

## **Towns Investment Plan proposals: engagement of children and young people**

### **1. Context**

- 1.1 The Towns Fund Superboard has agreed a Stakeholder Engagement and Involvement Strategy and Plan which states that:

*“This stakeholder engagement plan will clearly outline an inclusive stakeholder list and communication strategy as to ensure a transformational, locally driven and community owned submission to the Town Fund for Sandwell’s three towns.”*

- 1.2 25% of Sandwell’s population is under 18 years of age, and the youth population is increasing. A truly inclusive engagement and involvement approach will ensure that young people contribute to the planning and development for our towns of the future.

### **2. Engagement**

- 2.1 Young people have an important contribution to make in decisions that impact their lives, and their communities. The terms ‘youth voice’ and ‘youth participation’ have been used for a long time, but the phrase ‘youth engagement’ is often overused and misunderstood. Sandwell Council, through its commitment to the SHAPE Youth Forum, enables meaningful engagement to take place with young people, using Hart’s Ladder of Participation as the agreed approach (see the model at the end of this paper). Effective engagement requires the involvement of skilled adults to enable young people’s voices to be truly voiced, heard and responded to, and it’s also important that young people receive feedback regarding their contribution. This proposal recommends that a small part of the funding available to develop the Towns’ bids is used to secure the expertise required to engage young people with skill and integrity.

### **3. What do we already know?**

- 3.1 In 2017, when developing Vision 2030, pupils from Sandwell schools participated in activities that helped to inform the ambitions that were finally agreed; some of those issues are reflected in the Towns Fund documents, including a lack of aspiration and poor education outcomes across the Borough.
- 3.2 Sandwell carries out a bi-annual survey with children and young people. The most recent Survey findings were published in June 2020. The Survey summarises the views of 876 children and young people from years 5 and 6 in primary schools, years 7 to 13 in secondary school, plus the views of parents and professionals. The four extracts below highlight important considerations for the Town Plans:

Along with crime issues and deprivation, it was evident from comments made that Sandwell does not have the best reputation in the eyes of all four groups. Although some of the adults did acknowledge it was improving and developing, the majority felt it was not somewhere where young people could build their future. Those who did want to stay or were unsure, their responses were based on their families living in Sandwell and it being familiar territory rather than the Borough itself.

**...when young people stated where they socialised with friends, many places were located out of Sandwell. The places they socialised in predominantly were parks and food outlets. Adults highlighted Sandwell parks were used for socialising, however the children and young people stated many parks outside of the borough, as they did with entertainment venues, days out and town centres they visit.**

Travel appeared to be a barrier for why young people being able to do activities they like to do, but the biggest barrier was having no-one to go with, and also for the secondary pupils they didn't know what activities were available.

**In terms of development for the future, despite parents feeling young people were educated well about careers, college, university education and apprenticeships, these are what the young people were most interested in learning about, therefore continuing to educate and provide them with information on these is important. Learning how to run your own business was something adults and young people felt they were not educated about, and yet it was something that over 30% of young people were interested in finding out more about. This also was highlighted as an area which all young people felt they were not competent in along with renting or buying their own home.**

3.2 What we haven't yet ascertained from previous engagement with young people is how they think things could be improved, what needs to be done.

#### **4. Proposal**

4.1 We have some information from children and young people, but more detailed work is needed to understand how to improve their experience of living in Sandwell so that they can see a bright future for themselves in the Borough.

4.2 The original proposal for young people's engagement in the Towns Fund planning suggested events and activities that would enable those more detailed conversations to take place but the Covid19 lockdown has meant that new ways of working will be needed in the time that remains available before submitting Plans. It is proposed that a young people's reference group is established, operating virtually, and ensuring that a dialogue can take place between the Town Boards, the SuperBoard, and young people. This will

require dedicated project capacity from August to December, prior to the submission deadline, as set out below:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Capacity</b>
Qualified youth worker time for engagement with the reference group	3 months @ 1 x Senior Youth Officer (SYO) x 6 hours per week
Qualified youth worker time to lead direct work with young people	3 months @ 1 Senior Youth Worker (SYW) x 10 hours per week
Qualified youth worker time to support direct work with young people	3 months @ 1 Youth Worker x 10 hours per week
Qualified youth worker time to support young people's participation in Town Board and/or SuperBoard meetings	3 months @ 1 SYO/SYW x 6 hours per month
Engagement activity resources and recognition for young people (eg book tokens/ high street vouchers)	

- 4.3 The added benefit to the proposal above is that it will enable the Town Boards and SuperBoards to engage directly with young people rather than only having young people's voices relayed by an adult.
- 4.4 Not only would this proposal be good practice, but by engaging young people in this way, we hope that the final Town Investment Plan submissions will have an edge that other areas may not be able to demonstrate.

