

## **Meeting of the Cabinet – 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2023**

### **Report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise**

#### **‘Long Term Plan for Towns’ – The Town of Dudley**

##### **Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the ‘Long Term Plan for Towns’ Initiative, a £1.1bn programme announced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLHUC) in early October. The town of Dudley is one of 55 locations identified to benefit from a £20m endowment investment over a ten-year period. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the initiative, the implementation process, funding and timescales, and to set out the proposed next steps, for approval.

##### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that:
  - Cabinet notes the details of the initiative and the proposed next steps.
  - Cabinet endorses the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to progress the implementation of the initiative as set out in the ‘next steps’ that do not require additional funding in advance of the receipt of capacity funding and Cabinet notes the ‘finance’ sections in this paper and the impact on the programme of the need to pause elements until said capacity funding is received.

## Background

3. Government announced the 'Long Term Plan for Towns' (LTPfT) initiative in early October, together with the 55 towns that will each benefit from a £20m investment over the 10-year period of the programme. The town of Dudley was one of the locations identified.
4. A guidance note has been produced by DLUHC, which set outs the key principles of the initiative, the key themes that towns will need to focus on, the governance and delivery mechanism, funding and proposed timescales. These are summarised below.

### Key principles

5. The LTPfT guidance sets out that DLUHC is drawing on its experience in delivering the Levelling Up Fund, the Towns Fund and Levelling Up Partnerships, together with feedback from local authorities and delivery partners. The initiative requires local people and their priorities to be at the centre of the process, supported by long-term flexible funding. The key principles include:
  - Longer term funding certainty – capital and revenue resources to be available over a ten-year period.
  - Building local partnerships – through the creation of a new **Town Board**, bringing together community leaders, employers, the local authority and the local MP, to develop a shared vision and oversee funding and delivery.
  - Having a clear plan for delivery – the preparation of a **Long Term Plan** for the town, setting out the vision and priorities, aligned to the three key themes (see below), articulating how existing assets and powers will be used to support the priorities, and how it will lever in additional funding.
  - Joint working between central and local government – LTPfT will ensure that towns benefit from the full support of central government, via the creation of a new Towns Taskforce that will report to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Levelling Up. The current 'High Streets Taskforce' will also be expanded by Government, to enable Town Boards to draw on specialist expertise as required.
  - Involving local people from the outset – in addition to the Town Board, which will require representation from the community, such as faith groups, local charities, neighbourhood forum, CVS, NHS. Police, arts,

heritage and sporting organisations; the preparation of the Long Term Plan will need to include a process of community engagement, to be maintained throughout the initiative. Engagement is required to help Boards define the key issues to tackle, identify strengths and weaknesses within the community and test potential projects.

### Key themes

6. The guidance states that Government will provide significant flexibility for a range of improvements, driven by the needs and wishes of the local community, to be made under three broad investment themes:

#### **Safety and Security**

The theme seeks to address the issues that prevent people visiting, and businesses from setting up in, town centres – crime and anti-social behaviour. Alongside the funding available through the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Action Plan, the LTPfT guidance considers that new and improved security infrastructure – such as CCTV, street lighting, hotspot policing and wardens, as well as diversionary activity, could be measures included in the Long Term Plan.

#### **High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration**

Improving the physical fabric of town centres, to make them more attractive to residents, businesses, leisure activities, and to help retain skilled and younger people, is a key focus for the Long Term Plan. The guidance suggests measures such as converting vacant retail facilities into living space, preserving and improving heritage buildings, creating and maintaining parks and green spaces; alongside revenue programmes to maintain cleanliness, run market events, establishing Business Improvement Districts and supporting community skills development, could be appropriate.

#### **Transport and Connectivity**

Making towns more connected – to increase footfall and therefore viability, and to support access to employment – is considered critical if towns are to thrive into the future. Offering sustainable transport options, linking different parts of the town with new infrastructure, providing safe ways to walk or cycle into and around the town centre, alongside ensuring that public transport options are viable and attractive – are potential measures to be considered in preparing the Long Term Plan.

In addition to the three key themes summarised above, Government consider there are many **existing powers** that Town Boards can access to support the delivery of priorities. These include Compulsory Purchase, Public Space Protection Orders, High Street Rental Auctions, and Assets of Community Value – amongst others. A Town Board will be required to set out in its Long Term Plan how its members will use their existing powers to support the priorities, and, to support this, Government will develop a ‘toolkit’ of powers and consider where local authorities could be granted more flexibility in the use of such powers.

### Governance

7. The **Town Board** will be the focus for leading and delivering the LTPfT initiative. Towns will need to create one, and local people/community engagement will need to be at the heart of its work. The guidance identifies several key roles for the Town Board:
  - To be chaired by a business person or a local community leader.
  - Work with the local authority to develop the Long Term Plan.
  - Identify the issues and priorities for the Long Term Plan, including supporting a process of community engagement.
  - Identify opportunities for Board members to use their specific powers.
  - Identify opportunities to bring in additional private or philanthropic investment to support delivery.
  - Oversee the delivery of investments set out in the Long Term Plan.
8. Boards can establish sub-Boards to focus on particular investment themes or issues.
9. LTPfT delivery will be supported by the local authority, which will be the accountable body with responsibility for financial management via the Section 151 officer.

### Funding and Timescales

10. The **£20m endowment funding** comprises 75% (£15m capital) and 25% (£5m revenue). Further details are required from DLUHC on how the endowment process will work in practice and the financial implications for the Council, as accountable body. Capacity funding will be provided in 2024/25 to support stakeholders in running the Town Board and development of the Long Term Plan, including community engagement. Detail is awaited on whether local authorities can recover expenditure incurred in 23/24 to commence the above, and whether that funding is part of the £20m or additional to that.

11. Capacity funding will be made available by DLUHC when the Town Board structure is in place – with the Long Term Plan needing to be in place no later than Summer 2024.
12. From Summer 2024, and when the Long Term Plan is in place, Town Boards will be in a position to draw down the first year of support to deliver the priorities.

### Next steps

13. LTPfT is a 10-year programme from 24/25, but there are several key elements that the Council should be progressing prior to the start of 24/25. These can be summarised as:
  - Engagement with DLUHC – recent correspondence from the Cities & Local Growth Unit indicates that government is in the process of developing further guidance that will include advice on developing the Town Board, as well as further detail on funding. When this is received, the Director of Regeneration & Enterprise requires endorsement to engage with DLUHC and the proposed Towns Taskforce on the implementation of the initiative.

### *Creation of the Town Board*

- Engagement with the Dudley North MP – an initial discussion has been held with the MP, to discuss the initiative and the information available at this stage. The guidance identifies that the local MP should be represented on the Town Board and the Director of Regeneration & Enterprise requires endorsement to continue to engage with the MP on the composition of the Town Board.
  - Discussions with key groups and individuals – the key groups to be represented on the Board are set above and detailed in the guidance. The Director of Regeneration & Enterprise requires endorsement to engage with the key groups and individuals in Dudley town centre, including those on the current Dudley Town Board, to refresh and re-purpose the existing Dudley Town Board to comply with the LTPfT guidance and DLUHC requirements. This will need to include the identification of a Chair.
14. This work should commence now, to agree a new Dudley Town Board in advance of 24/25 (ideally by early 2024), so that Dudley is able to draw down the DLUHC capacity funding in early 24/25.

## 15. Preparation of the Long Term Plan

- The guidance states that the Long Term Plan should be in place by Summer 2024. To achieve that date, work should commence in late 2023 alongside the creation of the Town Board and in discussion with emerging Board members. The Plan and the investment strategy for the use of the endowment funding will take some while to prepare and agree – and if the Council wish to be in a position to drawdown resources for the first year from Summer 2024, then this work should commence as soon as possible.
- The Director of Regeneration & Enterprise requires endorsement to commence the preparation of the Long Term Plan from November 2023, including the planning of community engagement events, in conjunction with key stakeholders and emerging Board members. Membership of the final Board and agreement to the Plan will be subject to Cabinet approval.

## **Finance**

16. This report is highlighting that the Council has been successful in securing the £20m of LTPfT endowment funding, the capital/revenue split of that resource and the responsibility the Council will have as accountable body via the Section 151 Officer. It is a 10-year funding programme and the Long-Term Plan will set out the proposed investment strategy and the draw down of resources. This investment strategy will need to be prepared in full consultation with the DMBC Finance Team and the Section 151 Officer.
17. Capacity Funding will be provided in 24/25 by DLUHC to support the work of the Board and the preparation of the Long Term Plan, but at this stage the Council does not know the scale or timing of that capacity funding, or if it is additional to the £20m.
18. If the deadlines set out in the guidance are to be achieved and drawdown of core funding can commence from Summer 2024, work would need to commence on the creation of the Board and the preparation of the Long Term Plan in advance of the Capacity Funding being available. Such activities include:
  - Planning and delivering community engagements events linked to the identification of priorities and projects to be included in the Long Term Plan.
  - Supporting meetings of the emerging Town Board.
  - Professional support and specialist inputs required to prepare the Long Term Plan – including project coordination, economic modelling and cost benefits assessment, plans/designs and costings.

19. Given the spending controls agreed at Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023, the delivery of any planned community events and the engagement of professional support cannot be actioned until the capacity or full funds are available. The potential impact of this on the programme timetable is to be noted.
20. The estimated figure of capacity funding required to support the above (and other key activities that may emerge) in advance of capacity funding drawdown in 24/25 is circa £100,000.
21. The project will be delivered through the Regeneration and Enterprise Team supported by the Interim Regeneration Lead. Some projects may need to be paused/slowed to accommodate this work and any future expected Levelling Up Round 3 bids (announcement expected end of November 2023). The project activity will be reviewed following the Autumn statement for approval of a revised work programme, adjusted to fit capacity and priorities.

### **Law**

22. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides the Council with power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. Pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 a local authority has a general power of competence to do anything that individuals generally may do.

### **Risk Management**

23. A risk register will be prepared to form part of the Long Term Plan and the Investment Strategy submitted to DLUHC for approval. This will set out the governance, financial, commercial, planning, procurement and other compliance risk that will need to be carefully managed throughout the initiative. A key risk at present is the lack of detail in respect of the term 'endowment' and how the draw down of the £20m funding will work in practice.

### **Equality Impact**

24. The Council's Equality and Diversity policies will be applied throughout the preparation and delivery of the LTPfT initiative, including the identification of any specific equality impacts. Where required equality impact assessments/statements will be prepared, for example in relation to the composition of the Town Board, public engagement and the projects in the Long Term Plan.

## **Human Resources/Organisational Development**

25. It is anticipated that some HR resources will be required to contribute to the preparation and delivery of the LTPfT initiative. When the details of what is required is fully known, the appropriate approvals will be sought and required HR processes followed with regards to this.

## **Commercial/Procurement**

26. Any contracts or commercial agreements needed to deliver the prescribed outcomes will be let in accordance with Contract Standing Orders.

## **Environment/Climate Change**

27. Sustainability and environmental protection will be a key consideration in the preparation of the Long Term Plan and the priorities within it. The guidance highlights the need for sustainable transport measures and to increase accessibility via walking and cycling; to preserve and re-use historic buildings; and to create parks and gardens in town centres - so there is an implicit need for the Long Term Plan to consider the environment.

## **Council Priorities and Projects**

28. Facilitating the economic and social regeneration of the Borough is a key priority of the Council. The LTPfT initiative will help the Council to deliver against this key priority and also Public Health and Wellbeing, Public Transport Connectivity, and Asset and Property Management. It will support these priorities through delivering town centre regeneration, in accordance with the three priority themes set out above.



### **Director of Regeneration and Enterprise**

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