



Towns Fund Board

Minutes - 20 May 2022

Attendance

Members of the Towns Fund Board

Ninder Johal (Chair)	Owner, Nachural
Stuart Anderson MP	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West
Simon Archer	Director, Bilston BID
Mal Cowgill (v)	Principal and Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton College
Ray Flynn	Associate Director (Place), University of Wolverhampton
Ro Hands (v)	Owner, Learn Play Foundation
James Holland	General Manager, Collins Aerospace
Tim Johnson	Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC)
Pat McFadden	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South East
Kevin Rogers	Executive Director, Paycare
Amit Sharma	Director, Sapphire Innovation
Cherry Shine	Director, Wolverhampton BID
Councillor Stephen Simkins	Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy, CWC
Jane Stevenson MP	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton North East

In Attendance

Liam Davies	Head of City Development, CWC
Darowen Jones	Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions Ltd
Charlotte Johns	Director of Strategy, CWC
Shelley Humphries (v)	Democratic Services Officer, CWC
Christopher Kirkland	Head of City Investment, CWC
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration, CWC

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from James Crowter, Tecman; Adam Daniels, Countryside Partnerships; Josie Kelly, Access to Business; Councillor Ian Brookfield, Leader of the Council for City of Wolverhampton Council.
- 2 Notification of substitute members**
There were no notifications of substitute members.
- 3 Declarations of Interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 4 Minutes of the meeting of 25 March 2022**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the meeting of 25 March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5 **Matters arising**

Other than those covered in the Towns Fund Action Tracker at item 6, there were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

6 **Towns Fund Action Tracker**

Darowen Jones, Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions Ltd presented the Towns Fund Action Tracker and provided the outcomes of actions agreed at the last meeting.

An overview was provided of Events Programme meetings held which included Chrissie Rushton, Events Programme Lead, Cherry Shine, Director of Wolverhampton BID and Simon Archer, Director of Bilston BID.

It was reported that, following necessary internal processes, the request for re-allocation of funds had been formally submitted to Government. Thanks were extended to Towns Fund Board members for their input towards decision making prior to submission. Initial verbal feedback from BEIS had been positive and it was anticipated that subject to the development of a profile of the financial figures, it was likely the submission would be accepted.

It was noted that the Engagement and Communications Strategy Plan had been included on the agenda for this meeting and an update would be provided as a standing item for future meetings.

Resolved:

That the outcomes from the actions agreed at the meeting of 28 January 2022 be noted.

7 **Engagement and Communication Strategy**

Darowen Jones, Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions Ltd presented the Engagement and Communication Strategy with supporting presentation and highlighted salient points. The Communications Implementation Plan document included in the published pack set out methodology for engagement and how it would be measured and maintained for each of the Town Deal projects.

It was outlined that key stakeholders had been identified for each project and that communication tools would be tailored towards the target stakeholders. A communication sign-off procedure had been established. Next steps were identified as updating the Invest Wolverhampton website and ensuring social media content included relevant hashtags across all platforms to monitor engagement with related posts.

It was queried what the process was for identifying stakeholders and confirmed that the Project Leads had identified all stakeholders that they were aware of and would continually manage this for each project and act as a point of contact. Stakeholder meetings were also useful platforms to reach out to groups that may otherwise have been missed.

It was noted that the primary stakeholders were the City's residents and visitors and it was crucial to keep them informed and included when shaping the vision for the City. It was acknowledged that there was a collective responsibility to ensure no

group was missed and that platforms for everyone to communicate and engage was beneficial.

In response to a point raised around residents with limited or no digital access to the website or social media, it was confirmed that each project had a tailored approach to engagement based on the demographic of its stakeholders and there was potential to factor this in and provide alternatives.

A plea was extended to include ward members in all engagement in order to advise residents.

A query was raised around the provision of alternative options for independent businesses who were adversely affected by either reduced footfall or closure due to redevelopment in their trading area. Following a discussion in which it was acknowledged that losing these businesses would not be in the spirit of the Levelling Up agenda, it was confirmed that all traders, particularly those directly affected, would be fully included in all engagement processes.

Resolved:

That the Engagement and Communication Strategy be approved.

8

Programme Dashboard

Darowen Jones, Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions Ltd delivered the Programme Dashboard presentation and provided a brief summary of the status of each of the projects. This included summary outputs, key milestones, projected timelines and funding positions.

It was requested whether there were any red flags to be aware of and it was noted that engagement with traders was key particularly in respect of the Bilston, Wednesfield and Public Realm projects where, as raised earlier, traders may be adversely affected by building works.

In response to a query around receipt of funding for each stage of the projects and a contingency plan should there be any slippage in delivery timetables, the process of the stages that funding was released was summarised. It was also noted that projects were funded to 2026 and advances could not be requested, although it was confirmed that any funds released before the project delivered would be deducted from the next payment.

A concern was raised again on how to mitigate disruption impact whilst development work was carried out. It was acknowledged that any potential impact would be thoroughly considered and that engagement and communication strategy planning was key to ensure all the views and concerns of those affected were taken into account. It was acknowledged that all Towns Fund Board members had the opportunity to champion stakeholder engagement.

A concern was raised around the risk of inflation and assurances were offered that this had been factored in as far ahead as reasonably possible. It was noted that the perception of the City may be at stake if projects were not delivered in a timely manner and, in response to a query around a risk register, it was reported that Verto software was being used to continually monitor data and served as an early warning system against potential risk to projects. Any concerns would be communicated to

Towns Fund and acted upon. It was also agreed that a copy of the risk register would be shared amongst Towns Fund Board members. It was suggested that other Towns Fund Boards could be consulted to learn their approaches to mitigating slippage and risk, as well as many of the other issues discussed.

It was suggested that key Board members could regularly receive updates and report back to the Board with any serious issues and a planned response.

Resolved:

That a copy of the risk register would be shared amongst Towns Fund Board members.

8a Brewers Yard / Culwell Street

It was reported that the planning application had been submitted on 31 March 2022 and a communication would be released as soon as this was approved.

8b WM5G

Grant funding was in place and monitoring evaluation data was being fed back to Government.

8c Events Programme

It was reported that a list of events was in the process of being compiled with funding split on events across the City.

In response to a query around methodology to ascertain economic impact, it was confirmed that this had been agreed with the BIDs and there were events in the pipeline planned to ensure the most benefit and visitor footfall for the City's traders.

8d Wednesfield Markets and Permeability

It was reported that a stakeholder engagement meeting had been held on the evening of 19 May 2022 with another planned for 22 June 2022 for traders in this area. An exercise was also planned to capture customer feedback from visitors to the market.

8e Bilston Markets

It was reported that this was progressing with a potential Levelling Up fund 2 and a piece of design work was ongoing.

8f Wolves@Work

It was reported that 254 individuals had been supported into employment through the scheme and the funding from Towns Fund would provide a valuable uplift to work being carried out.

8g Public Realm P2

It was reported that a public consultation exercise was planned for June 2022.

8h Arts Park - Grand Theatre

It was reported that, although further information was embargoed, there was a stronger likelihood of the compulsory purchase order option being considered to secure the building adjacent to the existing theatre.

8i City Learning Quarter

It was reported that this project was progressing although an update on Department for Education (DfE) funding was awaited.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Update:

In terms of the reallocation of funds from the National Brownfield Institute (NBI) project, it was reiterated that the request had been submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on 5 May 2022 and a response was awaited. All other project business cases had been verbally approved and the formal written responses were awaited. The Monitoring and Evaluation return had been submitted on the day of the meeting with another due by the end of May. Attention was drawn to a change in financial profiling which provided a drawdown payment every six months rather than one lump sum at the cusp of each financial year.

- 9 **City of Wolverhampton - Draft Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus**
Liam Davies, Head of City Development and Christopher Kirkland, Head of City Investment delivered the presentation on the City of Wolverhampton - Draft Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus. It was outlined that this would be a living document designed to provide detail to potential investors of the range of existing opportunities within the City as well as aspirational plans. A short promotional video was presented which showcased investment opportunities within the City using maps and digital images to provide visual, economic and geographical context.

It was acknowledged that part of any investment made should be in the local people who would be required to realise these plans and it was important to keep as much investment as possible within the City. It was suggested that this could be achieved by upskilling residents to access employment opportunities generated by the planned schemes, for example in construction, mechanics or digital sectors.

An update was provided on the Innovation and Investment Forum attended by officers supporting Towns Fund Board. It was reported that some valuable contacts had been established with Government departments and potential investors and it was noted that Wolverhampton was more at the forefront of discussion than previously which was positive. It was hoped this visit could be repeated annually to source future investors.

A query was raised around the residential occupancy with the City and where this was envisaged to be by 2025 – 2026 in terms of the number of consumers driving the local economy. It was highlighted that the Interchange that acted as a gateway to the City for visitors was near completion and work investing in the commercial side to generate employment was being carried out as well as the development of attractive residential areas such as Canalside South. It was noted that the key was how to

manage these developments and how to attract the right investors. It was also noted that a demographic data gathering exercise was planned to understand residents' and visitors' profiles and leisure preferences, which would in turn inform future plans on mapping the offer within the City.

It was acknowledged that the aspirational vision for the City needed to be a shared one and long-term, sustainable investment was key.

It was noted that there were a number of potential entertainment opportunities opened up by new residential development areas and gaps in the high street as well as an overall gap identified in the market for hotel and leisure accommodation.

Resolved:

That the presentation on the City of Wolverhampton - Draft Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus be received.

10

Levelling Up Fund

It was agreed that item 10 and 11 be taken together and Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy, City of Wolverhampton Council delivered the verbal update on the Levelling Up agenda, evolution of Towns Fund Board and the potential for Wolverhampton.

It was outlined how Levelling Up aligned with themes within Our City: Our Plan, which had been co-produced with residents and stakeholders and held the ethos of Wulfrunians living longer, healthier lives at its core. It was noted that Wolverhampton had been identified alongside Sheffield and Blackpool as one of the trailblazers for championing the Levelling Up agenda.

It was reported that a robust economic evidence base had been developed and an ongoing dialogue had been established with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

An overview was provided on the governance structure around Levelling Up moving forward and where the Towns Fund Board and other groups sat within it.

The input of new voices was welcomed, although a concern was raised around the future of the decision-making powers of the Towns Fund Board under the proposed structure. It was noted that it was unclear at present as different funding streams often came with different criteria around decision making. It was also noted that one of the aspirations was to establish a single integrated investment programme to streamline funding bids and provide oversight on development plans for the City as a whole.

A query was raised around the Political Executive group and its functions; it was noted that a platform was needed for political input from Government Ministers, Leader, Deputy Leader, MPs and others, although the finer detail had not been finalised.

Suggestions were made for the inclusion of other partners such as the Director of Public Health and representatives of the charity and voluntary sectors. It was acknowledged that a means had to be devised of bringing as many valuable stakeholders together as possible but in a manageable way.

It was suggested that the feedback loops between the different boards within the governance structure should be clearly defined and the need for this structure to evolve was noted.

It was noted that input at a national level was valuable however it was agreed that decisions affecting the City should continue to be made at a local level. It was noted that accountability for Levelling Up in each area lay with local authorities.

Resolved:

That the Levelling Up Fund update be received.

11 **Evolution of Towns Fund Board**

It was agreed that item 10 and 11 be taken together.

12 **July 2022 Board Meeting - Proposed Tour**

Darowen Jones, Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions Ltd reported that a tour of the Towns Fund projects was in planning stages. It was planned to compile an itinerary to offer Towns Fund Board members the opportunity to visit the sites and meet with Project Leads. A Towns Fund Board meeting was planned to follow this to discuss feedback. Further detail on the date, time and meeting point would follow in due course.

Resolved:

That further details of the July 2022 Board Meeting - Proposed Tour would be circulated.

13 **Any Other Business**

A query was raised around consultancy fees and where these would be sourced from and it was confirmed these costs were not part of the funding bid.