

Minutes of Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board

**18 December 2023 at 3:30pm
at Friar Park Millennium Centre**

Present: M Jardine (Chair), Cllr P Hughes, Cllr T Fitzgerald, Cllr L Giles, Cllr J Chidley, S Bailey MP, B Hussain, V Breakwell, K Titley, N Woodcock, Sgt R Phillips, J Fellows,

Also present: A Blakeway, L Brookes-Smith, J Dolphin, C Felicio, R Jenkins, T Mitchell, A Sangha, J Satchwell, T Stokes

01/23 **Chair's Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed Board Members and attendees to the Board. Participants introduced themselves.

02/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from the following board members:

- N Richards MP
- Chief Insp P Griffiths
- Insp G Tomlinson
- S Shingadia
- C Geddes

Apologies were received from the following Sandwell Council support Officers

- M Jones – Monitoring Officer
- B Arnold – Section 151 Officer
- A Davey – Director Borough Economy

03/23 **Declarations of Interest**



The Chair asked Board Members to raise any declarations of interest. None were forthcoming.

Board Members were reminded to contact the Council's Monitoring Officer with any queries or support needed around declaring interests.

04/23 **Appointment of a Vice Chair**

No expressions of interest for the Vice Chair position had been received prior to the meeting. Item deferred to next Board Meeting.

05/23 **Background to Levelling Up Partnership**

A presentation was delivered by T Stokes, R Jenkins and J Dolphin setting out background information around the Levelling Up Partnership including the process to develop the partnership, an overview of the interventions and a summary of the information from the deep dive activity conducted by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities.

Points raised during the discussion included:

- A welcome focus through the LUP on skills and addressing residents' safety concerns
- The need for outputs for each project to be made clear in communication with residents
- Importance of keeping residents informed throughout the programme
- Importance of young people's engagement. Ideas were raised for local youth groups to be contacted to participate and a young people's board/equivalent to be held
- Current work being conducted by Public Health around mental health, physical health and how to make residents aware of available support. Public Health are also working with GPs on Social Prescribing and the Wellbeing Offer.

Actions:

- L Brookes-Smith to bring an item to the next board to update members on the work in Public Health around Physical



Health, Mental Health, Worklessness and Support available to residents.

- Communications and Engagement Plan to be brought to next meeting including outline of engagement with young people's groups
- Board Members to be invited to contribute to the Communications and Engagement Plan
- Project outputs and scope to be reported to next Board meeting

The Board noted the information contained in the report

6/23

Community Safety Project

The Board received a presentation from T Mitchell setting out the rationale for the community safety project and the project outline which includes CCTV enhancement and expansion, deployable cameras, nuisance bike measures, and a Community and Business Engagement Officer.

Points raised during the discussion included:

- A welcoming of the project as feedback captured recently in the Sandwell Resident Survey showed a high fear of crime and fear of being in the town during day and night.
- CCTV enhancement and expansion is part of a wider package of crime and anti-social behaviour deterrents including additional patrols and residents' information
- New CCTV cameras will be of better quality to allow better identification. A similar scheme was being run in Bearwood and was working well.
- Communication with residents needs to be clear that the LUP projects will not stop offences but are part of a broader package. Sgt R Phillips suggested that the communication should include an ask to residents to provide information through 101, or live chat
- The Radio Link scheme will include the purchase of equipment to allow stores in Wednesbury Town Centre to communicate with



each other on concerns or offences (i.e identifying shoplifters) and the Engagement Officer will be working with stores on how to best utilise them.

- In relation to a query raised around the sustainability plan for the Radio Link scheme, that the scheme is mirroring a project in Bearwood. The Community and Business Engagement Officer will link directly with businesses and there will be open communication between Officers, Police Colleagues, EPO's and the store owners for continuous support.
- That a safe spaces scheme allows the shop to be a space where residents can enter if they feel anxious, in danger or in concern; the staff will be able to call for taxis and other support as needed. Store staff will undertake training, this will become part of the community support across Wednesbury Town Centre and residents will be made aware of which stores are participating (e.g. posters in windows)

Actions:

- T Mitchell to share evaluation work from the roll out of the Bearwood community safety scheme.
- Future project updates to include to include information around the added value of the scheme along with information around other community safety initiatives to increase perceptions of safety and reduction of crime and ASB
- Communications and Engagement Plan to be brought to the next meeting (reference action in Item 5 above)

Resolved that:- Delivery commence of the CCTV scheme and Business Crime Reduction Partnership

Sgt R Phillips left the meeting

7/23 Greenspaces project

The Board received a presentation from J Satchwell setting out the rationale for the greenspaces projects and details of the designs. The four greenspaces projects are Hydes Road, Wyntor Road Open Space, Balls Hill Playing Fields, Norbury Road and Lakeside Open



Space.

Points raised during the discussion included that:

- A Board Member had received feedback from young people that a barrier to using parks was that there is no/poor lighting. Confirmation was provided that lighting is included within the plans
- In relation to Hydes Road Playing Fields that:
 - improvements to the building and car park were welcome together with an opportunity to provide facilities for the Bowling Club and other clubs
 - Officers are aware of issues around the car park access and complaints from parents of the nearby school and that Highways are reviewing options
- In relation to Balls Hill Playing Fields that:
 - The concrete area is not in Council ownership
 - Fencing around the whole site is not being considered as the football provision is informal football not for league matches. Planting is being looked at to increase the natural barrier.

Information was provided to the Board that following a capital appraisal undertaken by the Council, the Council's S151 Officer has approved that project spend can commence subject to a final review of cost estimates for the project. The Board are being asked to approve delivery, subject to the Council's S151 review.

Action: That any concerns raised by the S151 Officer, as a result of their review of the greenspaces project costs, be reported to the Board.

Resolved that:- Project delivery commence of the following greenspaces projects: Wyntor Road Open Space, Balls Hill Playing Fields, Norbury Road and Lakeside Open Space subject to Section 151 Officer sign-off.

The meeting was adjourned at 16:45 and resumed at 17:05



Cllr T Fitzgerald, N Woodcock, and J Satchwell left the meeting.

8/23 **Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan and Public Realm Improvement**

The Board received a presentation from C Felicio providing an outline of the two LUP projects.

Further to the written report, the Board were informed that public consultation around the masterplan was scheduled for March 2024 but is being reviewed and may now occur in May 2024 to avoid the election period.

Points raised during the discussion included:

- The importance of the route between the Metro and the Town Centre including building wayfinding to the Town Hall and Art Gallery area
- Ideas for the former market area to include play provision for younger children
- The importance of the consultation plan so residents are updated and involved. Ideas raised included using market stalls for resident consultation and surveys and that Board Members should be encouraged to attend any consultations that occur
- Concerns around the traffic around the main island near the Fire Station and that many avoid using the town due to traffic jams. This has previously been reviewed by Highways and a suggestion was made that this is revisited.
- That there are no council owned shops in Wednesbury Town Centre
- Potential for a forum to keep residents engaged e.g. 'Friends of the Town' group beyond the LUP programme.

Action: That details of the consultation plan be reported to the Board.

The Board received the progress update

9/23 **Millennium Centre**



The Board received a presentation from A Blakeway setting out the rationale to improve the current offer at the centre and make better utilisation of the space available to meet the needs of the existing community as well as providing for the future community created as a result of the 630 new homes.

As part of early consultation activity for the project, attendees at a recent Christmas event at the Millennium Centre were asked to identify their priorities. 285 people participated in this informal survey. Further consultation is planned in February 2024.

£2m LUP funding is available for the project and Officers are awaiting costs for initial designs. A small extension at the entrance of the building is planned to integrate the Café and Library together with interior remodelling. Designs may need to be re-visited once costings have been reviewed.

Points raised during the discussion included:

- That Millennium Centre staff are fully involved in the project
- That the youth service will be moving into the centre shortly expanding the offer to young people
- That the Council's Education and Skills team are involved with the project with a view to extending their offer from the centre
- Whether young people outside of Friar Park are likely to be attracted to the centre. Clarification was provided by L Matthews that the centre has referrals and participants from across Sandwell
- Whether Lottery Funding (original funders of the MC) may be able to offer match funding
- Views from young people that the centre is a good place for young people to get to know each other and have their own space to do things

The Board received the progress update

10/23

Friar Park Urban Village



The Board received a presentation from A Blakeway and R Jenkins setting out the project outline and Board role in relation to the project.

Board Members were advised that the LUP funding is associated with the land remediation phase of the Friar Park Urban Village project and that the overall project is governed by a Project Board supported by a Joint Venture Forum between Sandwell Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Board Members were advised that the Board's focus will be on the land remediation component of the project that is funded through the Levelling Up Partnership Grant.

Points raised during the discussion included:

- Comments around the housing development standards to ensure contributions to carbon reduction
- That communication and engagement with residents needs to be clear that the LUP funding is assisting with the remediation strategy for the site and visible change to the site will be limited.
- Suggestions for communication methods included the use of billboards so residents can see what work is taking place and is planned, and holding drop-in sessions at the Millennium Centre.
- Contingency plans to manage the project risk

Action:

- That a Member of the JV Board be invited to attend the WLUP Board
- That further details of the communication and engagement plan be provided

The Board noted the information in the report and that regular progress updates will be provided to the WLUP Board for assurance purpose

11/23

Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board Forward Plan

R Jenkins drew Board Members' attention to the forward plan included in the papers.



Board Members were reminded to complete the governance paperwork distributed and to raise any queries with the Monitoring Officer at the earliest opportunity.

Actions:

- That Board Members advise R Jenkins of their preference for future meeting times and meeting format (in-person/ hybrid / virtual)
- That Board Members complete their governance paperwork and raise any queries with the Monitoring Officer at the earliest opportunity.

12/23 **Chair's Closing Remarks**

The Chair closed the meeting and thanked Board Members and Officers attending in support for their contributions.

Meeting ended at 18:15

Contact: Wednesbury_LUP@sandwell.gov.uk

