

Dudley Town Board : Meeting 7th March 2025

Agenda Item 4 - Long Term Plan for Towns (LTPfT) Update and Capacity Funding

This is a discussion paper intended to support conversation amongst the Board. It is hoped that through the debate the Board will feel able to answer the questions posed to inform next steps.

Update on Long Term Plan for Towns (LTPfT)

At the last Board meeting on 9th November, the announcement had just been made as part of the Autumn Statement that the LTPfT programme was going to be retained and would be rebranded with updated guidance to be issued.

On 12th December an update was shared with Town Board Members by email following a webinar with members of Government's LTPfT programme team. This included:

- Confirmation that the programme is still intended to be £20m over 10 years with a 25:75 revenue:capital split
- That a further £200k capacity funding is to be made available in 2025/26 to reflect the extension of the programme, this to be in addition to the £200k originally committed to support development of the investment plan, public engagement etc
- The guidance may include further information about the makeup of Town Boards and the relationship between Town Boards and the Council
- There were some outstanding queries relating to the boundary confirmation and timescales.

At the time of writing this paper the refreshed guidance is still to be issued, however there are further updates to be shared with the Board following engagement with Government officials.

- The first £200k of capacity funding, which was previously conditional on approval of the boundary changes, has been received by the Council despite the proposals for changes to the boundary not having been confirmed.
- We understand there will be a new process for proposing boundary changes which will be set out in the new guidance and will therefore require the boundary proposals to be resubmitted once the details of this are known.
- The second tranche of capacity funding is expected to be received early in 2025/26
- New timescales for submission of Town Plans etc will be included in the new guidance

We do not have a timeline for the likely publication of the refreshed guidance. As soon as it is published, we will ensure a copy is shared with the Board and a meeting of the Board will be arranged as soon as practically possible to agree next steps.

In anticipation of the revised process for approvals to boundary changes and seeking to expedite a decision in relation to Dudley's boundary:

Do you agree for the Council, in consultation with the Chair, to resubmit the proposed changes to the boundary in accordance with the revised process once the new guidance is published subject to the rules relating to boundary changes not having significantly changed? If this is the case this to be brought back to the Board.

Capacity Funding – *how might some of the funding be invested now to start raising the profile of the programme and laying strong foundations for upcoming activity?*

The Council is now in receipt of the first £200k of capacity funding with a further £200k to be issued in the next financial year¹. While the new guidance is awaited there is an opportunity for the Board to consider how some of this funding might be invested to prepare for the work that is to come - laying firm foundations for a 10-year programme, establishing the Board for longevity, and adding value to the delivery of LTPfT. There will be a balance to be struck between waiting for the new guidance and the boundary approval to align capacity building activity and expeditiously starting preparatory work.

The previous guidance does not specify the activities that it was intended to fund, though does make reference to “*support the development of investment plans, including additional community engagement activities*” “*providing thematic knowledge and support*” “*towns can build their own local capacity, talk to local people about what they want from their town, and get going on their Long-Term Plans*” “*Management costs*” and “*secretariat function*”. It is however clear that it cannot be used for project delivery and this has been reiterated by Government officials recently. Previous guidance also suggests tools for engagement that Boards may wish to consider in the context of the funding.

The Board has already expressed its desire and commitment to grassroots activity, investing in and valuing people and communities, strengthening networks, and growing confidence in the programme, alongside investment in some larger scale projects. Discussions with a mix of colleagues from Dudley and other Town Team areas have identified some areas where capacity funding could start to be allocated, and activity could commence. These are set out below to support the Board’s discussion.

<p>1. Positive journalism – <i>develop PR capacity</i> Raise the profile of the board, programme and opportunities Locally tailored news and information Route into engagement and participation Opportunity for training, work experience and routes into education Developing storytelling skills – for groups and places Community researchers, reporters and ambassadors</p>	<p>2. Consultation and engagement – <i>investing in people to participate</i> Equipping with skills and confidence to have great conversations Multimedia – collecting information via a range of methods Closing the feedback loop Engaging a broad base of people Valuing people’s time Train the trainer – longevity</p>
<p>3. Leadership for Boards – <i>developing the Town Board and other groups in the area</i> Developing board cohesiveness and culture Valuing and investing in the Board Prioritisation and decision making Ensuring the community voice is heard Membership and make-up, on-boarding and succession planning Role and development of sub groups Wider skills such as bid writing, preparing a pitch, volunteer management, etc</p>	<p>4. Enabling activity – <i>building the network for the future</i> Enabling the informal groups of today to grow to be part of the consultation, delivery and community leadership of the future Supporting informal groups to sustain, mature and grow Funds to overcome barriers and facilitate venues, materials, transport Growing activity that could be part of the future programme</p>
<p>5. Secretariat, support and management Covering costs of secretariat, liaison, accountable body duties Monitoring and reporting Taking meetings to community venues</p>	

¹ For clarity this is in addition to the initial £50k given to the Council to support establishing the Board etc as referred to in guidance documents.

Questions for discussion:

- Do these represent value-adding activities which would develop the skills and capacity to take forward the programme and strengthen capacity in the area? Are there others not identified?
- Would Board members be willing to be a sponsor for each the community capacity building elements (one per theme), working with the Council to develop the scope and routes to delivery? Reporting back to the Board on progress as appropriate.
- Would the Board agree to allocate some of the capacity funding across these areas to start to fund the activity, retaining the rest for when the guidance is issued?