision:**

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse the City of Wolverhampton Council's ongoing response to the Levelling Up White Paper, working with key partners including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to deliver our strategic framework for levelling up, Our City: Our Plan.

**Recommendation for noting:**

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. The progress that has been made to secure significant funding for the City of Wolverhampton through government's levelling up funds to deliver transformational regeneration schemes which improve outcomes for all in our city.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the city's approach to levelling up and how the City of Wolverhampton Council working alongside private investors and city partners has continued to deliver on its priorities at pace to improve outcomes for local people.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The Government published the Levelling Up White Paper on the 3 February 2022, specifically naming the City of Wolverhampton as a priority place for investment into transformational levelling up projects – endorsing the Council's ambitious plans to invest in and further regenerate the city.
- 2.2 Since the launch of the White Paper the Council has worked alongside the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, Homes England and other government departments to advance city priorities. A report to Cabinet on the 27 July 2022 set Our City: Our Plan as the strategic framework for levelling up our city, supported by the Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus outlining major investment opportunities to realise social and economic outcomes.
- 2.3 The Council approach to levelling up continues to focus on bringing the right partners along on the journey, including bringing in the right private sector investors and developers to help increase the capacity, skills and capital to deliver projects and schemes that will enable transformational regeneration in our place.
- 2.4 While the local and regional economy have faced significant challenge over the 12 months, including a cost-of-living crisis, rising inflation and energy costs the Council has continued to deliver against its levelling up priorities. Wolverhampton has demonstrated that it has the right local conditions to activate catalytic investment that enhances local economic activity in the short term and delivers transformational regeneration in the long term. The city continues to be well placed to meet the levelling up challenge.

## **3.0 Our City Our Plan and Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus**

- 3.1 Our City: Our Plan is our strategic framework for levelling up, co-produced with over 4500 local people and stakeholders with a refresh approved at Full Council on the 1 March 2023. We have one plan for our 'place', derived bottom up and collectively owned with clear interface with Levelling Up missions. The plan outlines an overarching ambition that Wulfrunians will live longer, healthier lives, and outlines six priorities.

- Strong families where children grow up well and achieve their full potential
- Fulfilled lives for all with quality care for those that need it
- Healthy, inclusive communities
- Good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods

- More local people into good jobs and training
- Thriving economy in all parts of the city

3.2 Three cross cutting principles support the delivery of the plan – climate conscious, driven by digital and being fair and equal.

3.3 The Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus was approved by Cabinet on the 22 February 2023 and sets out a spatial framework for regeneration with commercially led proposals for the city centre and beyond. Together Our City: Our Plan and the Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus set out an aspirational and ambitious proposition which builds on the city's strengths, informed by a strong evidence base of socio-economic indicators with realistic and deliverable schemes to drive change.

#### **4.0 Levelling Up Wolverhampton Delivery Portfolio**

4.1 The Council has a strong track record of working alongside public and private partners to leverage investment into the city which maximises growth, delivers new jobs and opportunities whilst improving outcomes for residents. Driven by a compelling regeneration vision and strong track record of delivery. The last 10 years have seen major successes, including I54 an integral part of the UK's most successful Enterprise Zone with over £1 billion already invested, the National Brownfield Institute and most recently the relocation of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to the city in the recently constructed i9 and commercial district.

4.2 Detailed below and attached as appendix 1 to this report highlights just some of our key levelling up schemes where the Council are working alongside regional partners including the West Midlands Combined Authority, private investors and government departments to deliver for our city.

4.3 The Council has a strong track record securing and then successfully delivering against government levelling up funds. Over £40 million pounds has been drawn down through both the Future High Streets Fund and Town Deals grant funding programmes. Supported by match funding from the Council two ambitious programmes are delivering at pace transforming our city centre, Bilston and Wednesfield. Bespoke interventions include:

- Future High Street Fund Programme: Transformation of the west side of the city centre through the creation of new events space and high-quality public realm enhancing cross city connectivity with walking and cycle routes. The investment supports the diversification of the city centre, amplifies the investment in The Halls boosting the day and night time economy supporting our events city ambitions. Creation of the Box Space an urban food, beverage and entertainment venue will complement the city centre's wider attractions, drive footfall and support the creation of new jobs and start up enterprise.

- Wolverhampton Town Deal: A new city events and culture programme maximising the investment in events space and public realm through the Future High Street Fund. Supporting the enhancement of Bilston Market including new flexible multi use events space, further consolidating the role of the market as a key driver of future economic prosperity in the town. Improvement to Wednesfield High Street including environmental enhancements to the public realm and market. Driving the creation of new high-quality housing through delivery of Phase 1 of the Brewers Yard scheme. Scaling up our Wolves at Work employment support programme to get more local people into jobs in skills gap areas where employers need them most.

#### 4.4 Further funding has been secured to advance our priorities:

- City Learning Quarter: £20 million secured through Levelling Up Round 1. The scheme will deliver a c.£60m state-of-the-art learning hub in the heart of the city co-locating adult education, library and college facilities, supporting more local people into good jobs and training and enabling further housing development. This project will be subject to a separate report to Cabinet.
- Bilston Health and Regeneration Programme: £20 million funding secured through Capital Regeneration Project grant. The programme of work is a transformational initiative to increase local prosperity, improve social mobility and bolster pride of place in Bilston Town Centre. It will directly address levelling up missions including health inequalities and reinvigorating the high street by integrating public services, transforming a key high street anchor and public realm improving connectivity. The aligned package includes, Bilston Health and Wellbeing Hub integrating NHS, social care, community and leisure, creating commercial space. Improvements to market presence, connectivity including further stalls and events spaces and public realm comprising pocket park and urban garden, complemented by active travel.

#### 4.5 Immediate priorities for the next 6 – 12 Months

- Investment Prospectus Phase 1: Delivering ambitious regeneration projects in our city by creating aspirational, mixed-use city centre community blending living, alongside employment and leisure space. The city centre regeneration programme includes initiatives which will fuel social and economic confidence, drive investment and boost economic growth. A report on the sites that form the first phase of the Investment Prospectus was approved by Cabinet on 22 March 2023. Cabinet endorsed the approach of working collaboratively alongside the Council's delivery partners in order to leverage public sector funding and resolve viability challenges thereby enabling scheme delivery. Detailed work has been ongoing with partners to undertake feasibility studies, business cases and funding propositions. A further report is to be reported back to Cabinet detailing this progress in the coming months.

- **Canalside:** The Council has concluded the selection of a preferred developer to deliver the Canalside South scheme – one of the largest city centre residential development opportunities in the Midlands. The main site owners, which include the Council and the Canal & River Trust, have come together to form a partnership to bring forward the development of Canalside South under the auspices of a Collaboration Agreement which reflects the need for transformational regeneration across ownerships to drive placemaking principles and associated residential values. In addition, the sale agreement for land at Horseley Fields (which neighbours Canalside South) has recently completed and exchanged with developers Placefirst. In conjunction with the adjoining Union Mills site, Placefirst will deliver 366 new residential units alongside new commercial / employment floorspace, the sensitive restoration of heritage buildings and enhancements to the canal towpath connecting the site to surrounding areas.
- **Green Innovation Corridor – Phase 1:** Building on the city’s strengths as the National Centre for Sustainable Construction, phase 1 will also stimulate wider regeneration along the corridor by acting as a catalyst for additional private sector investment in the Science Park and unlocking brownfield sites for sustainable and affordable housing provision. The Council and its partners submitted a bid to the Levelling Up Round 2, whilst it received good feedback from DLUHC it was not successful. We are currently working up a proposal for the Green Innovation Corridor to be a cornerstone of the emerging West Midlands Investment Zone. We continue to explore other funding routes with government to support delivery of this catalytic scheme, including Levelling Up Round 3 once launched.
- **Levelling Up Zones and West Midlands Investment Zone:** The principle of Levelling Up Zones is set out within the West Midlands Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal. Investment Zones are a government initiative not forming part of the deal but which are being developed in tandem with the Levelling Up Zones. The Council is working with the West Midlands Combined Authority to develop a West Midlands Investment Zone proposition centred on the Green Innovation Corridor. Modelling is currently underway of the Council’s regeneration pipeline to explore the viability of a Wolverhampton Levelling Up Zone.

4.6 The West Midlands Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal published by government on the 15 March 2023 provides further opportunity to secure funding and powers to accelerate our levelling up priorities. The new deal is estimated to bring significant funds and it is hoped that this will reboot the economy, provide vital housing, jobs and skills, bolster our existing strengths in transport and Smart City Region innovation, and drive our net zero ambitions. The deal looks to create a more prosperous and better-connected West Midlands which is fairer, greener and healthier. The Council will continue to work closely with the West Midlands Combined Authority to maximise investment for Wolverhampton.

## **5.0 Governance**

- 5.1 We have continued to build on our strong relationships with key partners, including the West Midlands Combined Authority, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Homes England. Working with Government will help us to accelerate and expand the opportunities to increase prosperity. The Wolverhampton Towns Fund Board has been refocused as a City Investment Board to support the delivery and strategic direction of our levelling up vision. Bringing partners along on our journey to level up Wolverhampton remains a priority. This includes the right private sector investors and developers to increase capacity, skills and capital to deliver transformation regeneration of our city.
- 5.2 The city of Wolverhampton has also been invited by DLUHC to be part of only 10 'pathfinder' local authorities across England to pilot a simplified approach to funding delivery as recipients of the Future High Street Fund, Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund Round 1. This pilot will allow government to understand the impact of a simplified and consolidated funding model on delivery of locally selected capital projects, including how spending flexibility can support local authorities to respond to changing economic conditions. Pilot authorities will have greater ability to make decisions locally about moving funding between projects in their funding portfolio. DLUHC will devolve decision-making responsibility over three in-flight capital funding programmes in pilot areas, increasing local flexibility, and reducing bureaucracy and inefficiency within the delivery process. The City Investment Board will act as the consolidated governance for the pilot.

## **6.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 6.1 Option 1: Do nothing.
- 6.2 Option 2 and the chosen option: Working with key partners including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to deliver our strategic framework for levelling up, Our City: Our Plan to level up our city.

## **7.0 Reasons for decision(s)**

- 7.1 Cabinet is recommended to endorse the progress made to deliver levelling up in the city, and support the robust strategic framework set out in Our City: Our Plan and the Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus to realise our ambitions transformation plans and meet the needs and priorities of local people.

## **8.0 Financial implications**

- 8.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, Levelling Up projects and programmes will have financial implications which will be subject to individual reports as appropriate. Whilst some of the projects mentioned in the report are now in delivery, work is ongoing to further understand the financial implications for the Council, particularly focusing on the immediate priorities for the next 6 - 12 months.
- [HM/18082023/M]

## **9.0 Legal implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.  
[JB/18082023/B]

## **10.0 Equalities implications**

- 10.1 Fair and Equal is one of the three cross cutting principles of Our City: Our Plan. All levelling up activity will be subject to individual equalities analysis.

## **11.0 All other Implications**

- 11.1 Levelling up has implications across the Council and city, including climate change, health, and wellbeing and digital.
- 11.2 Health and wellbeing is an important part of everyday life. It is integral to leading a happy and healthy lifestyle. As only 20% of a person's health outcomes are attributed to the ability to access good quality health care, the wider determinants of health, made up of the diverse range of social, economic, and environmental factors which impact on people's health, play a crucial role in the health and wellbeing of communities and local people. Through its focus on these wider determinants the delivery of levelling up will ensure that our communities are stronger, healthier, and thriving places to live.
- 11.3 We will continue to contribute to the delivery of the Council's climate change action plan to meet our commitment to be net carbon neutral as a Council by 2028.
- 11.4 Our levelling up approach is aligned to the Digital Wolves strategy setting out how as a city and as a council we can harness the benefits of digital and technology for local people.

## **12.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 12.1 N/A

## **13.0 Appendices**

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Schedule of key schemes