



Towns Fund Board

Minutes - 15 May 2020

Attendance

Members of the Towns Fund Board

Ninder Johal (Chair)	Nachural
Stuart Anderson	MP for Wolverhampton South West
Councillor Ian Brookfield	Leader of the Council, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC)
Cllr Harman Banger	Cabinet Member for City Economy, CWC
Katharine Clough	University of Wolverhampton
Ruby Cochrane	Youth Council Representative
Mal Cowgill	City of Wolverhampton College
James Crowter	Tecman
Ro Hands	Learn Play Foundation
James Holland	Collins Aerospace
Tim Johnson	Chief Executive, CWC
Josie Kelly	Access 2 Business
Pat McFadden	MP for Wolverhampton South East
Ben Reid	Board Member, Internation Co-op Alliance
Kevin Rogers	Paycare
Tutsirai Rukarwa	Youth Council Representative
Cherry Shine	Wolverhampton Business Improvement District (BID)
Jane Stevenson	MP for Wolverhampton North East
Patricia Willoughby	West Midlands Combined Authority

In Attendance

Laura Collings	Policy and Strategy Manager, CWC
Rhiann Davitt-Jones	CBRE
Ian Fegan	Director of Communications and External Relations, CWC
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer, CWC
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration, CWC
Tony Marvell	Programme Manger, CWC
Michelle Nutt	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
Simon Phillips	CBRE
Philip Singleton	Programme Manager, CWC

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from Charlotte Johns, CWC and Adam Daniels, Countryside Properties.
- 2 Notification of substitute members**
Laura Collings attended for Charlotte Johns.

3 **Minutes of the meeting of 28 February 2020**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 28 February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

4 **Matters arising**

A query was raised by Jane Stevenson MP relating to the nominees that existing Board Members had put forward earlier in the establishment of the Board. Simon Philips – Director CBRE explained that priority to date had been given to the Chair election process and, now that this had concluded, the remaining three Board Member positions would be filled from the private sector in order to balance the Board (it currently has 11 public sector and 8 private sector representatives). This would also cap the Board size at 22 full members to ensure that the Board continued to be a functional decision-making group. This was agreed.

Simon Philips – Director CBRE set out the planned process in that Board Members would be asked to confirm their nominees. CBRE would then interview and evaluate all nominees, provide a recommendation and instigate a private vote of Board Members to select their three preferred nominees with the intention that they would be invited to the next meeting of the Board.

Simon Philips – Director CBRE provided assurances that the evaluation process would be undertaken in a transparent way and in line with the independent CBRE Evaluation protocol.

It was noted that those who had not been selected as Chair had been offered a place on the Board based on the CBRE independent evaluation.

Resolved:

1. That Board members forward any nominations for proposed members to Simon Philips, CBRE by the week commencing 18 May 2020 to allow an evaluation and private vote process to take place.
2. That the Board be updated with the refreshed membership following the selection process.

5 **City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board Action Tracker**

Resolved:

That the outcomes from the actions agreed at the meeting of 28 February 2020 be noted.

6 **Final Terms of Reference for City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board**

Tony Marvell, Programme Manager, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) presented the Final Terms of Reference for the City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board and highlighted the amendments made following the meeting of 28 February 2020.

It was noted that, as requested at the last meeting, a Chair had been selected who was representative of the private sector and it was reiterated that nominees who had not been selected for Chair had been offered a place on the Board.

The addition of a Code of Conduct for Board members and guidance for Declarations of Interest was also highlighted.

The refreshed Terms of Reference for the City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board was approved by the Board.

Resolved:

That the refreshed Terms of Reference for the City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board be approved.

7 Sense Check - COVID-19

Councillor Ian Brookfield, Leader of the Council, CWC passed the Chair to the chosen representative from the private sector, Ninder Johal, Nachural. Board members were invited to provide an update on their responses to COVID-19 and their experiences during this time.

James Holland, Collins Aerospace reported that there had been no impact in terms of military operation however a significant impact had been felt in the commercial area of business with a 50% reduction in sales. It was stated that the employee retention schemes offered by the Government had proved to be immensely beneficial allowing 35% of workers to continue working and 30% of the workforce to be furloughed until the end of July 2020. In response to COVID-19, measures had been introduced to ensure employee safety including temperature testing, workspace adaptations to ensure social distancing was maintained in all areas and the introduction of increased hygiene practices.

Tim Johnson, Chief Executive, CWC reported that the response of the residents of Wolverhampton had been impressive and there was great pride in this. It was reported that a number of challenges had been experienced and recovery plans were being explored, including how to safely reopen public spaces and the transport infrastructure. It was noted that it would be some time before the full impact of the effects of the virus would be understood.

Kevin Rogers, Paycare reported that an increase in mental health issues during the lockdown period had been emerged and a doubling of calls to the employee counselling helpline reaching out for support had been handled.

Resolved:

That the reported responses to COVID-19 be noted.

8 Town Investment Plan [TIP] Update

Rhian Davitt-Jones, CBRE delivered the Town Investment Plan Update presentation and highlighted salient points. The presentation provided an outline of the outcomes of discussions that had taken place with Board members and the themes and priorities that had been identified. It was noted that CBRE had undertaken a high-level appraisal of the Council's project pipeline and made suggestions on where these existing projects might align with the Boards priorities.

It was noted that through engagement with Board Members, CBRE had compiled a list of challenges for Wolverhampton. Key challenges included negative external perceptions of the City and it was noted that work could be done to positively raise its profile, addressing the skills profile, increasing job and economic growth

opportunities and realising opportunities presented by redeveloping existing vacant assets.

A map of the City highlighted areas of deprivation and unemployment and it was noted that work would be undertaken to 'level up.' The voice of the young people of Wolverhampton was also highlighted as a significant consideration.

It was noted that five themes had emerged and were identified as Enhancing Connectivity, Improving Vibrancy and Footfall, Changing Perceptions, Employment and Skills and Addressing Blight (unsightly buildings/land).

A number of projects had been identified under each of these themes and the Board were invited to agree the themes and the priorities moving forward. Once agreed, it was recommended that thematic focus groups be initiated to drive these projects forward.

It was noted that a number of mental health issues had arisen during the pandemic as a result of actual job losses, fear of job loss and concerns around businesses closing and a suggestion was put forward to establish a Social Enterprise Centre as a hub to support local businesses.

In response to a query around external consultations, it was reported that there had been consultations including the promotion of a campaign entitled 'My Town' where residents could join the conversation on social media platforms by making suggestions on how to improve their City. It was noted that the opportunity for consultation with residents and businesses was key.

Thanks were given for the breakdown of the £4.4bn that had been shared with Board members via email as requested at the last meeting. It was suggested that the Board consider whether any gaps or any shortfalls in funding had been identified. It was agreed that changing perceptions of Wolverhampton was a key element. It was clarified that the funding eligibility funding was primarily for capital expenditure; some of the projects identified were revenue projects but were noted for their importance in addressing the skills and employment gap in the City.

A query was raised in relation to the impact of the projects listed and if an evaluation had been carried out. It was echoed that the 'Employment and Skills' area was an area to focus on, including apprenticeships. It was noted that any providers of apprenticeship schemes had been delivering them remotely. There had been a reported deficit in essential skills such as maths, English and ICT and it was suggested that this deficit be addressed in an impactful way.

It was suggested to work towards aligning activity at a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and combined authority level and that skills could be addressed as a region; it could be explored how the Town Deal Board could maximise this.

It was noted that challenges lay ahead in the impact of COVID-19 on the changing high street and examining what would drive consumer behaviour in the future. It was suggested that the full economic impact of the pandemic would not become apparent immediately and it was important to carefully evaluate the effects over time.

It was considered whether the private sector investment propositions may be affected by the effects of COVID-19 however it was agreed that it would be appropriate to proceed cautiously before any final decisions were reached.

It was suggested that the number of different projects be kept to a minimum to ensure focus was maintained, particularly in the Educations and Skills area which was emerging as an agreed area of focus. It was suggested that this theme be incorporated into capital projects to demonstrate that the funding has made a difference. It was also agreed that there was no quick resolution to the skills challenges particularly as additional short-term unemployment issues had been caused as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was noted that work was being undertaken at LEP and Combined Authority levels to access funding and it was suggested that updates on this work could be brought into the Board meetings.

Mal Cowgill, City of Wolverhampton College reported that, despite the pandemic, City of Wolverhampton College students had maintained engagement with their studies using virtual platforms, which was encouraging. It was also reported that interest in apprenticeships for 16-18-year olds had not waned and 454 applications had been received since 23 March 2020, however there was a short-term shortage of employers available. Mal Cowgill followed this up by offering the support of the College to the City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board.

It was queried whether there would be any monetary advantage in Wolverhampton being amongst the first tranche of Town Investment Plan (TIP) applications. It was clarified that there would not and emphasis was placed on ensuring investment plans were robust, structured and evidence-based.

In addition, the effects of COVID-19 had altered the economic climate and the application guidance would need to be updated to require the inclusion of economic recovery strategies to investment plans. It was equally noted that there would be no disadvantage in waiting, although Ministers had been keen for the first cohort to come together quickly to provide proof of concept.

The point was raised that the concept had been launched in Wolverhampton and it may be beneficial that the flagship City was amongst the first cohort of applicants. It was suggested that a small number of the projects could be considered in the first round and others added later.

Resolved:

That the themes of Enhancing Connectivity, Improving Vibrancy and Footfall, Changing Perceptions, Employment and Skills and Addressing Blight (buildings/land) and associated priorities be approved to form the basis of the Town Investment Plan.

9 **Working Groups Approach**

Rhian Davitt-Jones, CBRE reported that a working group approach had been recommended to drive the agreed TIP projects forward. It was stated that a working group was to be established for each of the themes and the first focus sessions were due to take place the week commencing 23 May 2020.

It was agreed that Board members would be invited to choose which group or groups they would like to contribute to by registering their digital vote which would be sent via email by Rhian Davitt-Jones, CBRE.

Resolved:

1. That Rhian Davitt-Jones, CBRE initiate a voting system for Board members to declare which TIP working group or groups they wish to contribute to before 25 May 2020.
2. That Board members register their vote to join one or more working groups before 25 May 2020.

10

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Update

Michelle Nutt, BEIS provided a verbal update on the position of the Town Fund application process guidance. It was recognised that challenges lay in there being no clear guidance as yet, however reassurances were offered that the development of the draft guidance was underway. It was reported that elements of COVID-19 economic recovery plans were being incorporated into the guidance as well.

Three phases had been identified:

1. The assessment of plans process
2. Outlining projects in greater detail
3. Approval of projects to be driven forward into full business cases

The required criteria were identified as:

1. Evidence of need – setting out issues and opportunities
2. Scale of Opportunity - outcomes
3. Strength of Vision – including coherence and alignment with existing funding and strategies, alignment with Future High Streets Fund, , Local Enterprise Partnership, Local Industrial Strategy, Strategic Economic Plan
4. Strength of Partnerships – match funding, evidence of consultation privately and in co-production with communities

It was noted that a fifth criterion was to be identified and would be shared once established.

It was hoped that the guidance would be ready to publish in 3-4 weeks. Concerns were raised around misalignment between the preparation of the programme plan and the lack of final guidance. Reassurances were offered that the work was progressing as quickly as possible, taking into account the incorporation of economic recovery planning, however it was proving challenging to get the information.

It was suggested that the criteria that could be shared be circulated ahead of the finalised guidance.

Resolved:

That the verbal update provided by Michelle Nutt, BEIS be noted.

11

Future High Streets Fund

Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration, CWC delivered the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) presentation to the Board. The presentation provided an outline for the full business case for the FHSF bid. It was reported that extensive online

engagement had taken place to ensure future-proofing the scheme in light of the impact of COVID-19.

It was noted that there had been a decline in high street retail. It was highlighted that plans were being developed to unlock future development opportunities and link elements of the City together such as the transport hub, Civic Hall, Lichfield Street and the Westside Link.

It was outlined that a consultation session had taken place with a wide range of stakeholders in attendance and had produced some positive outcomes.

The remaining two slides depicted the projects in development which would be beneficial for the City and artists' impressions of what some of these projects could look and feel like.

In addition to the presentation, a letter had been drafted offering the strong endorsement of the City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board to back Wolverhampton's bid submission for the Future High Street Fund. Board members agreed to approve the content of the letter and for it to be submitted in support of the Future High Street Fund bid application.

It was agreed that the Towns Fund Board should remain sighted on the work of the Bilston Town Centre Task Force.

Resolved:

1. That the City of Wolverhampton Town Deal Board approve for the letter to be submitted in support of the Future High Street Fund bid application.
2. That the Towns Fund Board should remain sighted on the work of the Bilston Town Centre Task Force.