



Towns Fund Board

Minutes - 19 March 2021

Attendance

Members of the Towns Fund Board

Ninder Johal (Chair)	Owner, Nachural
Stuart Paul Anderson	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West
Simon Archer	Director, Bilston BID
Councillor Ian Brookfield	Leader of the Council, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC)
Katharine Clough	Vice Chancellor, University of Wolverhampton
Mal Cowgill	Principal and Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton College
James Crowter	Managing Director, Tecman
Adam Daniels	Regional Operations Director, Countryside Properties
James Holland	General Manager, Collins Aerospace
Tim Johnson	Chief Executive, CWC
Josie Kelly	Chief Executive Officer, Access 2 Business
Pat McFadden	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South East
Maninder Mangat	Director, MM Consulting
Ben Reid	Board Member, International Co-Op Alliance
Kevin Rogers	Executive Director, Paycare
Ruby	Youth Council Representative
Amit Sharma	Director, INCO
Cherry Shine	Director, Wolverhampton BID
Councillor Stephen Simkins	Cabinet Member for City Economy, CWC
Jane Stevenson	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton North East
Tutsi	Youth Council Representative
Patricia Willoughby	Head of Policy (Housing & Regeneration), West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

In Attendance

Michelle Nutt	Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration, CWC
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer, CWC
Andrew Scragg	Youth Service Participation Worker, CWC
Peter Taylor	Head of City Development, CWC
Tony Marvell	Transformation Programme Manager, CWC
Ross Cook	Director of City Environment, CWC
Ian Culley	Section Leader, CWC

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from Professor Geoff Layer, Vice Chancellor, University of Wolverhampton.
- 2 Notification of substitute members**
Katharine Clough attended for Professor Geoff Layer

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

4 **Minutes of the meeting of 27 November 2020**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 27 November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

5 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting of 27 November 2020.

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.

Resolved:

That the outcomes from the actions agreed at the meeting of 27 November 2020 be noted.

7 **Future High Streets Fund Update**

Ross Cook, Director of City Environment delivered a verbal update and accompanying presentation on the Future High Streets Fund Update.

It was highlighted that the £15.7 million awarded to Wolverhampton was well over the £7 million initially proposed by the Government and Wolverhampton had received the 16th largest award nationally and the largest in the Black Country.

An outline of the proposals included the Civic Halls Public Realm refresh, the development of a refreshment and performance venue at Bell Street, redevelopment of Victoria Street and the work on Cleveland Parade to prepare the site for a future long-term development.

The work undertaken on the projects and planning was commended.

Resolved:

That the presentation on the Future High Streets Fund Update be received.

8 **Towns Fund Capital Accelerator Grant**

Ross Cook, Director of City Environment, CWC delivered the update on the Towns Fund Capital Accelerator Grant with supporting presentation. It was outlined that the 10 mini projects were on target to deliver the outcomes planned from within the £1 million investments by 31 March 2021. An update was provided on the progress against projects in Bilston, Wednesfield and the City Centre to date.

It was acknowledged that the traders in Wednesfield had engaged really positively with the programme and contributed to the success of the project. Particular thanks were extended to Jay Bayso for his contributions and support to the scheme.

It was also reported that the Wednesfield traders had expressed how pleased they had been with the consultation process and outcome and their thanks were passed on to the Towns Fund Board. It was highlighted that the reconfiguration of Wednesfield Market was well underway and would be prepared to launch soon.

Resolved:

That the update on the Towns Fund Capital Accelerator Grant be received.

9 **National Towns Fund Update**

Michelle Nutt, Assistant Area Director, BEIS provided an update on the National Towns Fund Bid. It was outlined that an offer of £25 million funding had been made to Wolverhampton and any acceptance would need to be made within eight weeks of receipt of the written offer.

It was confirmed that the offer was subject to an indication of which projects would be taken forward and how the conditions outlined in the offer would be met.

Following a query around whether resubmitting the bid may result in the offer being lower, it was confirmed that to resubmit the bid would mean starting the process again from the beginning. The bid would need to go through a repeated process and it may be a different group of individuals considering the bid. There were no guarantees of a higher offer however Michelle agreed to provide further clarification on the potential of a lower offer should the bid be resubmitted.

In response to a question around why the full amount bid for was not awarded, it was confirmed that full funding had only been offered to authorities with exceptional bids to drive growth, such as the update of Blackpool Illuminations for example.

It was acknowledged that £25 million was the average maximum amount and any award above that level would have been a bonus.

Resolved:

That the National Towns Fund Update be noted.

10 **Levelling Up Fund**

Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration, CWC delivered a verbal update on the Levelling Up fund. It was outlined that £4 billion had made available nationally over the next four years. It was reported that bids would need to be submitted by 18 June 2021 with announcements on successful bids due to be made in the autumn.

The Levelling Up Fund would invest the money in projects that had an impact on residents and communities and Members of Parliament for the bidding authority would back one bid that they saw as a priority. The three main themes for priorities focused on transport investments; regeneration and town centre investments and cultural investments.

In response to a query around who would write the bids, it was confirmed that they would be authored by local authorities with endorsement from local Members of Parliament. It was clarified that one bid could be submitted for every Member of Parliament representing each local authority, which meant Wolverhampton could potentially submit three bids for £20 million.

It was agreed that there was an opportunity for the Towns Fund Board to be utilised as a platform for oversight of the bid as it had the advantage of a partnership membership as well as the three Wolverhampton Members of Parliament sitting on the Board.

It was queried whether, if successful, Levelling Up Fund monies could go towards bridging the gap in funding offered by MHCLG. It was noted that the concept of applying for various methods of funding would maximise the potential to fund more of the proposed projects and was certainly being explored.

It was acknowledged that the Authority would need to propose robust bids as there were potentially 30 other level one priority authorities across the country bidding for a share of the funding.

Resolved:

1. That the Levelling Up Fund presentation be received.
2. That the Towns Fund Board have oversight of any Levelling Up Fund bids submitted.

11 **Towns Fund Projects Funding Discussion**

Tony Marvell, Programme Manager – Regeneration, CWC led the discussion on the funding for the Towns Fund Project. A precis of the projects had been provided in advance of the meeting and the next stage of the programme for the next three to four months were outlined.

It was queried whether projects would be chosen according to priority or if projects would be delivered in part or whole. It was noted that the possibility of other funding options may be available therefore an examination of timescales for other funding bids as well as project timescales was required. Additional funding may mean more projects may be able to move forward.

Information on projects, project timescales, funding available, potential funding and bidding timescales would be made available to Board members prior to the next meeting. This would inform decision-making when taking projects forward.

At this point Michelle Nutt returned with the clarification that, should the Town Deal bid be resubmitted and reconsidered, there was a chance that the resulting offer may be for less.

Members of Towns Fund present agreed on a named vote process to determine whether to accept the offer. Following this vote, it was unanimously agreed that the offer of £25 million be accepted.

The Chair thanked everyone including partner organisation representatives and City of Wolverhampton officers for their efforts and contributions in the submission of the bid and shaping the Town Investment Plan, as well as to Members of Parliament who had lobbied hard for the funding. It was acknowledged that the success of the Town Fund Board bid was a positive example of what could be achieved by private and public sector collaboration.

Resolved:

1. That members of Towns Fund Board agree to accept the offer of £25 million Town Deal funding from MHCLG.
2. That information on projects and additional funding timescales be collated and shared with Towns Fund Board members prior to the next meeting.

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Any other business

Josie Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Access 2 Business offered the opportunity for Board Members to volunteer as vaccination campaign champions to promote take-up of the COVID-19 vaccine and dispel any concerns for those who were hesitant.

It was reported that Suzi Perry, a popular television presenter who hailed from Wolverhampton, had featured in a video showing her receiving her vaccine and encouraging others to do the same. Any interested Board members were invited to record themselves receiving the vaccine to use in the campaign or get in touch with Josie Kelly.