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# PLACES, SPACES AND FACES

## OUR REGENERATION PLAN



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## Foreword from the Board

We are Dudley folk and could each tell you stories about growing up, working, living and playing in the borough. From Neil, our Chair, who is Dudley born and bred and has spent most of his working life educating Dudley residents, to Mark, who remembers shopping for school shoes on the high street and watching Star Wars by the zoo at age six and now feels proud to be working here to bring hope to the next generation, and Rachel, who moved to Dudley in her early teens and still recalls vibrant Saturday shopping trips in the town and now wants to make a real difference as both a resident and worker in the borough. We are all rooted in this place.

We are dead passionate about the place and want it to be somewhere where we celebrate the Dudley identity while welcoming others in, where everyone has a good start in life, and where our families choose to bring their families up for generations to come.

We are really committed, individually and collectively, to being Neighbourhood Board members and feel both the honour and responsibility of representing the community and delivering a programme which delivers short term impacts and long-lasting change. While it's been a bit of a stop-start journey so far, we have thoroughly enjoyed working together and reaching a point where we're able to present our Regeneration Plan.

However, this is only the beginning for us, just as the engagement undertaken through summer 2025 was only the start of a ten-year conversation. We are really proud of our cohort of community researchers who have had fantastic conversations with the community to help us understand people's ambitions for the area and the challenges they face. The task ahead of us is to use the programme money wisely so that it makes greatest impact in relation to those local priorities and attracts other funds and activity along the way. Having engaged with thousands of people this summer about 'Plan for Neighbourhoods' we've decided, in discussion with our Community Researchers, to continue to use this name, rather than the more recently announced 'Pride in Place', for the time being at least, so as not to lose continuity, but we also look forward to understanding more about what it means to be part of Government's PIP programme.

We were also really struck by the four-word summary "*places, spaces and faces*" one of the community researchers used at our recent celebration event which summarised the feedback gathered and principles of the programme for Dudley. This has really resonated with us and is clearly the community relates to as well having been generated by conversations with them, so will be something that we keep coming back to as we roll out delivery.

We want to shout about what Dudley has to offer and help address the inequalities that sometimes mean that not everyone has a fair chance. We want to involve everyone and make sure that those whose voices aren't heard so often are really listened to. We hope that everyone who took part in our engagement activity this summer can see themselves and the thoughts they took time to share in this plan. It is written for you with our commitment to do everything we can to bring it to life, working with and through the community.

## Dudley Neighbourhood Board

## Places, spaces and faces – our regeneration plan

*Awlroight, Ow bin ya? (Hello, how are you?)*

*Dudley Borough is in the "beating" heart of the Black Country. We're a friendly bunch with a story of rich industrial heritage and a love of pork scratchings and pint of real ale.*

*Birmingham is only 30 minutes away. The borough is home to the towns of Dudley, Sedgley, Stourbridge, Brierley Hill and Halesowen, and we are one of the early hubs of the industrial revolution. We also have fantastic green spaces, canals and bostin' (amazing) geological riches.*

**Awlroight,  
Ow bin ya?**  
(Hello, how are you?)

We can, and we will, give you plenty of stats and facts about Dudley's programme area, but we think the heart of the place is best understood when it's described by local people.

Have a look at our film which will tell you about the place and how we've sought to understand local priorities: [www.regeneratingdudley.org.uk/plan-for-neighbourhoods](http://www.regeneratingdudley.org.uk/plan-for-neighbourhoods)

Here are some of the things that residents value most about their area:

*"I like that the area has visitor attractions Zoo, Museum. I like that we have our own dialect, flag and Black Country Day."*

*"My neighbours, they are always helpful and kind. The park is close by, so is my doctors."*

*"Places for children to explore nature safely, be active and maintain healthy relationships with exercise and activity".*

*"Has some supportive organisations."*

*"Dudley is the historical heart of the Black Country and is the borough capital. Whilst the town centre has suffered as have all high streets due to the change in shopping habits, the centre is still emotionally important to people and is a central space for culture, shopping and other areas to come together."*

*"Buffery Park is a great resource and well used by the community, especially the children's playground and the football pitch. I like being able to walk into town. The*

*Black Country Living Museum is really good especially hosting evening events that celebrate both our history and our present diversity.”*

*“Beautiful green spaces - Bumble Hole; Saltwells nature reserve; some beautiful old buildings in Dudley town centre; the history - black country museum and canals”*

*“Good neighbours, good transport links and access to the countryside.”*

*“Russell’s Hall Park is a great open space. The group of Friends of Russell’s Hall Park try to keep it tidy and accessible to all. Living Hope Church is a bonus.”*

However, not everyone has the same experience of living here and the area is not without its challenges. Residents have told us that they are particularly concerned about safety in the area, that people can be disrespectful, and that the area is down at heel.

*“Nothing I like about the area at the moment.”*

*“The area is very run down. Both B/Hill and Dudley High Streets are poor in appearance, and no quality shops, which inevitably breeds a higher crime rate. As a female, I would not visit the high street alone.”*

*“Lack of parks, there used to be so many where kids could be kids and play rather than staying indoors and ending up suffering from isolation”.*

*“The town centres - feel unsafe, vulnerable. Such a shame as Dudley has so much to offer and could be amazing!”*

*“Anti-social behaviour, riding of motorised scooters and bikes on footpaths, roads, in parks and on canal towpaths.”*

Through this summer’s engagement we have heard about the contrasts, diversity and inequality across the area. They can also be seen in the stats and facts that we’ve explored to help write this plan and understand the priorities. No one believes the area is perfect and everyone wants to see changes and investment that deliver real improvements. We want to reflect and respond to that honesty – that there are so many assets and things to be proud of, but also many challenges to face. People who live here are proud and resilient and want to be proud of the place again.

## Section 1: Our local context

### A potted history

The name Dudley is Early English (Anglo-Saxon) and is derived from two elements Dudda – a masculine personal name and leah a word that implies a woodland estate. Other local centres, within the borough and the programme area, also date back to Anglo-Saxon origins, such as Netherton – Nether (lower) and ton, (a farm estate). Domesday Book in 1086 records there was a castle, the historic powerbase, there and a number of people living in the township of Dudley. The market was the major focus of town life, as it was in Netherton when a market charter was granted in 1684, but from the 1290’s nearby moorland was used for smelting of iron. This grew throughout the medieval period and by the 16th century the working of iron was a major industry, particularly nail making. A will of Oliver Shaw in 1559 recorded that he was a naylor of Nederton. This is the earliest record of a person engaged in metal work but he was soon followed by others. The Dudley canal was completed in 1779, opening up transport routes and from the 1880’s the place was shaped by collieries, quarries and ironworks.

There are **65,700** people living in the programme area, approximately **20% of the borough’s total population**. It’s a large and varied area that stretches across many distinct communities each with their own individual character, challenges and opportunities.

Across our area we have a younger than average population with an **average age of 36**, compared to 41 in Dudley borough, and 40 nationally. We are a mixed and **diverse** community. Different places have very different profiles with some being more traditional, and others home to younger, multicultural families.

The programme area also includes several local high streets and one main town centre all of which serve their neighbouring communities and offering vital local amenities. There is a total of **600 retail units** within the programme area, providing important employment opportunities for local people.

### Our story so far

Dudley’s story so far is one of adaption, transformation and renewal: from an industrial powerhouse to a modern borough, building on its heritage while embracing change. Our area is home to a diverse and growing population; a community known for its warmth, determination and resourcefulness and with a strong sense of belonging to the borough. Deeply rooted in its working-class traditions, Dudley’s rich cultural and industrial heritage remains central to its identity and is celebrated and presented in many ways, through its landmarks, historic buildings, cultural institutions and extensive network of canals. Many of our current residents worked, or had family who worked in the glass, iron, coal and quarry industries. They are multi-generational industries with long histories and have shaped the communities of today.

Dudley's history is significant and has had such a direct role in shaping the Dudley of today. The Dudley Archives collects, preserves and makes available archive and local studies material relating to the borough helping the community to understand the past, experience the present and shape the future. The Black Country Living Museum enables you to explore over 250 years of history, from the Industrial Revolution to post-war prosperity, through living interpretation. Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust take you on an underground journey through more than 428 million years of history, and just to the south of the area you'll find the Stourbridge Glass Quarter with the Red House Glass Cone, once a hub of glass production and one of only four surviving structures in the UK today.

As the Neighbourhood Board, we want to build on this legacy, ensuring that Dudley's history, identity and people remain at the centre of its future growth and prosperity.

### Our heritage and environment

The geology of Dudley borough and the Black Country has played a significant role in shaping the area's heritage and ingenuity. The natural resources found underground have brought wealth to the area for hundreds of years. In 2020 the area's industrial and natural history earned the Black Country its 'Global Geopark' status, with key sites within or near our programme area including Bumble Hole, Saltwells National Nature Reserve, and Barrow Hill.

Although a predominantly built-up area, we're lucky to have good access to green spaces including several large parks, nature reserves and geosites which are greatly valued locally, and are spaces that people want to see protected and improved for future generations. Our communities recognise the health and wellbeing benefits of greenspaces and being able to enjoy walking the dog or seeing their kids play outside. They recognise the role that the environment has had in shaping our culture, industry and heritage and want it to continue to be part of their story.

### Our culture

Culture means different things to different people. A feature of Dudley's communities is that each has a distinctive local identity, and communities feel a sense of pride in where they live. This is in addition to the overarching sense of place for the borough, and for some, a sense of pride in coming from the Black Country.

Dudley's culture is dynamic, ever-changing and distinctive. It is constantly evolving reflecting its demographics and population. It includes our heritage, architecture, tourism assets, civic buildings, canals, castle, museums, industrial history and natural beauty. Our festivals, music, entertainment, creative activities, sport, events and food and drink bring people together. Our sense of shared identity – traditions, dialect, shared experience, shared pride, the Black Country flag.

The growing mix of faiths, nationalities and groups brings new richness and diversity to our area, seen in the range of shops, events, places of worship and groups in the voluntary and

community sector. Dudley folk are generally welcoming and keen to support each other, but we acknowledge that these changes aren't welcome by all, giving rise to some community tensions and areas where these differences are divisive. We will work with all our communities, and particularly through the incredible network of voluntary and community sector groups, to help understand these points of conflict and find ways to support stronger, cohesive communities.

Our voluntary and community sector makes a huge difference, particularly in the most disadvantaged places providing much needed support including youth engagement, support for those experiencing homelessness, and poverty reduction. For example, the Churches Housing Association of Dudley and District (CHADD) who support young families to flourish and help them to prepare for their next stage, living independently. Each young person and their family have a mentor and access to support from the wider network of the Dudley Young Person's Alliance. Similarly, local VCS organisations such as Provision House in Dudley Town Centre, work closely with partners to distribute food, clothing and essentials to families facing financial hardship.

### Our economy

Often referred to as the historic capital of the Black Country, Dudley was once a driving force of the industrial revolution. Its foundries, glassworks and coal mines powered national growth by capitalising upon Dudley's unique geology and natural resources generating wealth locally and forging a strong sense of local pride. However, as a key industrial town Dudley was heavily impacted by 20<sup>th</sup> century deindustrialisation, resulting in a weakened economy and high levels of unemployment and local deprivation that are still felt today. Furthermore, the construction of Merry Hill Shopping Centre (an out-of-town regional retail development) in the 1980's led to the decentralisation and decline of Dudley Town Centre as a primary shopping area. This decline was further exacerbated by structural trends in suburbanisation with many middle-class workers moving to new out of town housing developments.

Today, Dudley's local economy is evolving from its industrial past. Private sector interest and new investment in advanced manufacturing, education, health technologies and the visitor economy are already benefitting the area. Manufacturing remains a distinctive part of Dudley's economy, comprising approximately 15% of the borough's total employment albeit with a new focus on advanced manufacturing. However, the overall sectoral make-up and size of Dudley's economy have shifted to a service-based majority with most employment now in the 'foundational economy', predominantly retail, education and health and social care, many of which are located within Dudley's Town Centre. Accordingly, Dudley residents' skills, qualifications and wage levels remain below the national average, and several wards show high levels of deprivation, generational unemployment, lack of affordable housing and in work poverty. Correspondingly, quality of life in Dudley's deprived areas remains below national averages.

Since 2012 we have also seen a structured series of public sector-led interventions bringing over £1 billion in investment. These include the construction of the Dudley and Sandwell

Archives building; Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro line extension – phase 1 due to open in 2026, Dudley Interchange – also due to open in 2026, and restoration of some of Dudley town centre’s historic buildings within the Conservation Area. Historically, connectivity to Dudley has been poor so the forthcoming completion of two major connectivity and transport programmes in 2026 will offer new opportunities for the town and its residents, providing fast links to Birmingham city centre.

The economic value of tourism in the Dudley Borough for 2024 was £447million, with 9.6 million visitors. Dudley’s visitor attractions contribute to its heritage value and historic landscape, including Dudley Zoological Gardens and Castle, Black Country Living Museum and Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust. These cultural and creative assets deliver social value, bringing together communities and supporting the health wellbeing and sense of belonging for local people.

It is important to note that despite this economic activity, overall, we see net out-commuting from the borough even though local pay rates are now roughly in line with those earned elsewhere in the region, showing that there is potential to encourage more residents to work locally.

### Our wider impact

Our local places and institutions also serve communities far beyond our programme boundary. Dudley College of Technology, for example, supports around 12,000 learners, including young people, adult learners and higher education students from across the region.

Dudley is now increasingly recognised as a hub for innovation and creativity with a strong focus for learning. This narrative is further supported by anchor innovation assets in Castle Hill, including Health Innovation Dudley (degree level healthcare), Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology (IOTT) and Very Light Rail National Innovation Centres (VLRNIC). It is hoped that these will help to improve local education attainment levels, create jobs and improve quality of life for Dudley residents.



## Section 2: Spatial targeting

Our programme area is extensive and is made up of multiple neighbourhoods, communities, and areas which people relate to in different ways. We are very grateful to everyone who completed a survey or took part in a conversation over summer 2025 to help us tap into that local intelligence and understanding which has allowed us to identify areas of greatest need and where we may need to focus funding and interventions. Through our Board members and community researchers we intend to continue to seek to understand life in ‘real-time’ and at a hyper-local level and not just where there’s data available, so we can prepare and respond to change.

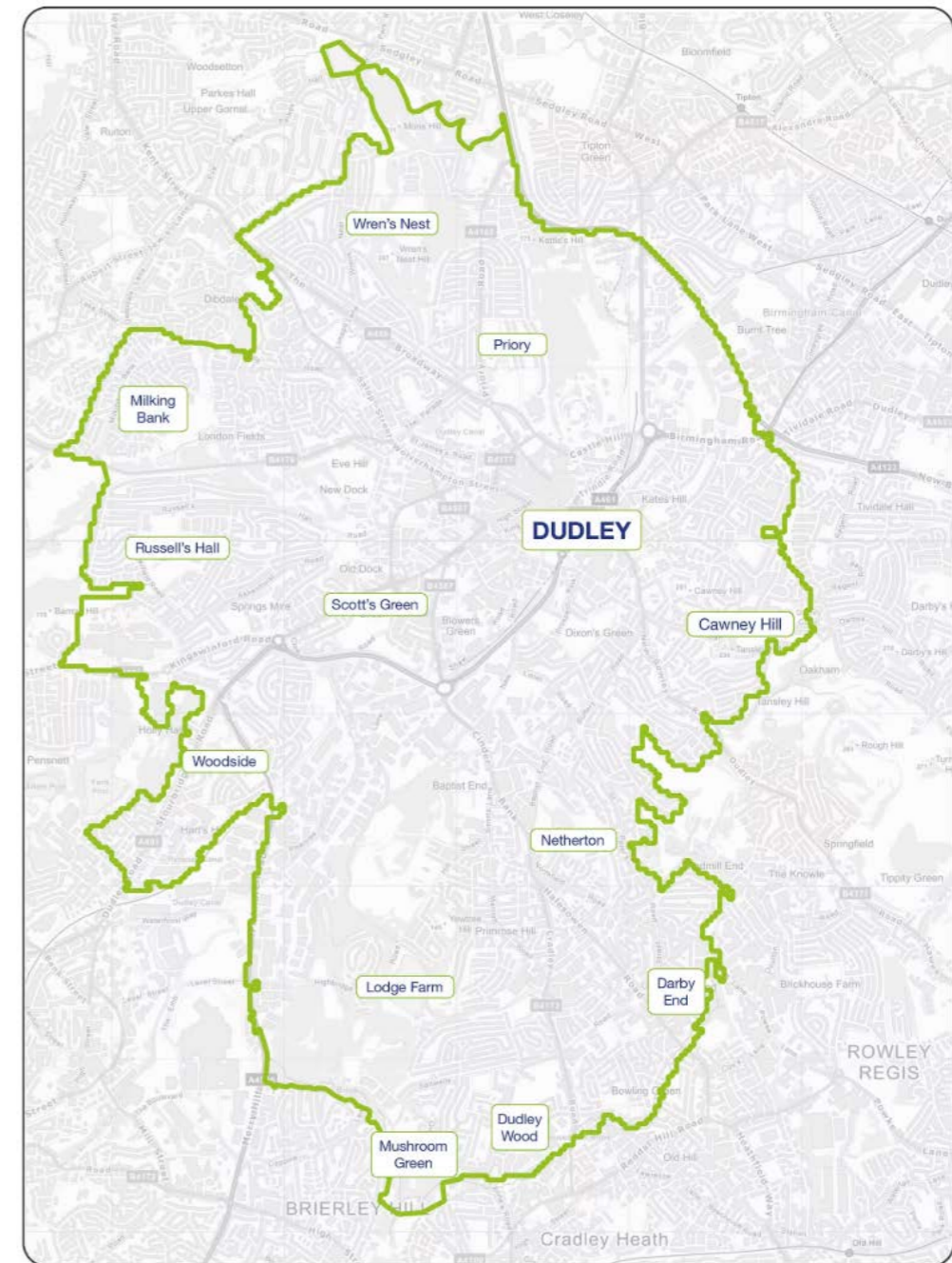


Figure 1. Map of the agreed programme geographic boundary for Dudley.

The community engagement, survey responses, data and document review have highlighted the challenges being faced, and the aspirations people have for their places, families and communities. Neighbourhoods show both need and potential. We know that c.£20m programme funding won't be enough to deliver everything, and though we are committed to using the funding to leverage more investment and activity from others, we will have to focus funding and interventions in specific places or invest in particular groups to improve the life experiences of those who face greater challenges than their neighbours.

That is not to say that one area is more or less important than another, but rather that data and engagement results have told us that there are some places and people where the investment would be of greater benefit. In this section we will firstly explore the data driven, ward-based analysis of the statistics, followed by a more qualitative analysis at a neighbourhood level of the emerging three priority geographical areas for investment.

Let us tell you about our places within the programme area.

A full visualisation of data generated to support the plan can be found here: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c47aa659b6f246b99b3ffe6963596bbc>

### Areas of need: ward-based analysis

Our programme area covers five wards:

- Castle and Priory
- St James's
- St Thomas's
- Netherton and Holly Hall
- And approximately half of the Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood ward



**Castle and Priory** – The Castle and Priory ward lies close to Dudley Town Centre at the north of the boundary. It has over **17,700 residents**, the most in the programme area and although predominantly a residential area, it has a mix of housing, schools and community facilities, alongside a concentration of important heritage and visitor attractions including Dudley Zoo and Castle, Castlegate retail and employment park and the Black Country Living Museum. The area also has several active community organisations, faith groups and residents' networks, these include St James' Church and Dudley Baptist Church. Dudley Castle and Priory Ruins are major recognisable landmarks located within the ward, and the area has local assets including key education centres such as Dudley College and community centres such as the Priory.

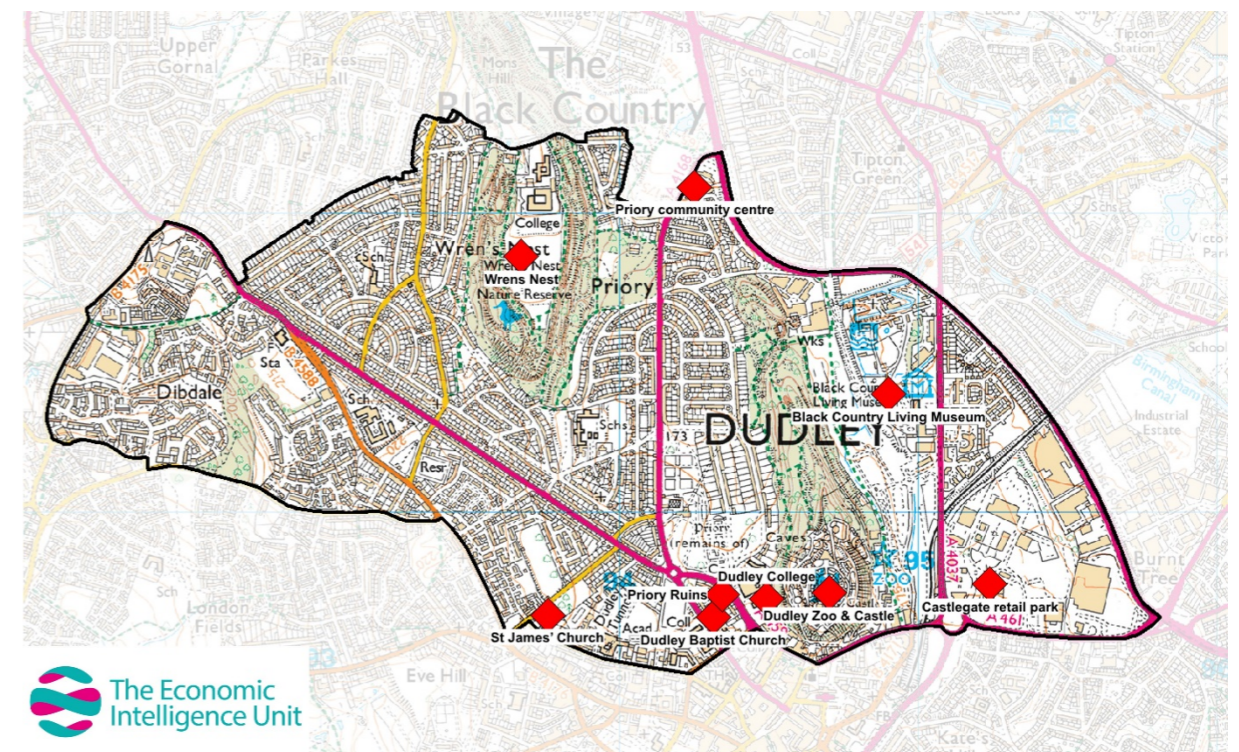


Figure 2. Map of the key assets within the Castle and Priory ward.

1. People in Castle and Priory have limited access to blue space but good access to green spaces and are the healthiest ward by population within the programme area with 80.4% reporting very good health, although this is still below the national average of 82%.
2. Castle and Priory have serious concerns and challenges linked to social and health inequalities, in particular a very low life expectancy (males and females are 4.3years and 3.8years shorter than the national average respectively).
3. Antisocial behaviour rates vary across the programme area but are highest within the St James's, St Thomas's and Castle and Priory areas with recorded
4. Finally, there are challenges within hyperlocal pockets of deprivation and requirement for support into employment and support services.

**St. James's** - Incorporates a large part of Dudley town centre including key retail, civic and commercial areas, and therefore plays a central role in the economic and social fabric of the borough. The area also has a concentration of Dudley's heritage assets in and around the ward for example, the Duncan Edwards statue and Dudley Fountain as well as the centre's historic conservation area with locally listed and protected heritage buildings and architecture such as Fountain Arcade, Plaza Malls and the former Dudley Museum. It has a diverse and growing community, reflecting the changing character of the borough.

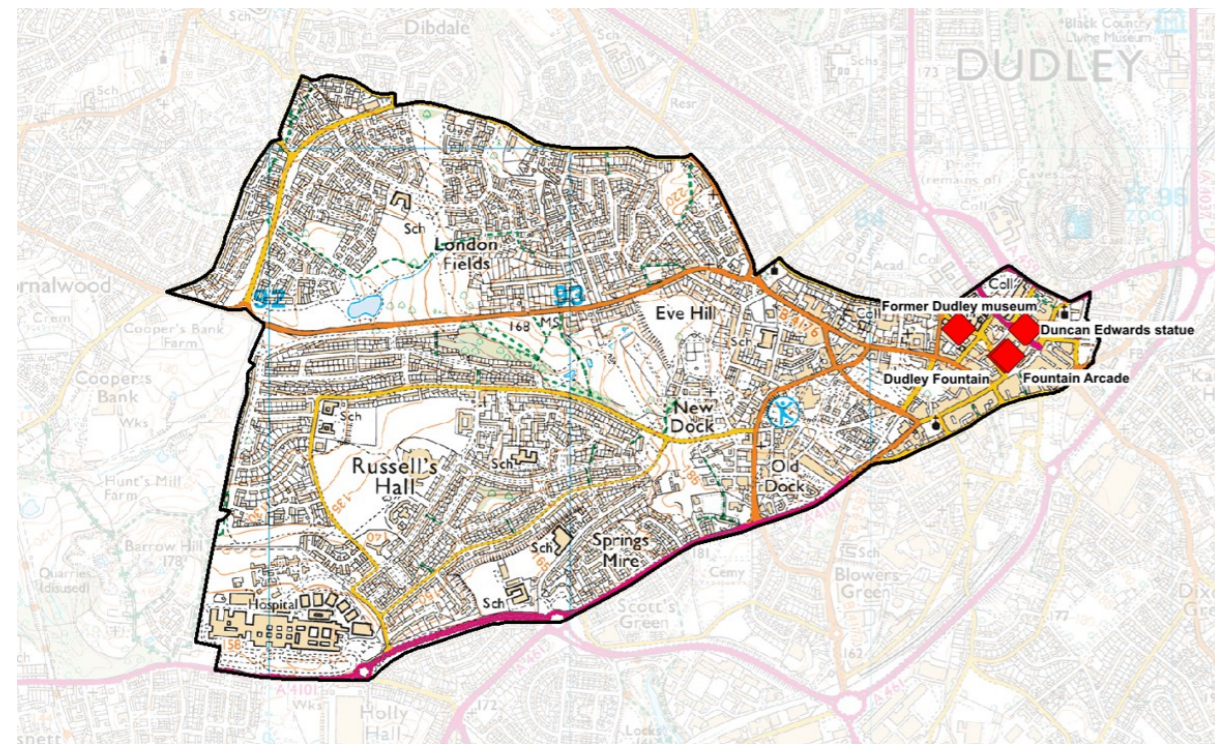


Figure 3. Map of the key assets within the St James's ward.

1. St James's comprises much of Dudley town centre, it therefore faces the pressures of changes in high street retail and consumer behaviour. The area, with its town centre core, is central to the Dudley Economic Regeneration Strategy, economic growth, local identity and cultural vitality. Correspondingly, with most employment now in the foundational economy St James's has the highest job density in the programme area.
2. For health and wellbeing indicators St James's ranks middle of the programme area. General health is low and there are high rates of disability, but life expectancy for males and low rates of childhood obesity are promising. However, it faces challenges linked to health inequalities, deprivation and housing need and has the lowest rate of residents in good or very good health at 76.6% in the programme area.

3. Antisocial behaviour rates vary across the programme area but are highest within the St James's, St Thomas's and Castle and Priory areas with recorded crime at 152 per 1000 people in St James's. The Dudley Borough average is 86.
4. Child poverty is the lowest in St James's at 32%, although still higher than the Dudley Borough of 30%, and 22% nationally.



*St. Thomas's* - has established residential neighbourhoods with local amenities, schools and green spaces. The ward has active community groups such as St Thomas's Community Association. It also features several Grade II and II\* listed buildings that reflect its architectural and cultural history such as Cobbs Engine House and Chimney and the Church of St John the Evangelist in Kate's Hill.

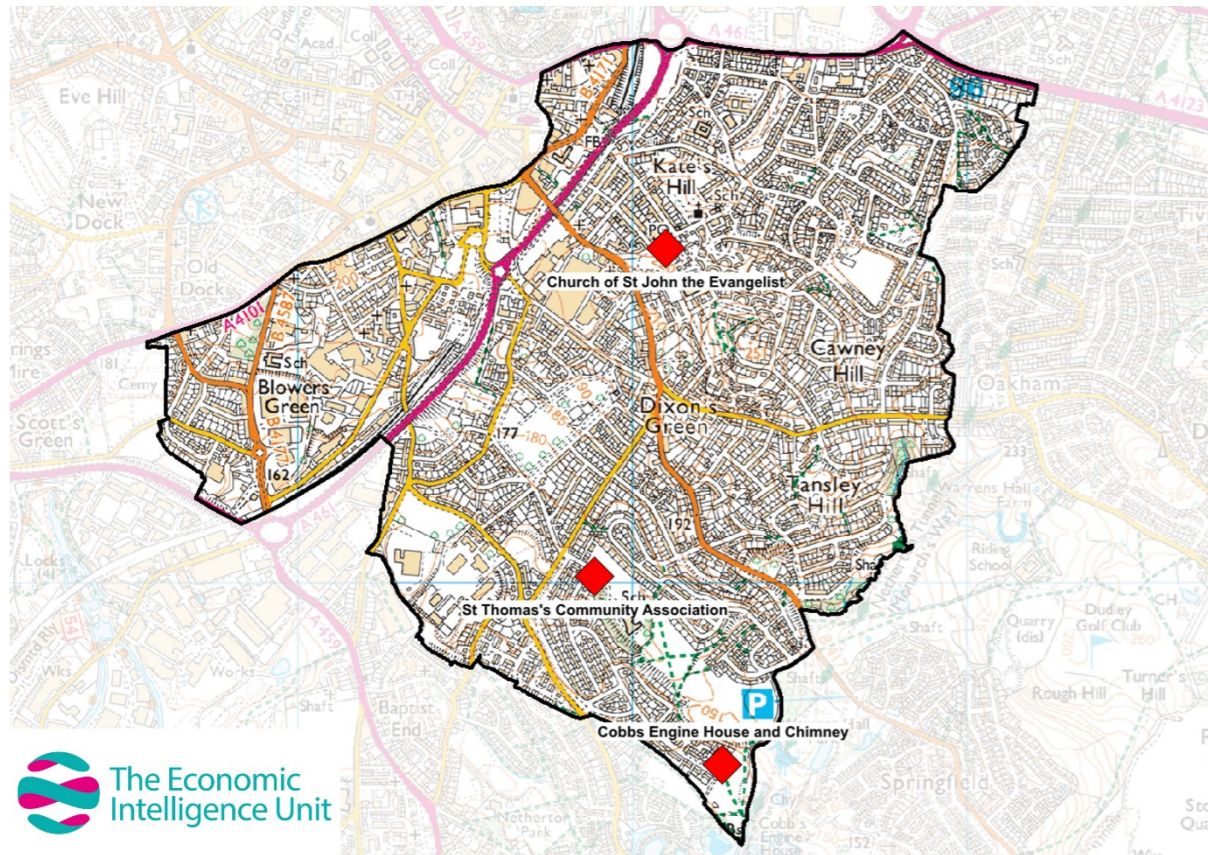


Figure 4. Map of the key assets within the St Thomas's ward.

1. It is well connected to the town centre, and has the area's most diverse demographic profile, with 47% ethnic minority across a mix of families, older residents and diverse communities. It also has many active and well utilised community networks and groups.
2. Analysis of core health and wellbeing indicators shows that St Thomas's ranks as the 2nd lowest ward in the boundary area, despite better outcomes in terms of general health and female life expectancy, male life expectancy is very low, as is rates of physical activity for children and adults and access to GP appointments.
3. Antisocial behaviour rates vary across the programme area but are highest within the St James's, St Thomas's and Castle and Priory areas with recorded crime at 130 per 1000 people in St Thomas's. The Dudley Borough average is 86.

4. Child poverty is the highest in St Thomas's at 49%, considerably higher than the Dudley Borough of 30%, and 22% nationally demonstrating deep-rooted deprivation, and sharp inequalities.
5. St Thomas's is the most deprived ward in the area with 78% of residents in the top 20% most deprived areas.
6. Fuel poverty is also an acute issue in the area. This culminates in an area with signs of housing stress and the lowest rates of home ownership and housing quality across the plan area.
7. Finally, economic inactivity is the highest in St Thomas's at 42.7%. As a result, further challenges can be found in skills gaps, low household incomes and health outcomes.



**Netherton and Holly Hall** - Netherton sits to the south of the programme boundary. It has a park which includes a healthy hub, providing free park activities and exercise. The parks green space also provides links to local canal and railway walks. It hosts a proud industrial past and is home to the Netherton Anchor. There are numerous places of worship and a vacant Cultural Heritage Asset – Netherton Arts Centre which closed in 2021 and is owned by Dudley Council.

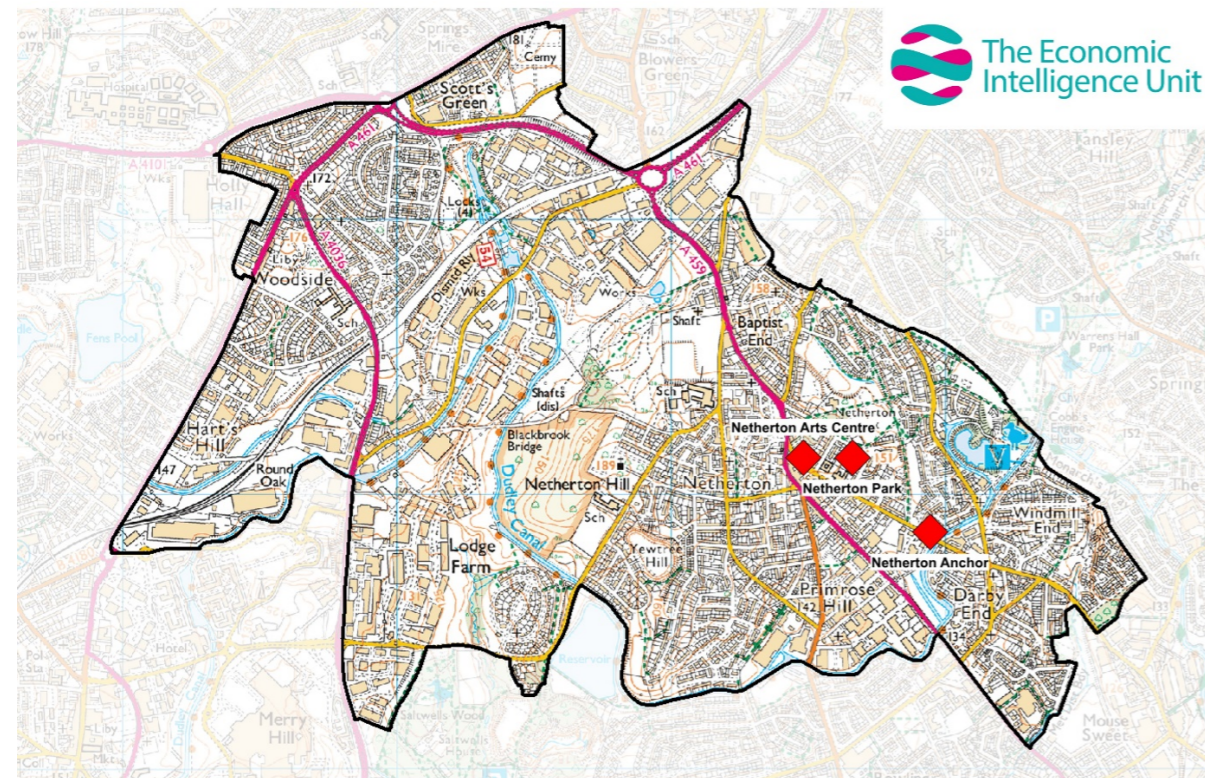


Figure 4. Map of the key assets within the Netherton and Holly Hall ward.

1. The area struggles with worklessness and low skills and 30% of residents in Netherton have no formal qualifications much higher than the national average of 18.1%.
2. This is also apparent in poor early years educational outcomes in Netherton with only 40% of children meeting expected standards.
3. Across all core health and wellbeing indicators Netherton and Holly Hall rank the lowest within the area with poor general health and life expectancy.
4. Antisocial behaviour rates in Netherton are low within the programme area but higher than the borough average of recorded crime at 97 per 1000 people. Dudley Borough average is 86.
5. Fuel poverty is an acute issue in the area at 20% of households compared to the national average of 11%.

**Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood** - Chain-making once dominated the area and forms its identity that is maintained through local community hubs, schools and churches. It is predominantly residential supported by local schools, amenities and community facilities and has good links to accessible green and blue spaces – notably Saltwells Nature Reserve which contributes to improved quality of life and Netherton Reservoir which is used for recreation and water sports. Challenges exist linked to health outcomes, employment opportunities and access to support services.

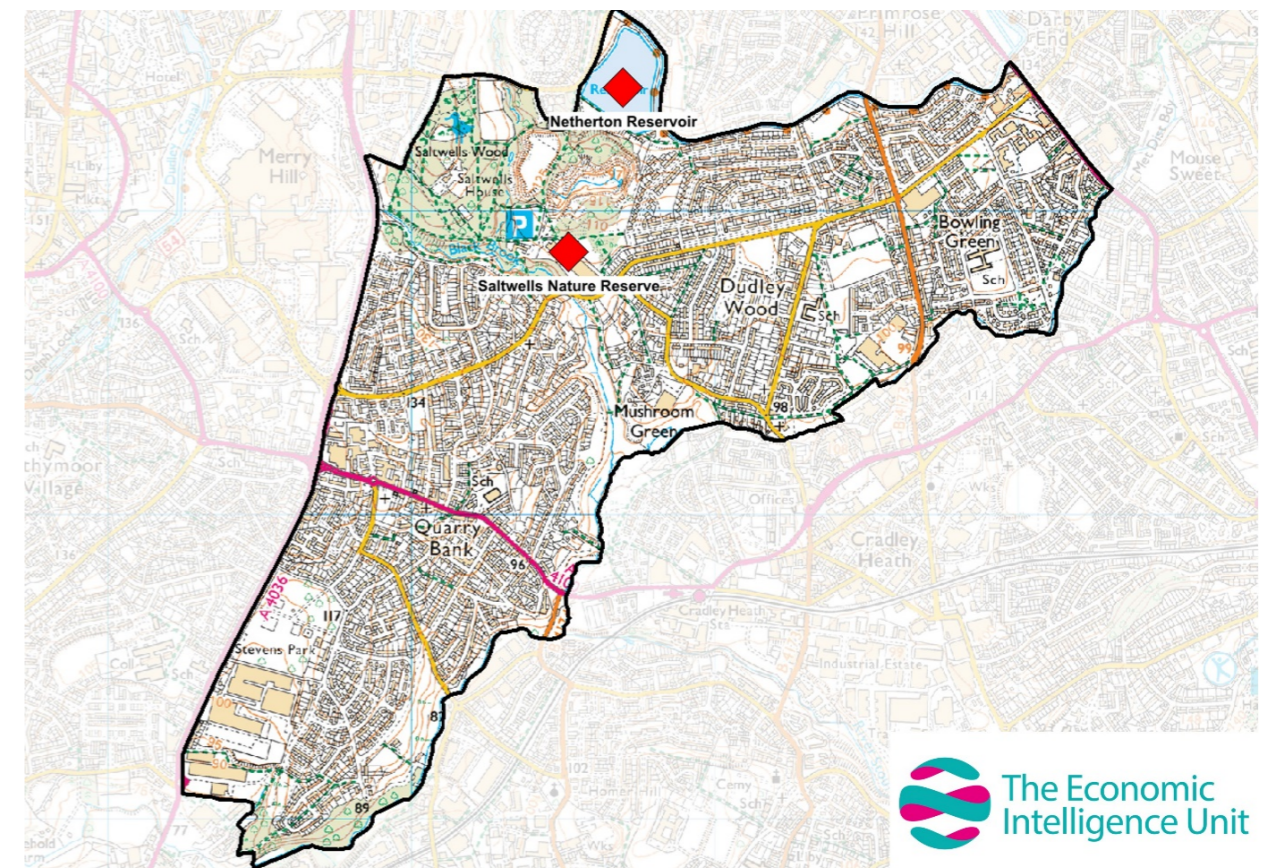


Figure 5. Map of the key assets within the Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood ward.

1. It is the least deprived area within the boundary at 24% deprivation and has a stable population of 13,600.
2. It is also the least diverse ward in the plan area at 11% ethnic minority, with many families having lived there for generations with strong identity and local pride.
3. Rates of physical activity and associated childhood obesity are issues in the area with almost a third of children in reception overweight or obese in Quarry Bank.
4. Antisocial behaviour rates within the programme area are the lowest within Quarry Bank with recorded crime at 75 per 1000 people which is also lower than the Dudley Borough average of 86.
5. Job density in the area is low, which is reflected in the highest scores for car dependency in the programme area.

However, ward level data doesn't tell the whole story, therefore we have also looked at LSOA level statistics within wards to enhance a data driven approach to hyperlocal issues. We know that neighbourhood by neighbourhood, street by street, there can be stark differences in health, deprivation, education, opportunity and access to services, so it is important to also take LSOA stats into account.

### Local Neighbourhoods: priority areas for investment

We know that life within each of these wards is not the same for everyone, and places can be generalised, therefore a hyper-local understanding and approach will need to be taken regarding interventions and activities delivered through the programme. This may require some further engagement and/or analysis. We asked the community about the places they felt interventions should be targeted and some of that information will help us with our hyper-local work. There were three areas commonly identified across the responses which are more identifiable and relatable than ward boundaries locally: Dudley Town Centre, Netherton Town Centre and Wrens Nest.

#### Dudley Town Centre

Dudley Town Centre is the primary town centre within our programme area and provides the local community easy access to a primary shopping area, cultural facilities, business, entertainment and leisure uses and provides employment opportunities.

The town retains its historic market town form, with architectural buildings, outdoor marketplace and locally recognised statues. The town centre boundary also comprises a concentration of civic buildings, including the Dudley College Campus and Dudley Council Offices. It has several places of worship including two churches and a mosque at either end of the high street, and urban and green public open space at Priory Gardens, Coronation Gardens and Stone Street Square.

To the north, and connected to the town, the Castle Hill area, which is also the core of the Black Country Geopark, hosts an important cluster of tourism and heritage assets including Dudley Zoo and Castle, Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust, Castle Hill Leisure Complex, and open-air Black Country Living Museum.

Dudley Town Centre has undergone notable regeneration in recent years, supported by investment in heritage, education and public spaces. For example, the expansion of Dudley College, improvements to its historic marketplace (European Regional Development Fund funded (ERDF)), restoration of historic shop fronts (National Lottery Heritage Fund funded) all of which have enhanced the character and viability of the town.

Since 2019 the town has seen major investment in its regeneration with the development and delivery of several key infrastructure projects. Of particular importance are two major connectivity projects, Dudley Transport / Bus Interchange and extension of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro line. These will provide unprecedented and much needed connectivity to Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Both are due for completion in 2026 and have the potential to have a transformational effect on the town.

However, the investment and regeneration haven't yet changed the day-to-day experience of Dudley town centre. People feel it's uncared for, doesn't offer the breadth of shops or services that would attract them and others into the town, that the built heritage there isn't sufficiently celebrated, and should be cleaner, greener and safer. At the same time, neighbouring wards experience some of the highest levels of housing stress and poor-quality housing in the area, highlighting the need for coordinated investment that supports both people and place.

#### What did people say about Dudley Town Centre?

Residents are ambitious for the town and want to see it reinvigorated with hopes of:

*"The town centre is a vibrant mixed-use area with housing, leisure, culture interspersed with retail offer and excellent green spaces. Increased housing within the town centre drives increased footfall which in turn improves viability of shops and retail units increasing the diversity of the offer."*

*"Our town centres will be clean, safe and will have interesting places to eat, shop and enjoy entertainment." (Vision of the future)*

*"The town centre is busy with people from shops, offices, people have come to use the market. There are well maintained flower troughs, everywhere is free from litter, there is seating under trees, where people are sitting chatting." (Vision of the future)*

#### Netherton

Netherton is a historic and close-knit community within the borough of Dudley, known for its industrial roots, Victorian architecture, and strong civic pride. It blends heritage with regeneration, offering a mix of cultural, business, and community assets. In August 2025 the Netherton Arts Centre was granted grade 2 listed status following a locally led campaign. Residents are now very keen to see it brought back into use. Next door, the Savoy Centre is a modern multi-functional community venue offering training, events, and support services. It includes business units, a library, and spaces for local enterprises and social initiatives and offers training, employability projects, and affordable office space for small businesses and social enterprises. Netherton Park, supported by a 'Friends of' group offers extensive green space, together with sports and play equipment and links to canal and railway walks. In 2023 the children's play area was upgraded with new equipment and surfacing to help improve community wellbeing

and the lives of local families and young children. The community values the park and canal, however they would like to see more made of them. Similar investment in 2023 was made to rights of way improvements in Netherton and show a commitment towards investing in everyday infrastructure, making the area safer and more accessible. Other notable investment includes several active housing development sites.

*What did people say about Netherton?*

*“Netherton park is beautiful”.*

*“I like the green, natural areas in Netherton reservoir, Bumble Hole, etc.”*

*“...in our area Dudley high street and Netherton high street have beautiful buildings and historic spaces and could offer space to excellent community groups to bring people together. But are left empty and some going into disrepair.”*

*“Netherton Park has been updated to a standard such as that of Mary Steven’s Park, where there is a café, a welcoming atmosphere, and more picnic benches. Dudley and Netherton town centres aren’t full of the same type of shops.” (Vision of the future)*

#### *Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve*

In 1956 Wren’s Nest was declared the first ever geological national nature reserve due to its exceptional geological and palaeontological features of Silurian age. This green, geological and recreational area is now a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and scheduled monument, enjoyed by residents and visitors. It hosts several geological trails and provides a unique outdoor teaching facility for field geologists and researchers. Its thick layers of limestone were mined and quarried until 1925.

The surrounding area includes a Primary School for children aged 3-11 years, and a major council housing estate – the Wren’s Nest Estate which was built in 1934-1939 to rehouse around 1,000 families from the town centre. The Wrens’ Nest Housing Estate adjoins the Priory Estate which was built around the same time. Located between them is the Priory Community Centre offering sports pitches and a range of community activities. The Wren’s Nest estate has high levels of crime, sub-standard housing and high rates of generational unemployment. As an area of high deprivation, Wrens Nest has seen periods of regeneration and investment, but changes have been short lived. However, recent projects have shown a shift towards long-term investment that signals hope for the future. Investment from the Council to develop and design a business case for a new and improved visitor centre at Wrens Nest, indicates preparation for physical improvements and better use of the reserve for community and recreation supporting improved health and wellbeing outcomes. Additionally, in 2024 the neighbouring Wren’s Nest residential area benefitted from a new Early Years Inclusion Hub at the Wrens Nest Primary School providing a specialist provision for children with additional needs and indicating a commitment to social investment.

Residents value Wrens Nest for its geology, green space and recreational opportunities it offers, but they would like to be able to make more of it with better accessibility and facilities, more opportunities to learn and get involved.

*“Make more of Wrens Nest Nature Reserve. Taking into account the natural assets there. Is it possible to use it in a way which brings money into the town - guided walks etc many geologists would be prepared to pay.”*

*“Wrens nest nature reserve is a hugely significant site of international interest and yet, so few people recognise its significance. And its accessibility and gems are simply hidden by housing estate, and no large part parking or anything like that”.*



## Section 3: Vision for the future

### Our shared future

Dudley is changing, and our future is about people, pride and possibility. Our vision is structured around the programme's three overarching goals and eight investment priorities. It will be achieved through delivering priority projects identified with and by local people, backed up by robust data and aligned to the areas of most need. The delivery of this plan is essential to create an area that feels safe, vibrant, green and socially connected, where local identity will drive new opportunity and everyone will share the benefits of change.

*This vision is ambitious with grounded choices shaped by local voices. It has clear priorities and empowers, with black country gritty determination, the courage to change. It focuses on bringing our communities together, improving their lives, living conditions and environment and providing opportunities for all. It reverses decades of relative decline and changes perceptions of the area and its economy.*



Figure 6. Illustration interpretation of qualitative community engagement feedback.

### VISION STATEMENT

In 2036 this will be a place where more people choose to live, bring up their families and enjoy their older years too because they feel connected, respected, safer, healthier and part of something more. Everyone can see a future for themselves here. Greater investment in children, young people and families is leading to better opportunities, more long-term prospects and people who feel empowered and responsible as local leaders, actively involved in their local areas and participants in civic society. There is a vibrant, youthful energy which pulses through the heart of Dudley.

New activities in safe, clean, green spaces will mean that people want to be out and about more often, enjoying culturally vibrant, bustling high streets and local centres that meet local everyday needs, and where day transitions into evening with more reasons to stay longer. By offering accessible public spaces and activities for families and all generations our high streets will be buzzing hubs where people come together to talk, connect and care for one another.

Our much-loved green spaces and canals are always a breath of fresh air. They are safe, maintained, and have something for everyone whether you are enjoying a peaceful stroll on your own, with the dog, with others in the parks or down the cut (canal), or joining in with open play or group exercise.

It is a place where diversity, heritage and future are celebrated and embraced, and people feel prouder of where they live and ready for what's to come.

By 2036 it will be a place where:

- People feel safer and can enjoy life with less crime, antisocial behaviour and abuse.
- Communities are connected, empowered and responsible, actively leading change in their local areas.
- People enjoy better health and improved quality of life and can play a wider role in society.
- Dudley Town centre feels alive – it is clean, safe and full of purpose.
- Our parks, green spaces and canals are improved, maintained and well used.
- Our heritage assets are protected and celebrated.
- Our community facilities are improved, maintained and well used.
- All generations can reach their potential and see a future for themselves full of opportunities.
- Local businesses can flourish and grow.

We have reflected a lot on the relationships between the programme's themes. Although listed as linear themes for intervention, the programme aims to address 'wicked' and deep-rooted challenges in place and society, i.e. those that are complex, multifaceted and or with no simple or straight forward solution. The eight themes are all interconnected, they overlap and intertwine and will require unique local approaches to change. Therefore, although there are short term interventions that we can and we will support to respond to any immediate needs identified, we will also be thinking holistically about the long term, incrementally putting things in place to support systems change. For example, we recognise the connections between family support, activities for young people, life skills, safety and community participation. As a result, we will be mindful not to consider projects or interventions in isolation and will instead consider the ripple effects of the investment in a project or group within the wider context of the programme and its three goals. This is of particular importance as we cannot invest equally in everything across the whole area which will mean taking difficult decisions.

#### *Geographical focus*

There are needs throughout the programme area. Some are wide ranging, and some are far more localised. We intend to mirror this as far as possible with all the resources we have, by learning more about specific issues and neighbourhoods before responding accordingly over the lifetime of the programme. The primary areas of focus that we have identified to date are Wren's Nest, Netherton and Dudley Town Centre. These have been informed by statistical data, community engagement and survey results and align with resident's priorities and areas of need.

#### *Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve*

Lying to the north of the Plan for Neighbourhoods Boundary in the Castle and Priors ward, Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve is a treasured Dudley landscape and one of the things people value the most about living in the area. Wrens Nest is not only a locally cherished green space, but a place of world-class geology, rich in wildlife and with deep industrial roots. As a key part of the UNESCO Black Country Global Geopark it represents the past and future of Dudley. It improves local people's health and wellbeing and is a place where they spend time with family and friends. We must protect and celebrate this unique landscape, while making it more accessible, educational, and inspiring for all, enriching lives and strengthening local pride.

The vision for Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve is to improve this vibrant, open space for residents and visitors of all ages to live, work, play and enjoy. Community, geology and wildlife will thrive together providing a living landscape of learning, heritage and nature and shaping a greener future for Dudley.

What change will look like:

- Protected and enhanced landscape
- Opportunities for people to connect with place.
- Celebration of heritage and geology
- Inspiring learning
- Promotion of health and wellbeing
- Improved accessibility and facilities

What success looks like:

By 2036, Wren's Nest will be:

- A national model for how heritage and nature can thrive in an urban setting.
- A hub of learning and discovery, for children, schools and visitors alike
- A source of local pride, connecting people to their shared history/story and providing opportunities to volunteer and get involved.
- A place cared for by the community, valued by visitors and protected for future generations.

#### *Dudley Town Centre*

Based centrally within the Plan for Neighbourhoods area and covering parts of the St Thomas and St James wards Dudley Town Centre is the only major town centre within the boundary area. It provides the local community easy access to shops, cultural facilities, professional and leisure uses and both a key employment and education centre. For many, it is seen as an important part of daily life, providing convenience and a central place for culture, fostering a sense of community and spaces to come together socially. The town centre is at the heart of the Black Country, with deep heritage, architecture and historic buildings key symbols of identity and distinctiveness. Dudley is ready to reinvent its town centre, effecting change to honour its heritage whilst creating a vibrant, and inclusive future destination that meets local needs, revives pride and creates a place where people want to live, work, study and spend time.

The vision for Dudley town centre is to celebrate its heritage and proud identity, while embracing changing local needs and providing for everyday life. It will provide the linchpin of renewing civic pride, with revitalised opportunities for people to connect, come together, live, learn, work and enjoy life. It will be a welcoming, bustling and attractive family-friendly centre with varied retail offer and community facilities / activities especially spaces for children and young people.

What change will look like:

- Improved experience, including safety, cleanliness and diversification of offer
- Strengthening culture and heritage and restoration of historic buildings
- Investing in education and skills
- Improved connectivity and accessibility
- Attraction of investment

What success looks like:

By 2036 Dudley Town Centre will be:

- A busy, welcoming and safe environment full of life!
- Socially inclusive
- A modern centre for community life and civic society
- A hub of learning opportunities for all
- Cleaner, greener and cared-for
- Beautifully connected
- Economically strong

*“The appearance of the town has improved, more pride in the area, the parks and green spaces feel safe again.”*

### Netherton

Netherton is a historic and proud community within the borough of Dudley, known for its industrial roots, and famous for its chain-making and craftsmanship. It blends heritage with regeneration, and its identity is built upon hard work, community spirit and creativity. It also has outstanding natural assets including Saltwells Nature Reserve, Netherton Park and canal network. It has strong potential for inclusive, and community led regeneration.

The vision for Netherton is to make it a well-connected, safe and green community, with improved public spaces parks and canals, where heritage inspires creativity, opportunity and enterprise and everyone has access to good housing and local services.

What change will look like:

- Opportunities to strengthen pride in the community
- Enhanced and improved connectivity and green spaces
- Celebrate heritage and culture
- Improved living conditions and quality of life
- Expanded and improved community facilities (social anchors)

What success looks like:

By 2036, Netherton will be:

- Inclusive and confident, with people of all ages feeling part of a supportive community
- Lively and attractive
- Well-connected and green
- Celebrating its industrial past with opportunities and activities to engage and share in its widely recognised arts, heritage and culture with pride and without barriers.
- Economically resilient
- Confident and forward looking



#### Section 4: Strategic case for change

Our vision is grounded in the aspirations of our community and sets out the changes they want to experience in their day to day lives as well as their ambitions for those around them. We have asked people for their thoughts and aspirations for the future and used this, alongside their responses and the data about the challenges of today, to articulate the vision and priorities.

Our strategic case for change is underpinned by a robust body of evidence, summarised in the appendix. This draws on engagement responses in all its forms, data and sentiment polling provided by MHCLG, additional data mapped across the programme area by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), and a review of existing strategies, policies and information sources. We have sought to understand strengths as well as challenges, not just looking at things which people would like to see change but also those they value and want to maintain and grow.

#### Engagement Insight:

- A resident survey- online and hard copy- which received 1032 responses.
- A programme of community research and engagement. This was delivered by community partners who organised over 25 in-person events, gatherings and conversations with around 1,000 local people, including young people and marginalised groups who are less likely to respond to surveys.
- Council staff took the conversation to residents by attending events and hosting drop-in sessions at community venues.

Evidence from the data-led analysis demonstrates that:

- **Dudley faces some significant economic challenges.** These are long-standing and relate in part to the industrial restructuring that the town has faced over recent decades, and to the presence of some concentrations of disadvantage. This is reflected in relatively weak productivity, relatively low levels of employment and relatively low workforce qualification levels.
- **Overall levels of deprivation are correspondingly high.** In 2019 (the date of the most recent Index of Multiple Deprivation), over 60% of neighbourhoods<sup>1</sup> in the programme area were in the 20% most deprived in England. 43% of under-16s in the area lived in relative low-income families (compared with 21% in England). Healthy life expectancy in the Borough is consistently lower than the national average.

<sup>1</sup> Defined as Lower-level Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in this instance

- **Inequalities within Dudley are sharp.** The analysis by the EIU (which is also reflected in our descriptions of Dudley's neighbourhoods set out in Section 2) demonstrates that there is substantial divergence at local level: some neighbourhoods face deep-rooted deprivation and struggle with health, worklessness and skills challenges, while others have stronger economic assets and connectivity. In one engagement session this was described as “**life expectancy is more in years than it is in miles.**” The EIU analysis found that community safety concerns also correlated with levels of deprivation.

Three observations from the evidence are especially important to our Plan:

- First, **the scale of the challenge is significant:** while the funding will make an important difference, it will be essential to influence and align with other programmes. There is new investment coming to Dudley – for example the new Metro extension to the town centre and the designation of Dudley as a Heritage Place. We need to make sure that the programme complements this and enables local communities to fully benefit.
- Second, **the programme area is a large, and quite complex, area.** There are common characteristics and challenges across it – but understanding local neighbourhoods and responding to locally-identified needs will be important too.
- Third, **issues correlate.** The likelihood is that interventions to build community confidence and safety, for example, ought to impact on a range of other dimensions of wellbeing – supporting the goals of other initiatives as well as those of the programme.



## Community priorities for change

From the household survey and community engagement, several priorities for change consistently emerged. These relate to:



**Safety and crime reduction.** Participants of all ages repeatedly highlighted the need for more visible policing, stronger action on anti-social behaviour, drugs, and illegal motorbikes, and safer public spaces. Safety was not just seen in ‘enforcement’ terms – young people noted that more youth facilities and activities could help to reduce anti-social behaviour (and *perceptions* of anti-social behaviour); and an environment that is better looked after ought to increase feelings of security.



**Green spaces and clean environment:** Green spaces were valued but seen as needing better care. People also often did not feel safe in parks and nature reserves, preventing them from accessing and enjoying some of Dudley’s most valued assets. People asked for better-lit parks and a clampdown on the use of motorbikes in parks, as well as more community gardens, orchards, allotments, and greening in urban areas. Cleanliness was also a recurring theme: people are fed up with litter, fly-tipping and neglect.

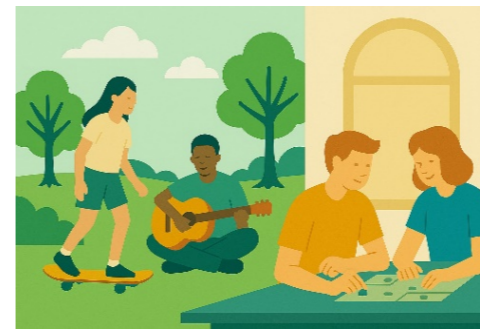


**Community spaces, support and connection:** Within the programme area the social trust score is negative, ranging from -28% in Castle and Priory to -12% in Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood. The average for Dudley is -11% and nationally it is -3%. Community partners and residents stressed the value of shared community facilities, while expressing concern that community hubs and

shared social spaces were also in decline locally. Residents called for more multi-use spaces where people of all ages can gather, access advice and services-including health services-, take part in activities and build connections. Churches and faith spaces were often mentioned as anchors of belonging, while libraries, centres, and voluntary groups were also valued. In addition to spaces and places, participants called for more organised events and groups to bring communities together.



**Regenerating high streets:** Heritage sites and local culture are sources of identity and pride, but people want to see declining high streets regenerated and derelict buildings restored. They want a modern, attractive and well-maintained town centre that reflects the area’s history as the “heart of the Black Country.”



**Family support, skills and youth opportunities:** This included a need for additional youth facilities, within and outside of school settings (supporting some of the evidence in relation to safety above), and opportunities for people of different generations to interact.

For each of the identified community priorities, we have considered the potential interventions that could be funded. Based on community feedback, we recognise that there is a balance to be struck between **interventions that can be delivered in the short term and will build confidence, engagement and momentum, and longer term, ‘strategic’ interventions that can build a lasting legacy and lever additional funds.** These two types of intervention ought to be complementary: by demonstrating practical delivery against expressed priorities in the early years, we aim to build capacity and commitment for longer term change. We’ve also heard about the importance of investing in existing infrastructure, facilities and groups which are known and trusted, rather than creating new.

We also recognise that the majority of funding available through the programme is capital. This aligns with many of the expressed community priorities, though we still anticipate greater demand for revenue than is available, but have sought to take the balance of funding into account in identifying interventions.

It can be seen from the potential interventions above that several types of intervention can be accommodated within more than one theme, recognising the interconnections between the issues raised by the community.

## Logic Model

Vision				
<p>In 2036 this will be a place where more people choose to live, bring up their families and enjoy their older years too because they feel connected, respected, safer, healthier and part of something more. Everyone can see a future for themselves here. Greater investment in children, young people and families is leading to better opportunities, more long-term prospects and people who feel empowered and responsible as local leaders, actively involved in their local areas and participants in civic society. There is a vibrant, youthful energy which pulses through the heart of Dudley.</p> <p>New activities in safe, clean, green spaces will mean that people want to be out and about more often, enjoying culturally vibrant, bustling high streets and local centres that meet local everyday needs, and where day transitions into evening with more reasons to stay longer. By offering accessible public spaces and activities for families and all generations our high streets will be buzzing hubs where people come together to talk, connect and care for one another.</p> <p>Our much-loved green spaces and canals are always a breath of fresh air. They are safe, maintained, and have something for everyone whether you are enjoying a peaceful stroll on your own, with the dog, with others in the parks or down the cut (canal), or joining in with open play or group exercise.</p> <p>It is a place where diversity, heritage and future are celebrated and embraced, and people feel prouder of where they live and ready for what's to come.</p>				
Goals	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thriving Places</li> <li>2. Stronger Communities</li> <li>3. Taking Back Control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upto £20m programme funding</li> <li>• 'Mainstream' funding sources – Dudley Council, WMCA devolved funds for skills, economic development, etc.</li> <li>• Other external funding – Lottery, ACE, charitable funds</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Board and community researcher time</li> <li>• Use of powers relating to 8 programme themes</li> </ul>	<p><i>Early delivery activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety architecture e.g. lighting</li> <li>• Introduction of community-led diversionary/ alternative activities</li> <li>• Development of town and neighbourhood masterplans to help design out crime</li> <li>• Work with police to complement the additional policing being delivered</li> <li>• Additive youth provision</li> <li>• Family learning and support</li> <li>• Events and activities which bring people together</li> <li>• Enhanced cleaning</li> <li>• Maintaining and improving parks and green spaces</li> <li>• Cultural activity and events</li> <li>• Activities that support physical and mental wellbeing (e.g. in parks)</li> <li>• Footway/cycleway maintenance</li> <li>• Improvements to communal spaces in residential areas</li> <li>• Unpacking the difference in results relating to housing and homelessness</li> </ul> <p><i>Longer term projects:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of measures identified in masterplanning to design out crime</li> <li>• Implement complementary measures to policing</li> <li>• Developing youth and family support models for long term sustainability</li> <li>• Programme of investment in youth and community facilities</li> <li>• Repurposing vacant units</li> <li>• Schemes to improve and repurpose derelict and heritage buildings</li> <li>• Supplementary drug and alcohol support for those who have experienced homelessness</li> <li>• Bringing more health services together in community settings</li> <li>• Supporting residents in accessing the skills support that is funded through 'mainstream' sources, especially where this is linked with local employers.</li> <li>• Additional active travel and accessibility measures complementary to the new Metro extension and Interchange</li> <li>• Traffic calming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional and improved community facilities</li> <li>• Improved public space and green space</li> <li>• Additional safety features installed</li> <li>• Community engagement programmes delivered</li> <li>• Heritage, cultural assets and derelict buildings restored/ improved</li> <li>• Individuals supported – e.g., young people accessing provision, participants in community events, people engaging with community learning, etc.</li> <li>• Additional funds secured</li> <li>• Number of organisations receiving grants</li> <li>• Number of organisations receiving non-financial support</li> </ul> <p><i>These changes can be measured through ongoing monitoring.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced crime and antisocial behaviour</li> <li>• Improved community perceptions of safety</li> <li>• Improved perceptions of overall environmental quality and pride in place</li> <li>• Increased community engagement and participation</li> <li>• Improved health outcomes (including subjective wellbeing)</li> <li>• Improved access to services</li> <li>• Reduced isolation and loneliness</li> <li>• Increased community interaction between people of different backgrounds and ages</li> <li>• People entering employment or learning as a result of activity delivered through the PfN</li> </ul> <p><i>Some of these changes can be measured through monitoring. But many will require surveys to assess community perceptions.</i></p>
Impacts				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community ownership and leadership</li> <li>• Strengthened voluntary and community sector</li> <li>• Better quality environment, sustained over time</li> <li>• Greater sustainability of local community services</li> <li>• Long-term employment, health and household income benefits</li> <li>• Increased private investment in the town centre and elsewhere</li> </ul> <p><i>Typically, these will be measured over the long term, through evaluation. Not all will be observable for several years, but we can track, based on outputs and outcomes achieved, the likelihood that these impacts will be met over time.</i></p>				

## Looking towards community leadership and a longer-term legacy

Although this is a long-term programme, we believe that we should start planning now for its longer-term legacy. A broad-based, multi-year and flexible programme offers a great opportunity to establish community-led institutions and partnerships that can, over time, secure funding from a diverse range of sources and become sustainable local anchors.

Our approach to balancing short-term and long-term interventions supports this, since we want to ensure that there is a high degree of community confidence and engagement from the start – we want to make sure that local people can see the real difference that is being made. We will also explore the potential for establishing different types of institutions (for example, a community development trust) that could sustain the work of the programme into the future.

Correspondingly, we feel that by ensuring we are guided by some core principles we will remain transparent and true to delivering locally informed, codesigned lasting changes and resilience for the area.

### Our guiding principles

#### 1. Local people are the key to change.

Our plan can only be successful if delivered with local people, therefore it must reflect local voices and lived experience. It will build trust through transparency and support community groups to drive positive action locally. This will allow us to help to ensure people are the journey, building ownership and a sense of belonging to reinvigorate civic pride in place and create a positive image.

#### 2. Meeting fundamental needs

The programme area will meet the needs of our local communities, addressing many of today's pressing problems, health, access to services, addressing inequalities, providing education and work opportunities, improved quality of life.

#### 3. Safe and welcoming

To improve local sense of belonging and increase citizen participation in society we must ensure people feel safe and welcome in their areas. Public spaces must be walkable and liveable and allow people to move confidently and safely.

#### 4. Clean, green and connected

The area will become cleaner, greener and more connected. Green routes and well-loved green spaces will be restored and maintained linking neighbourhoods, high streets and local amenities. Providing improved spaces to play, visit and improving health and wellbeing and improving connectivity and accessibility to local services, reach jobs, leisure, community and education opportunities.

#### 5. Proud of the past, confident in the future

Historic buildings, local landmarks and heritage combined with everyday life activities, practices and routines form locally shared identities, and strong connections to place. Buildings can be re-purposed for centres of learning, culture, community and enterprise with low barriers to entry, evolving our future narratives, and providing socially inclusive opportunities to form a strong sense of belonging whilst building upon the old

#### 6. Resilient economy

The local economy is adapting to new trends and opportunities which is mirrored in the skills and training offered locally. This sees new uses in our high streets leading to greater footfall and more active shop fronts and building uses. The sometimes-hidden creativity and innovation is exposed, supported and outlets have been identified.

## Alignment with the programme's three overarching objectives

The priorities expressed by the community and the interventions and issues that we have identified under the programme themes align with the three objectives as follows:

### Thriving Places

*Places, spaces and faces* became something of a strapline for us after it was used by one of the Community Researchers when describing the feedback they'd heard through the engagement period.

**Places** - firstly connected to the pride in the heritage of the place. The historic engine room of the nation and its role in glass, steel, canals and more. The story of a place matters. It is felt deeply by people; it is present in their memories and daily routines and a source of great pride that they want to be shared and celebrated to shape the future. As communities change, not everyone will have the same familial or historic ties to the area, but this creates a powerful opportunity to welcome people in and share the stories that make our neighbourhoods special, building a shared identity by celebrating local heritage as a source of collective pride and forming a strong sense of belonging while learning about others. A shared cultural identity is formed through everyday life; routines, values, experiences and behaviours that form the heartbeat of a place. By investing in, improving, conserving and finding new uses for our heritage assets local history and daily experience can continue to come together to create a community people are proud to be a part of.

It also related to the places people value, such as parks and green spaces, and the places they want to feel proud of again. The town centres of Dudley and Netherton are both places that people connect with but also feel that they are neglected and left behind and would benefit from investment in not only revitalising the heritage features and facades, but through enhanced cleaning and greening, infrastructure maintenance, and activation with more reasons for people to visit and spend time there. Many of our high streets, towns and local neighbourhoods no longer reflect the needs, habits or

aspirations of their communities. They have an appetite for them too to feel better maintained and loved. Every community deserves lively streets, accessible amenities that bring people together and meet everyday needs and we want to give local people the opportunity to shape them.

Safety and security is an overarching concern for places based on the surveys and engagement conversations. There are some nuanced differences between the data and the engagement results, but it is consistently identified as something that people would like to address. And that is in relation to places. They want to feel safe to go into town and spend time there during the day and of an evening. They want their children to feel safe playing in the parks, enjoying these much-valued assets. They want to enjoy a relaxing walk along the canal paths and through the green spaces without worrying about their personal safety. So, addressing safety is fundamental to unlocking the potential of places.

Therefore, in this investment period we will be investing in activity such as:

#### Place maintenance

- Town centre cleaning and greening which impact on pride in place and the sense of safety
- Investment in parks and green spaces – maintaining what’s there and growing the opportunities for them to be enjoyed by more people

#### Place activation

- activity in parks and towns – creating more reasons to visit and positive activity to engage with, reducing idle time leading to less desirable behaviours.

#### Place management

- Measures to address both the perception and reality of crime including lighting, diversionary activity, and working with the police to complement the additional neighbourhood policing being delivered

This ought to generate greater pride in place, build confidence and, aligned with other major investments (such as the Metro extension) could help additional private sector and community activity.

#### Stronger communities

*Places, spaces and faces* became something of a strapline for us after it was used by one of the Community Researchers when describing the feedback they’d heard through the engagement period.

Both **spaces** and **faces** relate to the stronger communities goal.

Residents have told us that they want more opportunities to come together and that **spaces** which enable that and where they feel safe to do so, are currently a barrier. This is in part due to the closures of community facilities in recent years leaving gaps, and in part due to the need for maintenance, repair or modernisation of those which are in existence. There is a strong sense of investing in spaces which are already there in some shape or form, rather than building new. People feel strongly about the need for youth provision and places where that can happen – as a positive activity to be involved with, an alternative to destructive activity, and to provide a positive, meaningful route to skills, employment and being engaged citizens. We have also heard how important spaces are for our older generation too. Spaces where they feel known and safe. Spaces where they can mix with others of all ages and backgrounds. Spaces which are accessible and where their basic needs can be met. The need for spaces where community happens and people meet, engage and build relationships is key.

The visibility of **faces** in the spaces is also something that we’ve heard. These are both the faces of those committed community workers and volunteers who bring spaces to life and make people feel known and connected, but who also need sustainable financial models to continue to operate; and the faces of those statutory, official institutions in the area, such as police, Council staff and other support services so that people feel heard, considered and that the system cares about them. Our engagement showed us that people usually, though not universally, have a sense of trust with their neighbours and those in their local area, “*My own street as neighbours are great*”, but that trust diminishes across a wider area and in relation to systems and institutions. Physical spaces alone won’t make the difference. They need to go hand in glove with the people who facilitate the activities, connect and empower, fostering a lasting social infrastructure that supports wellbeing and resilience.

Therefore, in this investment period we will be investing in activity such as:

- Making funding available to support improvements to community facilities
- Supported by investment in activities, events and activation which bring people together
- Youth provision

#### Taking back control

The **faces** of *places, spaces and faces*, is key to this goal as so much of this is able the people of the area.

We believe we have started positively in relation to this goal through the investment in our community researchers who have significantly helped the shaping of this plan through the community conversations had this summer. At our celebration event with the researchers, we all recognised the opportunity and appetite for their continued involvement, and to continue to invest in and grow the network. We also plan to keep

our Board structure and working arrangements under constant review to ensure we're set up in the right way for the programme. This will include consideration of subgroups, and these might present opportunities for a wider group of people to be directly involved.

People feel very passionately about those who serve the community in both paid and volunteer roles. Some of our survey responses named specific individuals, noting the contribution and difference they make. Therefore, enabling those who already connect and empower the community is something we want to pay attention to. We know that there are strains on funding in the third sector which we want to support directly and through identifying co-investment and leverage opportunities. Enabling those who are known and trusted community leaders to support and enable community ownership.

Data and engagement responses also speak to the inequality across our programme area and the desire for that to be rebalanced, improving life outcomes and enabling people to better take hold of their futures individually and collectively. This was particularly highlighted through the engagement responses in relation to family learning and giving children the best start in life, while also recognising that it needs to be whole family learning and activity, extending into older generations. All with a view to enabling people to fulfil their potential and be active citizens now and in the future. Community responses also strongly emphasised community safety as a key issue. Poor safety – and perceptions of poor safety – drive feelings of a loss of control. This is therefore a high priority in our proposed intervention mix, including both physical safety measures and community activities to reduce the causes of antisocial behaviour and crime.

To that end, during this investment period we will invest in activities such as:

- Youth provision
- Family learning and support
- Strengthening the links between business growth, employability and skills
- Measures to reduce crime and the perception of it
- Capacity Building
- Supporting networks and partnership development (social infrastructure)

More broadly, the programme overall should drive greater community leadership, and this is central to our long-term legacy plans.

Looking further ahead, our long-term activities will focus on ensuring that local people remain at the heart of shaping their neighbourhoods and driving change. This means supporting communities to take greater ownership of the spaces, stories and activities that matter to them, and helping grassroots groups to grow in confidence, skills and sustainability. We will continue to nurture the relationships, networks and partnerships

that give communities strength, creating more opportunities for residents of all ages to lead, participate and influence decisions. By investing in people, connection and collaboration, we aim to help communities build the foundations for lasting pride, resilience and shared prosperity long after this investment period ends.

### Intended use of powers

We want to explore the powers which could be used alongside the projects and interventions as they develop, but the below table seeks to set out powers we might envisage using to support our key priority themes:

Theme	Powers we may use	Potential benefits
<b>Safety and Security</b>	Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014	The Council is currently undertaking a survey on PSPOs including one for Dudley Town Centre and a borough wide antisocial vehicle use PSPO. Could help to improve feelings of safety and address pressing priority concerns raised i.e. ASB and off road vehicles.
	Respect Orders	To help people to feel safer
	Business Crime Reduction Partnership	Support our town centres and local high streets and reduce crime affecting businesses such as shop lifting and antisocial behaviour.
<b>Regeneration and High Streets</b>	Repairs Notices	We are proud of our heritage and want to see town centres looking better, increasing pride in place
	Community right to bid / Community right to buy powers	Could help to protect local assets which bring pride to an area
	Duty to preserve and enhance conservation areas	We are proud of our heritage and local historical assets; designated conservation areas could help to maintain and improve our places and improve sense of identity and belonging
	Fly tipping	Place maintenance helps to improve pride and well being
	Pavement Licences	Could provide opportunities for businesses to 'stall out' increasing trading opportunities and footfall in our towns and high streets and improving the look and feel of an area
	Business Improvement Districts	Could help to build partnerships in town centre and ringfence funding to improve the trading environment
	Community Infrastructure levy (Neighbourhood CIL)	Could be utilised as match for various community projects
<b>Cohesion</b>	High Street Rental Auctions (HRSA)	To help bring vacant and unsightly units back into use, create opportunities for new businesses and investment, also improving the look and feel.
	Community asset transfer	Increasing community empowerment and providing opportunity for the community to take ownership and drive change
<b>Education and Opportunity</b>	Young Futures Hubs and prevention partnerships	To support initiatives that provide early intervention and improving opportunities and outcomes for young people and reduce the risk of future crime.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Planning Policy	Our new Local Plan could help provide a framework to support and address our health and wellbeing inequalities

## Section 5: Alignment with other programmes and investments

### Making sense of the bigger picture

The programme area is vast therefore there are an abundance of strategies, polices, programmes, projects, funding pots and aligned activity happening at any one time, so much so it can feel a bit overwhelming! That's why, back in summer 2024 we began with a measured approach. We compiled a baseline of key information in relation to the priorities of the previous scheme (Long Term Plan for Towns) and refreshed it in spring 2025 to reflect the new goals and activities for this programme.

We know that things don't stand still for long. New programmes, policies, plans and funding opportunities pop-up all the time, so one of our asks of the Programme Team is to keep-track of what's changing. However, this isn't just their responsibility, we recognise that we all have a part to play. One of the benefits of the Board is that it brings together people who represent different parts of community. We each have our own networks and exposure to different information relevant to the area, so by sharing what we know we can form a collective understanding of what's happening locally and ensure our programme is well-aligned and relevant.

We know that some of our Board members and partners are already active in this space and do a great job of keeping the community up to date on new opportunities and we will seek to add to that by sharing what we find, pooling information and usings it to help Dudley to make the most of every opportunity that comes its way.

We recognise that we can't keep our eye on everything, so there will be some programmes and investments that we focus most on. These will be the ones that connect directly to our priorities and local context and help us to use our time and energy where it will make the biggest differences.

### A strategic approach to investment

We want every pound we spend to make the greatest impact where it is most needed, so we must be smart about how we invest. This means looking carefully at where other funding exists making sure that we aren't duplicating efforts or missing opportunities to build on what is already happening. One such example of this relates to crime and safety which is the top-ranking issue raised for the area. When we look at the related comments many people said that they would like a more visible police presence as a deterrent and for responsiveness to crimes.

We could prioritise some of our budget to fund additional police officers, but through exploring what else is going on, we've found that West Midlands Police already have an existing programme to scale up local policing. Instead of investing our monies in bobbies on the beat (funding the same thing twice!) we will focus on understanding how we can work with the police

to build on that investment to help tackle both crime, the perceptions of it and how safe people feel in their neighbourhoods.

### Case study: West Midland Police:

Every ward now has its own dedicated neighbourhood officer (DNO) who will work solely on that area, focusing on problem solving, engagement and targeted activity For Dudley Local Policing Area this means we now have 24 DNO's covering the wards across the Borough.

The DNOs will be working together with local action teams (LATs) who will be sector based. These officers will be joined by additional officers in Town Centres and Impact areas. This is a significant change in how we support our local communities and an approach that our neighbourhood teams have been asking for a number of years.

Following the government having introduced the neighbourhood policing guarantee, WMP have secured an additional 150 officers and 20 PCSOs as part of that, we are therefore able to realise the ambition of having dedicated, ring fenced neighbourhood officers, serving their communities.

Our DNO's will have their details uploaded on to WMP's external website. A key part of this new approach is about our visibility in our communities and we will shortly be launching a communications campaign that will be running throughout the Summer and beyond, telling the public about the DNO role and how they can find out who their local officer is and how to contact them.

We are also learning from other existing programmes, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to shape how we operate and which we might be able to copy and/or extend. It's now in its fourth year and shares lots of similarities with what we're doing such as the routes to funding and sorts of activities supported. By learning from what's worked, what hasn't and understanding why we can move more quickly, make more informed decisions and avoid repeating mistakes.



### Case study: Make it Happen:

Dudley boasts a strong voluntary and community sector (VCS) with a wide range of organisations and groups working to improve the quality of life for thousands of local residents. 'Make it Happen' and the 'Voluntary Sector Innovation Fund', delivered by the Council working with the sector, have taken an asset-based approach. They have sought to ensure that existing community assets are identified, mobilised and connected to support the delivery of the priorities so that the funding can be invested where it is most needed but also realising the potential of existing assets. This approach also builds capacity and sustainability through collaboration and reciprocity. Application of these models as part of Pfn will enable maximum reach and impact with the available funds and help to embed and demonstrate the value of communitycentred approaches.

The council's established team of community development workers are well placed to ensure that development and implementation of our programme remain community focussed and inclusive, ensuring that often marginalised groups are able to play an active role in all aspects of the Plan as it is rolled out alongside those whose voices are frequently heard.

### Learning from and alignment with local plans and strategies

There are key local documents that shape development in the area which we have paid particular attention to in the development of our Regeneration and Investment plans ensuring alignment and added value.

These include the:

- Economic Regeneration Strategy
- Cultural Strategy
- Place Based Strategy (linked to WMCA Growth Strategy and Integrated Settlement)
- Emerging Dudley Local Plan (currently under examination)
- West Midlands Growth Plan

We've also looked at site-specific development briefs and project-level masterplans like the Castle Hill Vision (Phase 2) and the Portersfield development in Dudley town centre. Alongside these, we have also reviewed recent documents, consultations and engagement processes that have been part of the development of strategies, policies and programmes, or have sought to evaluate their activity, to understand what is working well locally and the priorities and challenges emerging from them. This has allowed us to gain valuable insight to guide our approach.

A summary of the key documents is detailed in the Appendix.

### Mutual benefit

Importantly, we don't just want to align with other strategies, we want to influence them too. Our Regeneration and Investment plans have been shaped by strong community engagement and local intelligence so we will be working with our stakeholders and partners to promote our plans, vision and priorities and ensure that they will become key reference points and influence for others developing or refreshing local strategies.

To make that happen, we're setting up ways to keep the conversation going with our local partners and stakeholders, to keep our plans up to date and reflect what's really needed. We're also keen to keep sharing what we're learning, whether it's data, community insights, or just examples of what's working well so others involved in shaping Dudley's future and beyond can benefit from our experience too.



<p><b>Economic Regeneration Strategy</b></p> <p>The Dudley Economic Regeneration Strategy sets out an ambitious ‘route map’ for the borough over the next ten years. To shape a more prosperous, more fair and more sustainable economy in which businesses and communities thrive. The Strategy seeks to achieve the following outcomes for the Borough:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new businesses are formed, and existing businesses grow – including in new sectors.</li> <li>• inward investors choose to locate.</li> <li>• local people develop new skills and can ‘pivot’ as new opportunities come to the area.</li> <li>• town centres are vibrant and sustainable, attractive both to local people and visitors.</li> <li>• the quality of the natural and built environment (including heritage assets) are recognised at the heart of the visitor economy and more generally.</li> <li>• communities and businesses are connected by a high-quality transport infrastructure across the borough.</li> <li>• significant progress is being made towards net zero carbon.</li> <li>• everyone can reach their potential.</li> </ul> <p>The Strategy sets out four key themes and a cross-cutting priority that should underpin actions and investment.</p>	<p><b>Place Based Strategy</b></p> <p>The Dudley Place Based Strategy was prepared in liaison with West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), who in 2023, agreed a Deeper Devolution Deal with Central Government. This involves transferring more power and funding to regional bodies and local authorities.</p> <p>At the heart of the Deeper Devolution Deal is the concept of an ‘Integrated Settlement’ - a consolidated, long-term budget which will enable the region to prioritise local decisions.</p> <p>To inform priorities for investment thorough the Integrated Settlement, the WMCA asked each local authority to prepare a ‘Place-based Strategy for economic growth and regeneration. The strategy is built around the Integrated Settlement five ‘pillars’ of activity which relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing and regeneration;</li> <li>• Local growth and place;</li> <li>• Local transport;</li> <li>• Adult and skills; and</li> <li>• Net zero and retrofit.</li> </ul> <p>The Place-Based Strategy for Dudley sets out a growth narrative and vision for the Borough. It identifies the key locations for investment and the measures to unlock. It outlines how we will contribute to regional priorities and sets out how other resources will be used alongside the Integrated Settlement.</p>	<p><b>Dudley Borough Vision / Council Plan</b></p> <p>PfN will support the seven key aspirations for the borough set out in the Dudley Borough Vision for 2030:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A unique visitor destination with rich heritage.</li> <li>• Diverse towns and world-class retail.</li> <li>• World-leading transport innovation.</li> <li>• A hub for enterprise and innovation.</li> <li>• A skilled workforce.</li> <li>• Warm welcomes and close-knit communities.</li> <li>• Inspiring natural beauty.</li> </ul> <p>See <a href="http://www.dudleyboroughvision2030.org.uk">www.dudleyboroughvision2030.org.uk</a></p> <p>Dudley Council Plan (2025-26) and the wider Dudley Council Improvement Plan align corporate strategies with this ambition, seeking to ensure a ‘One Dudley’ focus on a shared vision for the local area which is co-produced with partners, businesses and communities to maximise resources and ensure best value across all service areas.</p> <p>Key to delivering this successfully is resident engagement - helping the council understand what good service delivery looks like; and partnership engagement - planning and delivery of services to meet customer requirements. We are keen to increase this engagement by co-designing our new Community Vision, engaging particularly with those that are historically under-represented.</p>
<p><b>Health and Wellbeing Strategy</b></p> <p>The PfN aligns with the principles identified in the <a href="#">Dudley Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028</a> by embedding an approach which builds community capacity and resilience, focussing on prevention and the wider determinants of health, and building on the existing skills and assets within the borough to ensure that services work with and for everyone. This will support the strategic ambition to close the gap in health and wellbeing for the most disadvantaged families and communities and create opportunities for people to play an active part in making Dudley borough a place where everyone can live longer, safer and healthier lives.</p>	<p><b>Cultural Strategy</b></p> <p>The Cultural Strategy sets out a 10-year vision with a set of outcomes that the strategy should achieve across five themes which shape activity going forward. These contain proposals for the governance, structures and resources that may assist delivery of the actions, outcomes and vision.</p> <p>Five Key Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theme 1: investing in capacity building to build stronger resilience within the creative and cultural sectors</li> <li>• Theme 2: continuing to invest in skills development to support future culture leaders and to support life-long learning</li> <li>• Theme 3: increased diversity of programming</li> <li>• Theme 4: fostering and adopting a more collaborative culture</li> <li>• Theme 5: having ambition regarding cultural infrastructure and production.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Town Investment Plan 2021</b></p> <p>The Town Investment Plan was developed alongside the Towns Fund business case and project. It highlights a shared vision for Dudley, taking advantage of existing strengths, including regeneration projects that have already made a positive and long-lasting impact on the town. It also sets out an ambition to go further to maximise the huge economic potential that exists within Dudley, through the combined resources, effort and goodwill of partners. It provides the framework for delivering the wider Regenerating Dudley programme through recognising the strengths and challenges of the town centre alongside prioritised projects. It articulates 5 strategic objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increasing the vibrancy and attractiveness of the town centre</li> <li>2. Building a skilled workforce</li> <li>3. Promoting Innovation and Investment</li> <li>4. Strengthening Dudley’s heritage and cultural offer</li> <li>5. Improving connectivity to and within the town centre</li> </ol>
<p><b>Health on the High Street</b></p> <p>The impact of the wider determinants of health, such as the environment have long been established. The high street or town centre is one part of the environment that has the potential to be an asset that can promote and improve the health of local residents in a number of ways.</p> <p>There are several aspects of the high street that can enhance the health of residents. The focus of the report is specifically on the retail offer in our town centres and how this can: enable residents to make healthier choices; create opportunities for social interaction; provide good access to services and advice; and improve mental health and wellbeing of residents.</p> <p>It prioritises the transformation of town centres into vibrant, inclusive, and health-promoting places. The approach integrates mixed-use development, public realm improvements, and healthier retail environments. Planning and licensing are positioned as key levers to shape high street regeneration. Safety, accessibility, and opportunities for social connection underpin future placemaking. The report establishes a baseline to guide investment, policy, and collaborative action across sectors.</p>	<p><b>Dudley Vibrancy Study</b></p> <p>The report outlines a multi-phase strategy for regenerating Dudley’s town centre, particularly through the reuse of vacant units and community-led initiatives. It recognises the strengths and challenges of the town centre and sets out a delivery plan. It recognises a strong sense of local pride and belonging, though mixed with frustration, that the High Street seen as a social and community hub despite retail challenges; that collaboration and local champions are central to building cohesion; that affordable, community-driven regeneration projects can strengthen ties; and that learning from other towns shows how space activation can reinforce social connection.</p>	<p><b>Dudley Active Travel Report</b></p> <p>Developed in partnership with Dudley Council, WMCA, Active Black Country and the Canal and River Trust, this explores the barriers and motivations for key groups in Dudley in relation to active travel. It supports town centre regeneration by improving high streets and arrival spaces, creating safer and more attractive pedestrian and cycling routes. It prioritises health equity by embedding active travel into daily life through inclusive, accessible infrastructure. It aims to reduce car dependency and promote walking and public transport as tools for physical and mental well-being. The approach leverages community-led initiatives and trusted health messengers to drive behavioural change. It proposes that investment focuses on safe, connected routes and integrated transport systems including empower children and families through education-led active travel initiatives that address safety, accessibility, and inclusion. Ultimately, Dudley seeks to build a healthier, more resilient population through sustainable mobility.</p>

Figure 7. Review of alignment of existing policies, strategies and surveys.

## Section 6: Match funding and leveraged investment

### Making our money go further

We know that the programme investment is a great start but won't be enough to do everything. The community has told us about a broad range of issues they'd like to see addressed and opportunities they'd like to grasp. We can't do it all at once, but we are confident that by building a clear understanding of how our programme priorities align with other programmes and funding streams, that together we can, and will, deliver more. It is important to keep checking in on our progress and adjust our approach to new opportunities and challenges, ensuring we remain responsive to the needs of our communities. Moreover, we are committed to stretch our £20m investment as far as possible, by turning it into many times that amount through building partnerships and relationships and unlocking other sources of funding to deliver more for our communities. We also want to make sure that the right funding source is used for the right project, avoiding any duplication on grant investment so every area and idea gets a fair opportunity. We are located within the West Midlands Combined Authority area so we are paying attention to the Integrated Settlement arrangements and opportunities which may also arise through that and will draw on the knowledge and contacts of our WMCA Board representative to support this.

### Exploring new models for sustainability

As we look to the future, it's important that investment from the programme doesn't just deliver short-term projects during the lifetime of the programme but also helps to build lasting community strength and resilience that continues long after the programme ends. Therefore, we're exploring different operating models and governance structures to ensure that happens. That might mean thinking creatively about how capital investment could support community-led sustainability. This kind of approach will help us to build community capital and make sure that what we create together has a lasting legacy.

Additionally, we have also procured expert advice as to potential operating models for the Board itself, recognising that setting up as a charity or community interest company (CIC) may open up new grant funding opportunities, and help us to receive income from assets created through the programme securing Board sustainability beyond the lifetime of the programme. These options will be considered by the Board in coming months.

### Making the most of match and leverage

When we talk about 'match and leverage', we mean finding extra ways to bring in funding, time and resources that add value to what we are already doing. We are developing a clear and flexible approach to match and leverage, and we want this to be a fully inclusive model that not only works for large scale schemes but also smaller grass-roots ideas, and that means recognising the value of community time, commitment and passion. We will also consider proportionality and ways to embed social value.

Here's what it might look like:

- Direct cash match – where projects are co-funded by other sources, considering a higher level of support for smaller community-led, seed projects for example.
- In-kind match – valuing the immense contribution of volunteer time and community groups
- Wider leverage – where programme investment attracts further funding because of the project's success
- Complementary funding – where related programmes and initiatives add value to our projects and where our work helps community to better access related funding opportunities.

### How we'll attract more investment

We will use every tool in our collective toolbox to secure match and leverage funding. This includes:

1. Learning from experience
2. Sharing skills and knowledge
3. Funding synergies and co-investment opportunities
4. Building community capacity
5. Encouraging a culture of partnerships and collaboration

#### 1. Learning from experience

Our Board members and partner organisations already have a strong track record of attracting investment from different sources, bringing different funding streams together to fund the whole, and developing projects which attract private sector co-investment. Collectively, we have successfully delivered projects that have attracted millions of pounds of co-funding, and we will use that experience to build confidence in deliverability and successful outcomes with future funders – such as Arts Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England.

Examples include:

- £25m Towns Fund money secured to deliver a new skills centre in Dudley, a project which is overseen by this Board
- The £1m private investment which helped to lever £2.5m Heritage Action Zone investment from Historic England and MHCLG.
- Following a national bidding process, Dudley College of Technology has been selected as one of ten National Centres for Technical Excellence for Construction (CTEC) and, as a result, will share in £100m Government training funding over the next four years to accelerate the development of construction sector skills
- Funding raised through business donations and sponsorship to create a Covid Memorial Rainbow sculpture being located at Russell's Hall Hospital
- Dudley Townscape Heritage Fund (2) which delivered £2,071,966 of grant-aided works, with a grant of £1,152,810 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). Match funding of £300,000 from Dudley Council. £619,000 of private investment plus an additional £186,267 from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)

## 2. Sharing skills and knowledge:

We are keen for Board members and partners chances to share their knowledge through exploring opportunities for workshops, mentoring, and networking, so everyone can benefit. This is one of the benefits of such a diverse board, we can draw on expertise from many sectors and networks to spot opportunities and avoid mistakes. We can draw upon the experience and knowledge of our members to embrace place-based approaches, strengthen and develop local partnerships and in turn build resilience, stronger communities and impact.

Through our membership we're able to tap into funding opportunities in different sectors and access skills that might help use draw in investment from other sources. For example, Clive Fletcher, our West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) representative on the Board, brings valuable links to funding opportunities through both his current role at the WMCA and previous work for Historic England. He will not only be able to provide advice and guidance about funding related to the heritage sector but also provides a direct link and advice for new opportunities emerging through the new WMCA Integrated Settlement process and wider west midlands region.

### Case study: Dudley College

Our Chair, Neil Thomas has played a pivotal role in securing and delivering significant investment to expand education opportunities across the region. During his leadership at Dudley College of Technology, nearly £80m of capital investment was achieved over the past decade through collaboration with local authority, WMCA, national funding bodies and independent employer partners. This investment has created state of the art technical education facilities serving all priority sectors and has made a major contribution to the regeneration and footfall in our town centre.

## 3. Funding synergies and co-investment opportunities

While other sources of funding to co-invest with the programme monies are yet to be secured, there is a live mapping exercise which will be ongoing throughout the lifetime of the programme, involving the Council, Board members, and partners to identify possible sources of match funding aligned with the programme goals, priorities and interventions. It is essential that we use this local data and mapping of assets and gaps to drive decision making and ensure we maximise opportunities for wider funding and investment. We are keeping a close eye on this area because we are aware that further financing sources are on the horizon.

A recent example which represents a significant opportunity to restore local identity and enhance nature conservation, aligns closely with the Regeneration, Heritage and High Streets intervention of this programme was the October 2025 designation of Dudley as a 'Heritage Place' by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It unlocks multi-million-pound heritage investment over the next decade

(the same funding period as this programme) and could work in synergy with any interventions we deliver.

### Case study: Sport England Place Expansion

The Council's Public Health team has been working with Active Black Country on the development of a Sport England Place Expansion application which has been successful. We are now at the stage of developing the full application looking at inequality in health and activity. This is expected to take 6-12 months to complete, which presents a great opportunity to align funding streams, particularly recognising that the initial work was done on behalf of the four Black Country Councils – each of which also have a Pfn programme – so there could even be opportunities to share knowledge and collectively lever in more!

It is likely that the programme funding will also unlock existing organisational budgets, which on their own may not be sufficient to deliver a particular project or intervention, but in combination with programme funding can deliver far more.

Our baseline mapping exercise is live and has already identified a range of match funding opportunities aligned with the different themes and priorities, including:

<b>High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dudley announced as a Heritage Place autumn 25</li> <li>• Historic England's Heritage at Risk programme</li> <li>• Enovert Community Trust</li> <li>• National Lottery Heritage Fund</li> <li>• WMCA Mayors markets fund</li> </ul>
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WMCA Integrated Settlement Building Retrofit programme</li> <li>• WMCA Integrated Settlement public sector decarbonisation</li> </ul>
<b>Work, productivity and skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work well</li> <li>• Youth Trailblazer</li> <li>• Connect to Work</li> </ul>
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport England Place Based Expansion</li> <li>• Football foundation grants</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) and Transport for City Regions (TCR)</li> <li>• S106 and CIL</li> </ul>
<b>Safety and security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the Government's Safer Streets campaign, Dudley and Brockmoor will benefit from increased police patrols during peak times, alongside stronger enforcement and prevention measures.</li> </ul>
<b>Education and opportunity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant funding from Gov – DfE and Dept Health and Social Care to deliver the Family Hubs and Start for Life offer. 0-2 years mainly, older children.</li> <li>• DfE Dedicated Schools Grant – Early Years Block for Early years Expansion and Wraparound Childcare Grant, both include capital allocations to support expansion.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Building community capacity

One way in which we can multiply the programme investment in Dudley is to use some of the funding to invest in training and support for groups to help them to strengthen their bids and become more confident in applying for grants. We will look to provide capacity building to groups based, and which operate within the area to help them put their best bid forward – be that for our programme monies or funds from other sources. We want to be able to help them access funding with skills which will benefit the community long after the programme ends. We are seeking to understand the skills that would be most beneficial through learning from other recent grants programmes, such as UKSPF, and will look at all applications for funding over the lifetime of the programme, to see what else, and how else we can help local groups best make the case for investment.

Additionally, we want to help signpost groups towards funding sources as we know this is an ever-changing landscape and there may be sector or geography specific funds which might just align with our locally identified needs and delivery ideas by our partners and third sector. We will therefore be intentional about sharing intelligence about available funds for example from the Government's Find a Grant service<sup>1</sup>, to local sources gathered by Dudley CVS, and emerging work being undertaken through Sonia Kumar MP's office. This way we are not just funding projects but building long-term capacity across the area.

#### 5. Creating a culture of partnerships and collaboration

Finally, we are big believers in learning from others so we will be reaching out to other places involved in the same programme to share what is working, swap ideas, and explore opportunities to work together to leverage more funding. We will particularly look to engage and work with other programme boards in the neighbouring areas, creating a safe, collaborative network where we can share knowledge, experiences and challenges and create new opportunities for growth.



## Section 7: Community and stakeholder engagement

### Dudley Neighbourhood Board

#### Who we are

We are a collection of people who feel passionately about the place we, live, work, teach and serve. We come from different walks of life and bring different skills, experience and perspectives to the Dudley Neighbourhood Board. We are 'normal Dudley folk' who want to make a real impact on real issues.

We volunteer our time and energy because we believe in the opportunity we have, working alongside our community and partners to make a genuine, long-lasting difference at a local level. We're not career board members, and we aren't here for titles or prestige, we are here to represent the voices from across the area and use that feedback to shape how and where the money is invested to address the priorities and imbalances identified by our communities.

We are united by a shared commitment to inclusive leadership, transparency, and community-led decision-making. You can find out more about us at [www.regeneratingdudley.org.uk/dudley-projects](http://www.regeneratingdudley.org.uk/dudley-projects).

#### Our composition and leadership

The Board currently comprises 21 representatives. We have sought to meet both this programme and Towns Fund programme requirements, representing the diversity of our communities and geographies. However, we recognise that it is not possible to represent every demographic or organisation on the Board without it becoming unmanageable.

We currently operate as a single Board with a Chair and Vice Chair. We have a single sub-group focused on the Towns Fund project and we are planning to establish more to support this programme. Each will draw upon Board members' strengths and expertise and reflect the programme's priorities. We also see opportunities for other community representatives to get involved in sub-groups, offering potential progression pathways onto the Board. We are committed to continuing local representation on the Board over the lifetime of the programme. We will continue to explore different ways and opportunities to connect local people into the Board and its wider activity.

#### How we work

We operate as a group of equals, where everyone's voice counts, regardless of title or background. Our focus is on ensuring the programme serves the community well, while fulfilling all governance and accountability requirements.

Learning and development will be key to strengthening how we work, so we have invested in Board leadership and development training to ensure we can fulfil all the process and governance stuff, but also that we, as a collective, can build a shared culture and approach to decision making. This training began with conversations to understand our collective experiences, strengths and learning needs to help fulfil our role on the Board. As this is rolled out, we plan to share useful training opportunities more widely with the local community sector, supported by capacity funding.

We keep our membership under regular review to ensure it reflects the diversity of our neighbourhoods and the evolving voices of local people. This helps us to stay connected and focused on the issues that matter most to our local communities.

We also work flexibly. We balance regular meetings with online collaboration through a shared work area and email updates. This hybrid approach helps us to stay agile, informed and focused on decision-making, without overburdening members or the programme support team with unnecessary administration.

### Relationship with Dudley Council

Our partnership with the Council is working well. We have two Councillors on the Board – a Cabinet member, and a shadow cabinet member providing links across some political parties and direct connections to ward-level networks. The Council serves as the accountable body for the programme and provides the secretariat to the Board. We recognise the Council’s responsibilities to meet the programme requirements, and we value the significant experience they bring in managing initiatives of this scale.

We collectively understand the need for the relationship between the Board as the decision-making body for the programme, and the Council, with a directly elected mandate and its role as accountable body, to function well and with maturity, especially when there are different views. We have agreed the principles for how decisions will be made to enable each organisation to fulfil their responsibilities and, should circumstances arise that aren’t covered by the processes put in place, we will work together, constructively, to agree a way forward. We are committed to a low bureaucracy, high assurance approach to working. Through the Board Leadership support programme, we are building our capacity to develop our decision-making approach, together with expert input from Dudley Council’s Legal and Democratic Services team. This will help us to embed fair and effective processes which meet all the required and expected standards.

In the short term at least, the Council will continue to provide programme management support as we get the delivery programme up and running. This will ensure robust due diligence and compliance with the Nolan Principles and Managing Public Money principles. We will be working hand in glove with them as we will be setting out the criteria

for each opportunity and agreeing the route to market with the programme team. The programme team will lead the process, with the Board setting criteria, reviewing proposals and making final decisions collaboratively. We might decide we’d like further information, or would like presentations from finalists, but those will be decisions we will make together.

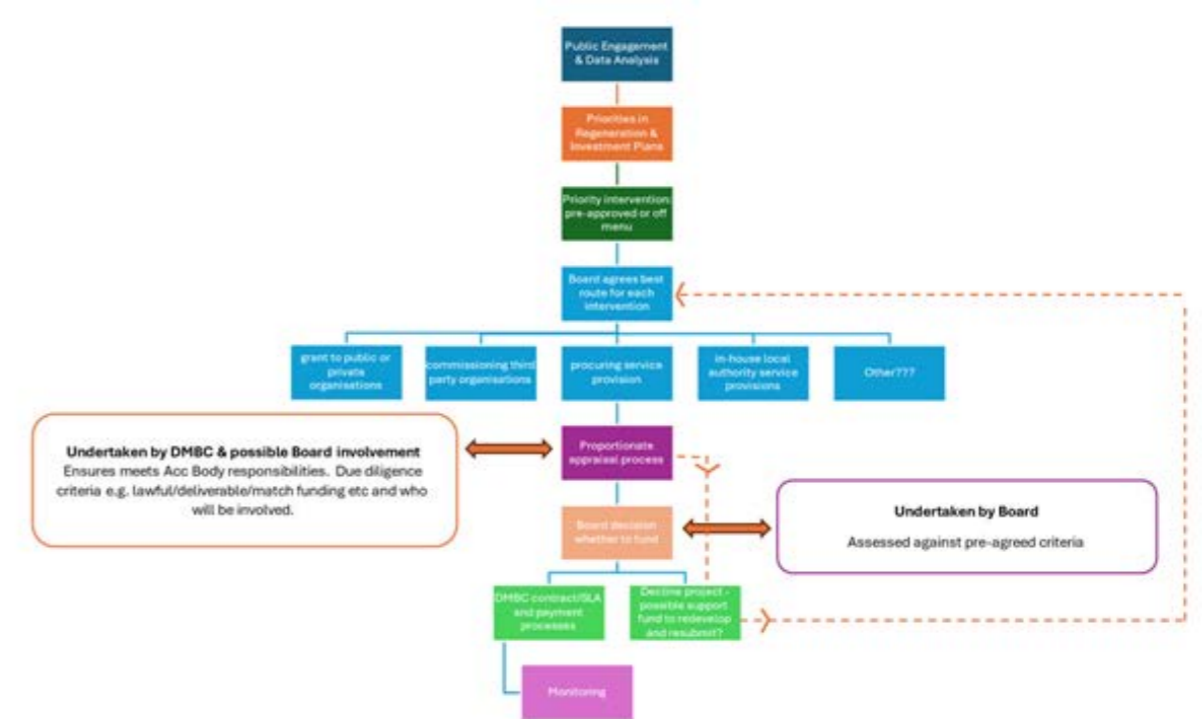


Figure 8. Proposed decision making process flow.

We know that many of the powers set out in the guidance sit with the Local Authority. We haven’t yet sought to exercise any of them, but we have shared with the Council that we might wish to, and we will work with them to employ those powers alongside the funding to address the priorities we’ve set out.

We are also aware of the Government’s English Democracy and Community Empowerment Bill which introduces a requirement for Local Authorities to establish effective neighbourhood governance, and we want to play our part in that and aim to share our learning with others as those arrangements emerge.

### How we deliver interventions

We are committed to building community confidence and momentum. Using capacity funding we have already invested in training and development to empower the community groups to take part in engagement and will continue to do so in response to need. Aligned with this commitment, early delivery funding will be focused on smaller, grassroots projects which respond to hyper-local needs. Over the lifetime of the programme, we will broaden our investment to include larger scale initiatives, always tied back to the locally identified priorities.

We are very focused on using the programme money to lever in other funding, so that £20m becomes five, ten or even fifteen times as much.

Our routes to funding projects:

- **Grants** – we anticipate that these will mainly be awarded in response to calls for projects for delivery against certain priorities. The criteria will be set by the Board, and a transparent, proportionate, bidding and assessment process applied. This will help the accountable body fulfil their responsibilities in relation to use of public funds and give the Board confidence in the decisions they take. Where there are projects which we don't fund due to weaknesses in their applications, we may offer training to strengthen future proposals.
- **Procurement** – for directly commissioned projects, we will follow the Council's contract Standing Orders and the relevant Procurement Legislation, with Board members involved in shaping briefs and scoring submissions, as we have already done with the board leadership support for example.
- **Direct delivery** – we know that there are some functions and activities which can only be delivered by a particular agency. In these instances, proposals will still be requested, reviewed and assessed for deliverability, cost-effectiveness and value for money before any funding is approved.
- **Commissioning** – where the best outcome is likely to come from a deeper exploration of need, resource allocation and provider identification we will use commissioning in line with [local government guidance](#)

The programme is about more than the £20m funding from MHCLG. It's also about how we use the weight and power of the community voice as a catalyst for action from others, helping to shape their priorities for investment in the area. Be that WMCA, TfWM, the Police and Crime Commissioner or others. We will be seeking to make the most of every opportunity to bring this to bear and create an increasingly shared agenda. This might mean we refresh the Board, its subgroups, and/or how it works over time, but we will always seek to take decisions which best support delivery of local benefits.

We will make use of our subject matter experts, subgroups and stakeholders to support those delivering funded projects to give them every chance of success. But we know that sometimes things don't go to plan and, in those instances, we want to be able to work with the project team to understand what hasn't worked, what would make a difference, what learning can we take from this, and, to explore if there are changes we can support during delivery to make it a success, or, if the project's concluded, to decide if we reinvest in a different approach to the same issue.

## Continuing our community conversations

Community is woven through everything we do. We hold meetings in community venues across our area, maintain open communications and share information with our networks to stay visible and accessible.

We are also committed to having an ongoing conversation with the community about the programme, and particularly making space and finding ways to hear, what may otherwise be, lesser heard voices. Over the summer 2025 we trained 17 trusted local community representatives as community researchers, 15 of whom went on to lead conversations across the area to gather insight from communities who might not otherwise engage via more traditional routes. Our hypothesis was that those groups might be more likely to have a conversation with someone they know and trust, and that's turned out to be correct as the demographic groups who have been less likely to respond to our survey are far better represented through our community conversations.



## Celebrating and expanding our network

Guided by our core principles, we know that real change starts with local people and that engaging with and listening to community voices is only the beginning of our partnership. A highlight of the year was our summer 2025 celebration event, marking the end of the first engagement period with our Community Researchers. It was a vibrant, joyful occasion that brought everyone together and helped break down barriers between the Board and the community. Community Researchers were able to share findings from their community conversations directly with the board. The energy, ideas and connections that came out of that event have inspired us to think bigger and we are now exploring how we can grow the community researcher network and make this an annual celebration of community collaboration.



We must remember to be reciprocal in our approach and are very mindful of the trust we have built within communities, that we must continue to build upon through open, and transparent collaboration. Our vision is to build a thriving, ongoing partnership that will be supported by continuous training, opportunities to engage and co-design and a shared commitment to weaving community insight into every step of our journey.

## Introducing our Community Researchers

We see the 2025 engagement to inform this plan as the beginning of a 10-year community conversation. For this reason, we have used capacity funding to invest in training led by a locally based engagement specialist, equipping community representatives with participatory engagement tools, techniques and, the confidence to lead great conversations in their own networks, truly recognising the benefits of peer-to-peer conversations.

They have put these skills to good use by:

- **hosting gatherings** reaching around 1,000 local voices
- **capturing rich qualitative feedback** on local priorities
- **supporting wider engagement** by attending existing events and supporting drop-in sessions
- **Collaborating with Board members** to extend reach in the community

This grassroots approach has been invaluable in ensuring underrepresented voices help shape a Regeneration Plan that is truly reflective of the challenges, hopes and areas of need of our communities.

From the first day of training, the researchers recognised the benefit of working collaboratively. They have been able to learn from one another and build a supportive network. Going forward, it is intended that this will be the start of an evolving network of community researchers working in partnership with the board who will continue to:

- facilitate ongoing community conversations
- track shifts in local priorities
- sharing feedback on the impact of the programme
- identify opportunities and challenges on the ground
- help shape future rounds of investment through lived experience

Their involvement has strengthened our partnership model bringing organisations, residents and stakeholders together to co-design the vision for our future.



Figure 9. Flow diagram of how community engagement will continue via the Community Researcher network.

We were very clear when commissioning the work, that it shouldn't just be expected of people and organisations to give their time without respectful recognition. So, we have also recognised their contribution with thank you payments to their organisations, acknowledging the value of their time and expertise to the programme. The skills they've developed are transferable and therefore able to be used to support their other activities

and initiatives, adding significant value locally while informing the future of the programme.

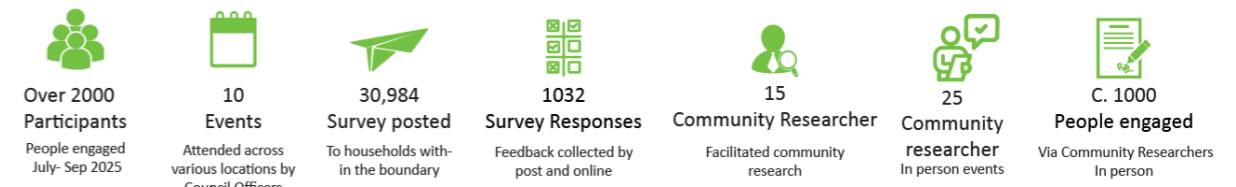


Figure 10. Photos of community researcher engagement training sessions

### Case study insight:

Lisa Parkers is the Pastor of Living Hope Church on Russell's Hall estate and a leader with Love Black Country and Love Dudley, a network representing around 150 local churches of all denominations. As part of the church's involvement in community engagement, members of the congregation spoke with local residents about their experiences of living in the area. One theme that emerged, particularly from older residents, was how much they miss contact with younger people – especially when family live further away – which can contribute to loneliness. Not waiting for the engagement period to close, priorities to be identified, or delivery funding to be available, Lisa responded to this feedback by creating opportunities for intergenerational contact within the church's existing Little Stars stay and play group. Thank you Lisa for trail blazing! We're so excited to see how else the findings from the engagement period can unlock further activity and investment. Understanding that our community is powerful!

### Other routes to engagement



Over summer 2025, alongside the Community Researchers, we launched a survey which was open to all to complete. It was available in hard copy, and online with alternative formats also available. A copy was sent to each of the 30,984 residences in the programme area.

### Marketing and communications

To help us raise the profile of the programme and the opportunities to engage, we agreed a set of marketing and communications priorities which have been implemented in accordance with the comms plan. This has included press releases, the production of bespoke social media assets and then used across organic and paid for social media, and a specific social media campaign targeting 17-24 year olds.

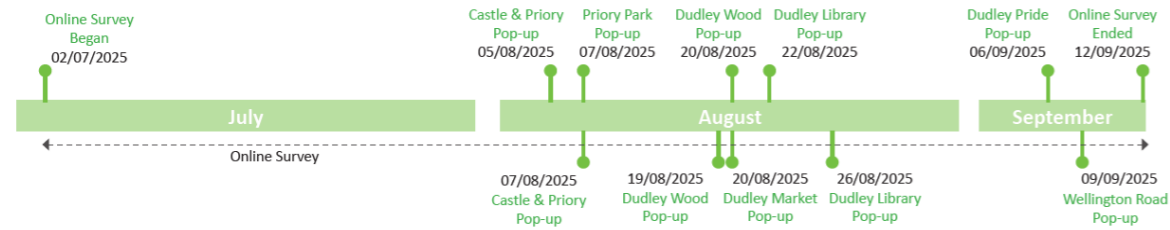
Residents, businesses, students, partners and stakeholders were also encouraged to participate in the survey through a targeted communications campaign (1<sup>st</sup> August – 11<sup>th</sup> September) which was promoted through various networks.



This was delivered by the council as we had to hit the ground running, however we agreed early on that Board and programme communication could be another opportunity for local capacity building and engagement, so we're looking forward to developing a model whereby local students, job seekers, community enthusiasts and others could get involved with designing and delivering our communications plan. This approach could:

- Build skills and provide real-world experience
- Foster greater agency and ownership of the story locally
- Help us to reach groups and communities through peer-led outreach
- Improve participation in civic society

We kept an eye on where survey responses were coming from in terms of demographics and geography. We want to learn from our experience and that of other Neighbourhood Boards, to find more ways to hear from those who didn't engage in the future.



We were also keen to make use of existing events and gatherings over the summer and rather than expect people to come to use, we sent a team of colleagues from the Council to ten places and spaces within the programme area where the community was coming together, to invite them to be part of the conversation and hear directly about their challenges and aspirations for the place they live.

Officers will be at the following events and drop ins and invite you to join us to find out more about the plan and the survey:

- Tuesday 5th August 10am - 1pm**  
Adult and Community Learning Open Week (Castle and Priory Neighbourhood Learning Centre)
- Thursday 7th August 10am - 1pm**  
Adult and Community Learning Open Week (Castle and Priory Neighbourhood Learning Centre)
- Thursday 7th August 12pm - 4pm**  
Play Week (Priory Park)
- Tuesday 19th August 10am - 12pm**  
Adult and Community Learning Open Week (Dudley Wood Neighbourhood Learning Centre)
- Wednesday 20th August 10am - 12pm**  
Adult and Community Learning Open Week (Dudley Wood Neighbourhood Learning Centre)
- Wednesday 20th 10.30am - 3pm August**  
Dudley Market
- Friday 22nd August 10am - 12pm**  
Rattle and Rhyme and Bluey event Dudley Library
- Tuesday 26th August 1.30pm - 4pm**  
Dudley Library



Figure 11. Photos from Engagement event pop-up and drop-ins.



Figure 11. Photos from Engagement event pop-up and drop-ins.

In addition, the sentiment survey commissioned by MHCLG showed that most local people had not previously been asked to help shape their area. We also know from community feedback that people can feel frustrated when they are repeatedly asked to complete surveys but don't see how their input is used. So, to respect their time and build trust we are making the best possible use of existing information to avoid repetition and fatigue. Where other recent surveys or engagement activities already provide insight into the programme area and local priorities, we are drawing on those findings to guide and inform our work. This approach will continue throughout the programme to ensure local voices remain at the heart of decision-making. A full list of the information sources that have informed this plan can be found in the Appendix.

### Evaluation and learning

Looking ahead we want to build upon the strong foundations we have laid for community engagement by developing a shared approach to learning and reflections across the partnership. We see evaluation as an ongoing process, part of the conversation, not a one stop reflection at the end of the programme. This iterative conversation will help us to understand what might be working well, what might need to change and identify any unexpected successes that emerge along the way. Evaluation is not just a governance exercise, and by involving the community researchers directly as codevelopers and joint owners of this process will bring a sense of belonging and build trust. Here we can create space for communities to test ideas, take managed risks and share learnings openly so together, in partnership with the Board we can improve our neighbourhoods.

## Section 8: Governance

We recognise that good governance brings transparency, fairness, clarity and accountability. We don't take our responsibility as a Board lightly, but we also want that to be balanced with proportionality and a low bureaucracy environment which makes the programme accessible, real and deliverable. We appreciate that there can be a healthy cynicism among the community about programmes like this and we want our programme to be transparent, winning hearts and minds with swift implementation based on good decision making and processes.

We have already referred to the training and support that we have commissioned and are now embracing to help us explore, discuss and agree what our responsibilities mean practically and how we are going collectively fulfil them. At the same time, we're also exploring and learning about potential future governance models and the pros and cons they could offer in helping us to deliver the programme.

We will utilise the necessary, well-established procedures which fulfil MHCLG and the accountable body's requirements and regularly examine and reflect on our approach as a Board to check that we are following those principles and enabling delivery. Our Terms of Reference (ToR) and Code of Conduct already set out our commitments to how we will conduct ourselves, including adherence to the Nolan Principles, Managing Public Money Principles and roles and responsibilities. We will take advice from the accountable body and/or MHCLG as necessary on these as the programme progresses. We will review our ToR and Code of Conduct at least annually, seek declarations of interest at every meeting, and update our Register of Interests regularly. Taking steps like this will help us to ensure we're operating safely and help us to take stock of our ways of working.

There are three main parties involved with Dudley's programme:

1. MHCLG as funder with associated requirements and expectations
2. Dudley Neighbourhood Board
3. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) as accountable body and programme team

The relationship between these bodies is set out below together with the responsibilities as we currently believe them to be. We recognise that these roles and responsibilities may change over time. Should that be the case we will continue to seek to be transparent about what it means for the programme's administration and delivery.

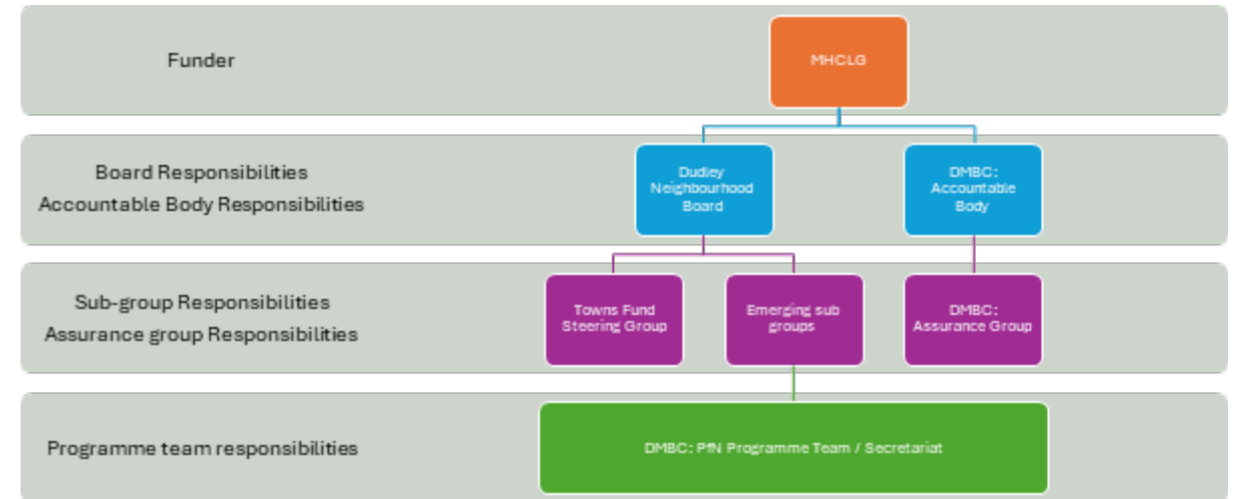


Figure 12. Governance flow diagram.

**MHCLG's responsibilities:** to adhere to the published prospectus and funding profile, to support the Board and the Local Authority in delivery of the programme, to share good practise and learning so all areas grow together.

**Dudley Neighbourhood Board:** to oversee the design and delivery of our programme, ensuring deep connection with the local area. We are decision takers and programme overseers. We have a responsibility to also act in the best interests of the programme and the place, drawing on our individual knowledge, experience and expertise. We also oversee the Towns Fund project in Dudley, reviewing monitoring returns and change requests prior to submission. We also seek to maintain an overview of regeneration activity in the area, to understand the relationships, dependencies, connections and opportunities that might arise.

**Accountable Body:** DMBC's role as accountable body is to ensure that the funding is appropriately managed in accordance with Managing Public Funding and other related principles. It will be accountable to MHCLG for expenditure and delivery so will work closely alongside the Board to both set the programme up with the right foundations and to ensure compliance throughout. The Council, through the Section 151 officer, will be asked to confirm statements of grant usage back to MHCLG.

**Assurance Group:** DMBC has established an internal assurance group which will provide check and challenge to the programme through review of the finances, risks, decisions and processes via the programme team. It may also be the route for audits of the programme from time to time.

**Towns Fund Subgroup:** This is an established group which involves the three partners to the Towns Fund funded project in Dudley. The steering group provides monthly oversight of the project before the Board reviews the monitoring and evaluation returns prior to submission.

**Other sub-groups:** These have yet to be established but are being explored through our leadership work and as the programme unfolds. We might, for example, see a subgroup focused on communication and engagement which brings our community researchers together with communications professionals and other relevant parties to ensure the Board is communicating with transparency and relevance, and that the conversation with the community continues.

**Programme Team:** Council colleagues who are supporting the Board through a secretariat function and application of programme guidance to shape and inform the development of our programme activity. They also provide the interface with MHCLG and with the rest of the Council so processes and systems align, and they can fulfil their responsibilities as accountable body while we fulfil ours as the Board. As we move into delivery, the programme team will also support the Board in getting opportunities to market with the related processes (as set out below) and undertaken due diligence checks when responses are received before presenting them to the Board for decision.

### How we will take opportunities to market and the process for appraising and approving investments

Having started the conversation with the community about priorities for the programme and considered these alongside other data sets to agree our vision and short-term areas of focus, we will start identifying how we will take each ask and opportunity to market. This will be done through discussion amongst the Board, alongside the programme team who will support us with relevant processes. The Board will agree the brief and criteria for each opportunity.

At this stage, it is envisaged that projects will be identified through one of four routes.

1. Grant schemes
2. Commissioning
3. Procuring service provision
4. Direct awards

#### 1. Grants

We will look to take learning from other successful grant programmes to inform our approach. Following our agreement of the brief, a call for proposals will be published. The requirements of the response will be proportionate to the size and nature of the opportunity, and we might run some training workshops beforehand to help potential bidders with the preparation of their responses, as this would also offer transferable skills which could help them secure funding from other sources too.

Following the closing date the Programme team will undertake a due diligence exercise, reviewing the proposals for core elements such as legality, deliverability, essential project criteria and programme fit. Two lists of projects will then be presented to the Board, those which meet the due diligence requirements and therefore the Board can decide which to invest in against the programme and project criteria, and those which don't. We are keen to see both to understand where there are challenges in bidding which we might be able to support, if there is other context we would want to consider, or more information which would help us in making decisions. We also want to continually review where proposals are coming from, both in terms of geographical spread and if it's always the same faces or if we're reaching new groups too.

At the start of every board meeting, Board members are asked to confirm and Declarations of Interest. If applications are being considered by the board and a member has any direct dealings with the organisation, they will be excluded from the decision-making process. We recognise that

this is likely to occur given the broad make-up of the Board, and that this might also include bids from teams within the Council. They will have to go through the same process.

Funding agreements will be put in place through the accountable body and the programme team will undertake proportionate project oversight and performance management which will report into the Board – both so we keep up to date with how delivery is going and the difference its making, but also if there's anything we can learn and may need to change for the next funding round.

#### 2. Procurement

While procurement will follow Dudley Council's Contract Standing Orders and the relevant Procurement Legislation, the Board will be responsible for setting the criteria and brief for procurement documents.

We may invite bidders to present to the Board before decisions are taken in some instances. We may also include one or more Board members in assessing submissions, following relevant training. We have already done this in the case of procuring our leadership support provider.

Where applications are required through more formal procurement processes, an appraisal of all applications against the project brief and score applications based upon the set criteria will be undertaken. Applications and appraisal scores will be presented at the next board meeting for members to make decisions.

Contract management will then be undertaken by the programme team, or relevant Council team, and reported back to the Board on an agreed frequency.

#### 3. In-house provisions

We also recognise there may be times when there is only one body which can deliver a particular intervention. In these instances, these project teams will still be asked to respond to a brief to articulate how the work would be delivered, timescales, costs and information to understand value for money for the Board to review and the programme team to monitor.

#### 4. Commissioning

Where the best outcome is likely to come from a deeper exploration of need, resource allocation and provider identification we will use commissioning in line with [local government guidance](#)

## Section 9: Assurance

Dudley Council is the accountable body for the programme.

The Assurance Group and Programme Team, each described in section 8, will be integral to the programme's assurance processes and ensuring that the programme is delivered in line with Best Value standards and Managing Public Money. The Programme Team includes a programme management function which will embed and implement the relevant standards in the delivery of the programme, while the Assurance Group will provide independent, experienced, check and challenge of the operation, and will in turn have a role in providing assurance to the Section 151 Officer to support approvals and grant assurance statements.

Projects awarded funding will be monitored by a Programme Management Team (PMT) within the wider Programme Team. The PMT has extensive experience of managing externally funded projects including £58m European Social Fund (ESF) project called Black Country Impact between 2016 – 2023, £7.5m of UK Shared Prosperity Fund between 2022 – 2025 and a further £3.9 of Integrated Settlement funding between April 2025 – March 2026. PMT have established processes and systems already in place to manage, monitor and audit Plan for Neighbourhood funding.

### Funding Agreement & Memorandum of Understanding

Funding awarded to external partners will be subject to a Funding Agreement between the delivery organisation and Dudley Council. It will be a mirror contract of the Agreement between MHCLG and Dudley Council. The Funding Agreement will clearly outline contractual targets (expenditure, outputs, outcomes) that need to be achieved for the funding received. We understand that for some smaller organisations, it may be a barrier to claim all reimbursement after receipted expenditure, therefore it will be considered to forward fund part of a project, this will be assessed on a project-by-project basis. It will also be proportionate to the value of the award as we continue to embed a high assurance, low bureaucracy environment.

Where projects internal to the Council have been approved to receive programme funding, a Memorandum of Understanding will be issued which will also outline contractual targets that need to be achieved.

Both Agreements will ensure adherence with funding regulations, publicity requirements, document retention and financial requirements. Training sessions will be delivered by PMT where required.

### Project performance

All Delivery Partners will be involved with regular monitoring, proportionate to the award, facilitated by PMT, at which progress against their project will be reviewed and cover expenditure, outputs and outcomes. It will also be an opportunity to offer support to the projects should they be encountering challenges, and/or share learning from other projects. The meetings will be held on a

formal basis with a standard agenda and minutes produced following the meeting, to formalise any agreed actions. Project progress and any issues identified will be reported to the Board.

### Audit and compliance

Each project will claim funding from Dudley Council through an invoice or a bespoke claims process depending on the nature and size of the project. Claim submissions will include all paperwork related to expenditure and where outputs and outcomes are reported, evidence will need to be submitted.

PMT will carry out an audit on all expenditure to ensure that only eligible expenditure is being claimed and review outputs and outcomes evidence to ensure compliance. Only expenditure, outputs and outcomes that have been audited for compliance will be claimed back from the Managing Authority.

### Claims to managing authority

All claims evidence and paperwork will be collated by PMT and compiled into a single claim back to the Managing Authority. Prior to any claims submission Dudley Council's Finance department will carry out a second independent check financial information to further test compliance. Only claims audited by PMT and subject to a second check by Finance will be subject to authorisation by S151 Officer.



