

Report to Sandwell Towns Fund Superboard

2 October 2020

Subject:	Update on Engagement Activities
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1 Recommendations

That the Superboard receive an update on the Engagement activities undertaken during Phase 1 of the Towns Fund Programme.

2 Purpose of the report

- 2.1 To provide an update on engagement activities undertaken during Phase 1 of the Towns Fund Programme and to identify key findings.

3 Current position/Background Details

- 3.1 At its meeting on 5 August 2020, the Superboard considered and approved an engagement strategy for Phase 1 of the Towns Fund Programme. The strategy identified two stages for engagement and consultation prior to the TIP submission. The first stage focuses on



ideas generation, and the second focuses on the development of our interventions.

- 3.2 Key stakeholders have been identified and invited to participate in the governance structure of the Towns Fund through membership of the Superboard and Local Boards.
- 3.3 There was a gap identified in young people's participation within the Towns Fund Programme. Young people have an important contribution to make in decisions that impact their lives, and their communities. A young people's virtual reference group has been established to conduct engagement with young people and to support the work of the Superboard and Local Boards. In addition, a young person's representative has been invited to participate in the Superboard meetings.

Summary of Engagement Activity – Stage 1 Ideas Generation

- 3.4 Stage 1 engagement activities focused on gathering views around the Towns Fund priorities for each Town and inviting ideas for improvements that could be taken forward as Towns Fund Projects. The engagement findings led to a set of priorities for each Town and a long list of projects.
- 3.5. A range of engagement and consultation methods were used as follows:
- **Use of data from previous engagement and consultation** (e.g. gathered through Vision 2030 consultation, through the formation of the Inclusive Economy Deal, SHAPE youth survey and play sufficiency assessment)
 - **#MyTown responses:** a website and # for anyone to submit comments on the Towns Fund Programme
 - **Social Media:** press releases, facebook, twitter and linked in inviting comments and signposting to residents survey
 - **One to One interviews:** conducted with stakeholders and partners in each Town
 - **Local Board and Superboard discussions**
 - **Youth engagement:** Face to face and virtual engagement via youth service, Discussions amongst SHAPE youth forum, and specific survey for Sandwell College students focusing on West Bromwich opportunities
 - **Consultation with elected Members**
 - **Phase 1 Residents Survey:** Informing residents about the emerging Towns Fund priorities for each Town and inviting comments and asking residents to identify what improvements they would like to see in their Towns

Summary of Stage 1 Findings

3.6 Rowley Regis

3.6.1 The residents survey invited views on the Towns Fund priorities identified by the Local Board. There were 142 responses with 92% of the survey respondents agreeing with the suggested priorities for Rowley Regis. Respondees identified additional priorities they would like to see addressed such as digital inclusion for older people or refurbishment of shop fronts.

3.6.2 **Young People:** Young people on the whole were supportive of the priorities identified by the Rowley Regis Local Board. The key issues and feedback from young people were around the need for better youth, recreational and leisure facilities, improvements to parks and open spaces, concerns around the perception of crime and safety and improved and safer transport options. Young people agreed with the priority around better access to more post 16 education opportunities in Rowley but asked that this be matched with better job prospects. Younger children felt constrained by their ability to play freely, referencing gangs, kidnapping and drug crime as concerns.

3.6.3 The findings from the Stage One engagement have supported the priorities for Rowley Regis Towns Fund as:

- Connectivity within and between the communities
- Making town centres more inclusive
- Raising education and skill aspirations
- Improving asset base
- Stalled sites

3.6.4 General findings from all the engagement activities in Rowley Regis included that people wanted to see more “brown land” to be used for re development instead of green spaces, existing green spaces to be improved, improved cycling routes, more education and skills development to developing young people and more affordable housing.

3.6.5 The engagement findings have contributed to project identification for the long list including the education facility for Rowley Regis, improvements to green spaces (through the accelerated funding proposals, and Britannia Park proposal), improvements to cycling routes through the

travel scheme, exploration of stalled sites, addressing safety concerns through the designs of Blackheath Town Centre improvements, and walking and cycling routes.

3.7 Smethwick

3.7.1 The residents survey invited views on the Towns Fund priorities identified by the Local Board. There were 208 responses with 90% of the survey respondees agreeing with the suggested priorities for Smethwick. Respondees identified additional priorities they would like to see addressed such as regeneration of old and historical buildings and investment in the high street.

3.7.2 **Young People:** The feedback from young people in Smethwick endorsed the local town board priorities. The key asks from young people were for better and improved youth facilities, improvements in green spaces to existing Multi Use Games Areas, skate parks, lighting and gym equipment. They also re-enforced the need for improved cycling lanes and better connectivity around the town. They saw the need for new and better education facilities in Smethwick but emphasised for this to be matched with better employment and career opportunities, ensuring that young people and talent was retained in the town. Younger children enjoyed playing out in the community with 92% saying they felt safe whilst playing out and identified major roads as the only constraining factor.

3.7.3 The findings from the Stage One engagement have supported the priorities for Smethwick Towns Fund as:

- Maximise local impact of major investments in hospital and Aquatics Centre
- Deliver more housing
- Regenerate and upgrade local assets
- Support good quality jobs

3.7.4 General findings from all the engagement activities included that people wanted to see education facilities/ training to support local people, improved/ safer connections to the whole of the town (roads, walking and cycling), improvements to public services, improved security provisions (Crime, ASB & fly tipping), environmental considerations (including development of green spaces), creation of more opportunities

for local people and businesses, housing improvements (including new low cost homes) and improved parking facilities.

3.7.5 The engagement findings have contributed to project identification for the long list including the Health and Education Centre proposal, improvements to cycling and walking provision, improvements to heritage assets, regeneration for housing, and green space improvements.

3.8 West Bromwich

3.8.1 The residents survey invited views on the Towns Fund priorities identified by the Local Board. There were 177 responses with 90% of the survey respondents agreeing with the suggested priorities for West Bromwich. Respondees identified additional priorities they would like to see addressed such as free parking, climate change and more places for social activities in West Bromwich.

3.8.2 **Sandwell College survey:** 632 students from Sandwell college responded to an online survey which asked them 10 questions relating to their experiences in West Bromwich, what improvements they wanted to see and what challenges they faced. Key findings included a cleaner high street, an arcade or gaming centre, a new drinks and food hall and more green space. Additionally, 25% asked for full fibre internet access and new live entertainment venues.

3.8.3 **Young People:** The wider consultation with young people endorsed the local board priorities. Some of the key issues and improvements resonated with those of students from the College, especially around youth, leisure and recreational facilities, including a games centre, youth lounges and social spaces for eating and drinking in the town centre. Crime and safety remain high on young people's agenda especially during the evenings. The young people felt that whilst they welcomed raising aspirations through education and improving provision this needed to be coupled with better job and career opportunities. Younger children want to see improvements in outdoor spaces where they can play freely and especially in more built up areas.

3.8.4 The findings from the Stage One engagement have supported the priorities for West Bromwich Towns Fund as:

- Reinvigorate the town centre
- Unlock land to aid regeneration
- Support good quality jobs
- Stimulate COVID Recovery

3.8.5 General findings from all the engagement activities included that people wanted to see opportunities created for all of the community (Age, Race, Religion), improvements to the retail offering, improved security provisions, improved connections to the whole of the town (roads, walking and cycling) and improved housing.

3.8.6 The engagement findings have contributed to project identification for the long list including improvements to the Town Centre through outdoor market improvements (accelerated funding), green corridor and town centre retail development, facilities for young people through social space in the Town Centre and Town Hall proposals and improving access to job and career opportunities through strengthening the mechanical engineering training offer. Concerns around safety in the town centre will be considered throughout the full business case development phase of all the Towns Fund proposals.

Summary of Engagement Activity underway – Stage 2 Intervention Development

3.9 During Stage 2, engagement and consultation is being used in a more targeted way to shape the proposed interventions and test their feasibility and acceptability. The findings from the stage 2 engagement will shape the details of the Outline Business Cases for projects and inform the full business cases (which will be developed subject to a Town Deal being agreed).

3.10 The following methods are being used:

- Phase 2 Residents Survey: 21 September – 30 September
Informing local people about the proposed shortlisted projects in each of the towns, inviting their views on the project they feel will be most impactful and what they would like to see included in the shortlisted projects for their Towns. Promotion on social media, press release, discussions with local groups, board members,

stakeholders, businesses, elected members are some of ways we have been promoting the survey.

- Youth Engagement – reference group meetings, further consultation with Shape Youth Forum and wider engagement through detached youth work and social media is planned in each town week commencing 21st September. Feedback will be provided at each local board meeting and a summary at Super Board.
- #MyTown responses
- Social Media
- Local Board and Superboard discussions
- Project specific workshops
- Consultation with elected Members

3.10 The residents survey will close on 30 September. A high-level analysis will be shared with the Superboard during the meeting on 2 October as part of the discussion around the proposed shortlist for each Town. The detailed analysis will be available for the Superboard meeting on 20 October and included in the Town Investment Plans.

3.11 A summary of the discussions with the Young People's Reference Group will be provided during the meeting on 2 October.

4. Source Documents

Engagement Strategy approved by Superboard 5 August 2020
Youth Engagement Proposal