



# Towns Fund Board

## Minutes - 25 November 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 (v)	Director, Bilston BID
Councillor Ian Brookfield (v)	Leader of the Council, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC)
Lindsey Flynn	Representative of Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
Ray Flynn	Associate Director (Place), University of Wolverhampton
Ro Hands (v)	Owner, Learn Play Foundation
Harleen	Youth Council Representative
James Holland (v)	General Manager, Collins Aerospace
Tim Johnson	Chief Executive, CWC
Josie Kelly	Chief Executive Officer, Access 2 Business
Maninder Mangat	Director, MM Consulting
Peter Merry	Deputy Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton College
Kevin Rogers (v)	Executive Director, Paycare
Cherry Shine	Director, Wolverhampton BID
Tia	Youth Council Representative

#### In Attendance

Liam Davies	Head of City Development, CWC
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer, CWC
Charlotte Johns	Director of Strategy, CWC
Darowen Jones	Towns Fund Programme Manager, Kinver Business Solutions
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration, CWC
Ayesha Malhan (v)	Regeneration Officer, CWC
Andrew Scragg	Youth Service Participation Worker, CWC
Peter Taylor (v)	Regeneration Manager, CWC

*Item No.*     *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Towns Fund Members Jane Stevenson MP, Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton North East; Adam Daniels, Managing Director of Countryside Partnerships; Pat McFadden MP; Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South East; Mal Cowgill, Principal and Chief Executive of City of Wolverhampton College, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Executive Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy for CWC and James Crowter, Managing Director of Tecman.

Apologies were also received from Ian Fegan, Director of Communications for CWC.
- 2 Notification of substitute members**

Peter Merry, Deputy Chief Executive of City of Wolverhampton College attended remotely for Mal Cowgill.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Minutes of the meeting of 29 July 2022**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 29 July 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 presented the Towns Fund Action Tracker which outlined the outcomes of actions agreed at the last meeting.

It was highlighted that steps had been taken to ensure Board members received information prior to external communications to the media.

Resolved:

That the outcomes from the actions agreed at the meeting of 29 July 2022 be noted.

7 **Levelling Up Agenda - Briefing Note and Update**

Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy, CWC presented the Levelling Up Agenda - Briefing Note and Update highlighting key proposals. The briefing note detailed proposals for a review of the Towns Fund Board and its scope in order for the best City response to government policy.

Proposals included a review of the Terms of Reference and an extension of membership to include other key partners whilst still honouring the previous agreement of keeping the membership at a manageable level.

It was queried whether there would be a focus on funding activity only or around the Levelling Up agenda. In response, it was envisaged that the Board's scope would encompass not only those areas, but also provide a forum to understand and seek sustainable opportunities to continually ensure the best outcomes for the City and its residents in an ever-changing financial climate. It was suggested that the Board should have strategic oversight of making the best use of all funding and investments made available, as well as monitoring implementation and delivery of improvements to the City.

It was acknowledged that building on the network of partnerships already firmly established through Towns Fund Board was a better use of resources than creating new boards for the purpose.

In respect of the proposal to rebrand the Board as part of the review, it was agreed that the name City Investment Board would befit the new arrangements whilst reflecting the broader purpose.

Resolved:

1. That proposed changes in relation to the Towns Fund Board scope, name and membership in light of current government policy be agreed.
2. That Towns Fund Board agree to the commissioning of new Terms of Reference and Local Assurance Framework for the next board meeting as required.
3. That the Towns Fund Board undergo rebranding as City Investment Board.

8 **Towns Fund Programme Update Dashboard**

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

8a **Brewers Yard / Culwell Street**

It was reported that the Brewers Yard / Culwell Street project was just awaiting the s.106 planning approval and was progressing well.

8b **WM5G**

It was reported that the funding package had been agreed and a Digital Festival had taken place recently as well as the delivery of eCommerce Masterclasses. This was commended by the Chair as it was noted that around 30% of the Black Country reportedly did not fully understand how the digital infrastructure worked.

It was suggested that undertaking a deep-dive into the opportunities presented by the emerging digital infrastructure may be beneficial and agreed that this discussion would form a future agenda item.

Resolved:

That an agenda item be presented at a future Towns Fund Board meeting exploring potential business opportunities created by the WM5G digital infrastructure.

8c **Events Programme**

It was reported that regular communication was being upheld between the Council and BID managers to discuss and plan future events. It was noted that events were instrumental in drawing income into the City however it was important to also incorporate ways to encourage more visitors to return to the City in the future.

8d **Wednesfield Markets and Permeability**

It was highlighted that a new project manager had been appointed internally to oversee this and the Bilston project. Stakeholder engagement work was currently underway, with the next session planned for January 2023 to analyse feedback on the five physical interventions. It was planned to present an item to the Board in the new year detailing the plans for the interventions and to invite discussion and feedback from the Board.

A concern had been raised around communications of timescales as enquirer perceptions had been that work had slowed. A general discussion followed around communications, during which it was outlined that the Invest website was continually being updated with a focus on keeping information current and in plain English. It was acknowledged that a pro-active approach was preferable to ensure residents were kept abreast of developments.

Members suggested that it would be helpful to have information to hand to answer enquiries as they only had information around top level activity and not the finer details. It was noted that as part of the commitment to ensure Board members were informed, a newsletter had gone out in lieu of the cancelled September meeting and there were plans to issue a regular newsletter with key developments.

It was acknowledged that there had been some negative comments posted on social media channels in respect of completion timelines and queried whether anyone from the Authority had responded to them, although it was noted that it was challenging to monitor and engage with all posts across so many channels.

Suggestions were made around other communications such as hoardings in situ before and during work taking place, with information on plans and updates on completion dates, or use of the electronic signs on the ring road.

It was added that Bilston BID had included details of Bilston market updates in their newsletter and a noticeboard had been set up in Bilston to notify of events coming soon.

Resolved:

That an item be presented in early 2023 on feedback from stakeholder engagement of the five interventions at Wednesfield.

8e Bilston Markets

It was reported that this project was slightly ahead of Wednesfield and was at the design stage. It was noted that the end goal wasn't solely on the creation of an asset but to maximise other potential as well.

8f Wolves@Work

It was reported that Wolves@Work was already active and at delivery stage. It was also being linked into other projects by stipulating that contractors take on local employment as part of the contract.

8g Public Realm P2

In addition to the update, a query was raised around the pending decision of the match funding bid for £9.5 million and whether the outcome of this decision would affect the delivery of the project. It was noted that this funding would cover additional improvements but funding for delivery of the originally agreed Public Realm Phase 2 developments was already accounted for.

A comment around communicating via Twitter prompted a discussion on the use of social media platforms and Youth Council Representatives made some valuable

suggestions on a variety of additional communication methods aimed at young people. It was agreed that a separate session be arranged with Youth Council members to explore these suggestions further.

Resolved:

That a separate session be arranged with Youth Council members to further explore communications options targeted at young people.

8h City Learning Quarter

It was highlighted that the preferred contractor had been announced for the first phase and the project was on track for completion March / April 2023.

8i Arts Park

It was reported that the compulsory purchase order for 66 – 70 Lichfield Street adjacent to the Grand Theatre could no longer be progressed following legal advice. Owners had been notified as appropriate and it was noted that the building was being brought back into use for residential units and commercial space. Members were assured that discussions were ongoing with various key stakeholders, including the Grand Theatre, to explore other options. It was agreed to form a task and finish group to finalise these discussions and provide feedback to the Board.

In response to a query around any potential impact in timeline for the Arts Park project, it was reported that BEIS had been briefed with a cashflow update and it was hoped to realign the expenditure before March 2023. It was added that BEIS had mechanisms in place to ensure money could be retained if not spent. A request was made to ensure the investment was retained as close to the vicinity as possible.

Resolved:

That a task and finish group be formed to explore and finalise suitable options for reappportioning the Arts Park Funding and provide feedback to the Board.

8j Communications and Engagement

Following the circulation of a newsletter in lieu of the cancelled September meeting, it was agreed to issue a newsletter between meetings to update Board members. The Invest Wolverhampton website was being updated to bring the Towns Fund section forward from a subpage to a more central location. There were also a number of engagement activities underway and as mentioned earlier, feedback from these would be presented in the new year.

Resolved:

That a Board newsletter be shared with members in the month between scheduled meetings.

9 **Towns Fund Programme Level Risk Register**

Darowen Jones, Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions delivered a presentation on the Towns Fund Programme Level Risk Register and highlighted the two risks RAG rated as red.

It was noted that one related to the potential risk of parties or stakeholders holding any connection to Belarus or Russia, however members were reassured that vigorous checks were being undertaken and the risk would be downgraded once checks were complete. The other was the risk that the government's Towns Fund could have called in on any of the projects; this risk remained red as the Arts Park was still subject to change.

It was queried whether the current rate of inflation was considered a risk. Although it was noted that inflation at a rate of 10% had already been factored in as good practice, it was proposed that an agreed strategy to respond to inflation would be explored and brought to the Board in January 2023, whilst a sub-group could be set up to support.

It was noted that in the event that inflation rates went down and there were funds left unspent, Board members would be consulted to approve reappportioning of funds.

It was also suggested that it was worth clarifying that the government funding could only be used for specifically agreed projects to avoid misconceptions that the money could be spent elsewhere whilst the cost of living crisis was still at the forefront of people's minds.

Resolved:

1. That a strategy to respond to inflation rates be developed and presented at the January 2023 meeting.
2. That a sub-group be established to support risk management.

10 **Towns Fund Financial Profile**

Darowen Jones, Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions delivered the presentation outlining the Towns Fund Financial Profile and outlined allocations against each project. It was highlighted that all projects were still within the agreed time envelope which was positive. Public Realm P2 had been reprofiled as well as Bilston, Wednesfield and CLQ, however all remained within budget.

It was confirmed that all funding needed to be spent by financial year 2025 – 2026 and that, based on analytics, there were no concerns around funding being lost.

A query was raised in terms of the Events Programme which was thought to be an ongoing project, which didn't align with a 2025 – 2026 end date. Assurances were offered that a five-year plan was being pushed for as this was an ever-evolving area.

Resolved:

- That the Towns Fund Financial Profile be received.

11 **Towns Fund Performance Return to Government**

Darowen Jones, Programme Manager, Kinver Solutions delivered the presentation outlining the Towns Fund Performance Return to Government which was due for submission by 16 December 2022.

It was agreed that the detailed return would be shared with the Board for comment with feedback ahead of this date. Kevin Rogers, Executive Director, Paycare also offered assistance to review the return.

It was queried whether feedback from BEIS would be shared with the Board and confirmed that any feedback received would be provided as an update.

Resolved:

1. That the Towns Fund Performance Return to Government be approved subject to feedback from Towns Fund Board.
2. That Kevin Rogers, Executive Director, Paycare provide support in the review of the detailed return.
3. That any feedback from BEIS be shared as an update to the Board.

12 **Any Other Business**

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the Board and commending all the hard work and contributions of members and stakeholders to date.

There was no other business.