



Towns Fund Board

Minutes - 24 September 2021

Attendance

Members of the Towns Fund Board

Ninder Johal (Chair)	Owner, Nachural
Stuart Anderson MP	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West
Katharine Clough	Director of External Engagement, University of Wolverhampton
James Crowter	Managing Director, Tecman
Lindsey Flynn	Representative of Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership
Ro Hands	Owner, Learn Play Foundation
Tim Johnson	Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC)
Josie Kelly	Chief Executive Officer, Access 2 Business
Peter Merry	Vice Principal, City of Wolverhampton College
Maninder Mangat	Director, MM Consulting
Kevin Rogers	Executive Director, Paycare
Amit Sharma	Director, INCO
Cherry Shine	Director, Wolverhampton BID
Councillor Stephen Simkins	Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy, CWC
Jane Stevenson MP	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton North East
Patricia Willoughby	Head of Policy (Housing & Regeneration), West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

In Attendance

Liam Davies	Head of City Development, CWC
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer, CWC
Rafiquel Islam	Political Assistant, CWC
Gavin Kennedy	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration, CWC
Tony Marvell	Programme Manager, CWC
John Roseblade	Head of City Transport, CWC
Peter Thomason	Area Lead, Cities and Local Growth Unit
Isobel Woods	Head of Enterprise, CWC

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from Simon Archer Director, Bilston BID; Councillor Ian Brookfield, Leader of the Council, City of Wolverhampton Council; Mal Cowgill Principal and Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton College; Ben Reid, Board Member of International Co-Op Alliance; Professor Geoff Layer Vice Chancellor, University of Wolverhampton and James Holland General Manager, Collins Aerospace.

It was acknowledged that Tutsi and Ruby had stepped down from the Youth Council due to other commitments and thanks were extended on behalf of the Board for their contributions. New representatives would be announced in due course.

At this point it was noted that Michelle Nutt had moved on therefore Peter Thomason would now report for Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) going forward. Thanks were extended to Michelle Nutt as her contributions to the Board were acknowledged.

2 Notification of Substitute Members

Katherine Clough represented University of Wolverhampton for Professor Geoff Layer and Peter Merry represented City of Wolverhampton College for Mal Cowgill.

John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, CWC was also in attendance for Ross Cook, Director of City Housing and Environment, CWC.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

4 Minutes of the meeting of 14 May 2021

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 14 May 2021 be approved as a correct record.

5 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

6 Towns Fund Action Tracker

Tony Marvell, Programme Manager, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) presented the Towns Fund Action Tracker which outlined the outcomes of actions agreed at the last meeting. It was noted that discussions had been held with Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and some useful information had been shared. Proposals would be picked up later in the programme update.

Resolved:

That the outcomes from the actions agreed at the meeting of 14 May 2021 be noted.

7 Future High Streets Fund Update

John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, CWC delivered the Future High Streets Fund Update presentation which provided an overview of progress against the Civic Hall, Victoria Street, Box Park and Cleveland Parade developments.

In response to a query around whether delays had been experienced in procuring materials it was noted that there had been, however design specifications had been redrafted to accommodate what was available. Costs for materials had risen nationally and the possibility that additional funding sources would need to be explored to cover this was taken into account.

Resolved:

1. That the Future High Streets Fund Update be received.
2. That additional funding sources be explored to account for the cost of materials.

8 National Towns Fund Update

Peter Thomason, Area Lead for BEIS provided a verbal update on the National Towns Fund. It was reported that the majority of the 101 towns that had accepted funding offers had progressed to stage 2.

Confirmation of Wolverhampton's acceptance had come through and discussions were forthcoming to ensure projects were safe and deliverable.

The first 5% CDEL payment had been sent to Wolverhampton in the last week and that CLGU would be able to move forward with the grant.

It was acknowledged that inflation rates may have influenced finances therefore, if it continued to rise, it was queried whether the Government would take this into account. It was noted that the maximum funding had been made available therefore flexibility may be necessary by ensuring some projects came under budget to offset any that were over budget.

It was suggested that if this was the case the Board then had a duty to secure additional funding. It was also noted that some projects were reliant on match-funding and to be mindful of this. Assurances were offered that contingency plans and a risk registering strategy was in place.

Resolved:

That the National Towns Fund Update be received.

9 Wolverhampton Towns Fund Update

Tony Marvell, Programme Manager, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) delivered the Wolverhampton Towns Fund Update presentation which provided an outline of project implementation.

Following the last meeting of Towns Fund Board, during which members had agreed the funding levels it was reported that the offer of £25 million funding had been formally accepted and project plans had been drawn together for expenditure, match funding and outcomes. The presentation summarised action already taken towards starting each of the 10 projects and it was highlighted that the three accelerator projects were already making good progress. The presentation also included the breakdown of the Funding Allocation Protocol process which had been established to provide financial flexibility in the event of an underspend or acquisition of additional funding.

Following the presentation, it was acknowledged that the success of the Wednesfield project was partially attributed to the contributions of the local traders and a query was raised around what plans there were for further public consultation. Assurances were offered that public engagement was a key part of implementation plans and that project management would be in place to support the project including a communications plan to ensure full involvement of stakeholders.

The Funding Allocation Protocol was discussed, and It was suggested that in the event that there is surplus funding that funding should be redistributed amongst the existing projects which have already been assessed and approved by DLUH, rather than introducing a competitive process.

Resolved:

That the Wolverhampton Towns Fund Update be received.

10 **Project Business Case Updates**

Tony Marvell, Programme Manager - Regeneration and City Environment, CWC delivered the presentation on Project Business Case updates which outlined the status of business cases for each of the 10 projects. It was noted that the funding offer was dependent on the development of these business cases.

The presentation outlined that three tranches had been devised and set out timescales and planning for the projects allocated within each tranche, leading to full approval of the funding. It was highlighted that the first tranche included the Brewers Yard / Culwell Street development, West Midlands 5G project and the Event Programme project, which were all ready to move to the first stage by October 2021.

There were no further questions and the update was noted.

Resolved:

That the Project Business Case Updates be received.

11 **MHCLG Dual Headquarters Update**

Gavin Kennedy, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formally MHCLG), delivered a presentation which provided an update on the opening of the government department's second headquarters in September 2021. The presentation outlined that the new headquarters would be in Wolverhampton and set out the progress of the recruitment campaigns, career and apprenticeship opportunities created and appointments made so far.

Thanks were extended to Gavin and it was acknowledged that the success of many of the applicants served to illustrate the potential of the residents of Wolverhampton. It also served as a good example of local and central government working together. A query was raised around the unsuccessful applicants and what might have been a barrier to them securing a position, such as the possibility of a skill gap. It was requested that feedback be provided to Isobel Woods, Head of Enterprise, CWC, in order to support those near misses.

Ro Hands, Owner of Learn Play Foundation, queried as an apprenticeship training provider if there could be an opportunity to work together. It was acknowledged that there was talent within the City and the system needed to work together to expose more young people to opportunities, especially in digital media roles.

Resolved:

1. That the MHCLG Dual Headquarters Update presentation be received.
2. That interview feedback be provided to Isobel Woods, Head of Enterprise, CWC, in order to support and steer unsuccessful applicants into other opportunities.

12 **Any other Business**

There was no other business.