

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	6 th November 2023
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Committee Date	14 th November 2023

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Cynlluniau Tymor Hir ar gyfer Trefi / Long Term Plan for Towns

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides the main points from guidance regarding the 'Long Term Plan for Towns' programme. In doing so meeting the scrutiny goal of: 'Scrutiny to be provided information relating to the funding offered through Central Government and to be informed of initial progress made to development of the plan and how funding will be invested. Where appropriate, Members will offer recommendations to further develop the plan'.
- 1.2 There is an investment of £1.1 billion into 55 towns. There are 4 Local Authority areas in Wales, Merthyr Tydfil is one of them. Each town will have a £20 million endowment-style fund to invest over the next decade. There is a 25% Resource, 75% Capital split.
- 1.3 Each town will develop a Long-Term Plan to invest in and regenerate their town, based on the priorities of local people, and put to local people for consultation.
- 1.4 There are three investment themes, namely 'Safety and Security', 'High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration' and 'Transport and Connectivity'.
- 1.5 Each town's Long-Term Plan should be produced no later than Summer 2024 and drawn up by a new Towns Board.
- 1.6 By April 2024 – local authorities to bring local partners together to form Town Boards, or expand existing Town Deal Boards where these exist, and start the process of setting out a long-term vision based on local priorities.

1.7 Spring 2024 – Once a Town Board has been set up, capacity funding will be released to support the development of investment plans, including additional community engagement activities. Ongoing engagement will be available from the Towns Taskforce.

1.8 From Summer 2024 – Submission of Long-Term Plans and release of year one funding. We will be in touch with the local authorities in these 55 towns to provide further guidance and discuss next steps.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

2.1 This report be noted and debated relating to the funding offered through Central Government and initial progress made to development of the plan and how funding will be invested.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 There is an investment of £1.1 billion into 55 towns. Each town will have a £20 million endowment-style fund to invest over the next decade, empowering them to develop a plan for the long-term, not a plan to the end of the financial year; taking endowment principles to maximise the flexibility and impact of funding. There is a 25% Resource, 75% Capital split.

3.2 There are 4 Local Authority areas in Wales. These are Merthyr Tydfil (town being Merthyr Tydfil), Torfaen (town being Cwmbrân), Wrexham (place being Wrexham) and Vale of Glamorgan (town being Barry (Vale of Glamorgan)).

3.3 Each town will develop a Long-Term Plan to invest in and regenerate their town, based on the priorities of local people, and put to local people for consultation.

3.3.1 Towns will have freedom to develop plans that meet local priorities across the investment themes.

3.3.2 They will not be subject to onerous reporting requirements; instead, the Towns Taskforce will engage towns to monitor progress and help address problems that arise.

3.3.3 Towns will be able to roll over funding into future years if best to deliver priority interventions to a high standard and will remain responsible for ensuring good use of public funds.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 Wales - Delivery Structures

In Scotland and Wales UK Government will also work with local partners, including local authorities and the devolved administrations, to make sure funding and support aligns with other programmes to have the best possible impact.

UK Government know this is a shared priority, and will work with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to consider how best we apply this approach to towns in Scotland and Wales.

In England the local authority will be the accountable body for funding and will be responsible for ensuring good use of public funds via existing Section 151 officer duties, according to the priorities set out by the Town Board in each town's Long-Term Plan. In Scotland and Wales UK Government are minded to use the Financial Assistance power under Section 50 of the UKIM Act to fund towns directly while working with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to determine the most appropriate delivery structures.

4.2 Capital Funding

The UK Government will provide capacity funding in 2024/25 for local stakeholder working with relevant local authorities to establish a new Town Board, or to expand and adapt an existing Town Board.

The capacity funding will support the ongoing running of the board and the development of their town's Long Term Plan, including community engagement activities.

This funding forms part of the overall funding package each town's Long-Term Plan is able to receive.

This capacity funding will be accompanied by central engagement support in its delivery.

Once Board structures are in place, capacity funding will be made available from Spring 2024 for Boards to build on their vision and priorities to write their Town Plan.

4.3 Taskforce

UK Government are establishing a Towns Taskforce, reporting directly to the Prime Minister and Levelling Up Secretary.

Working with the Levelling Up Inter-Ministerial Group, the Taskforce would look to attract private and philanthropic investment into the towns, championing the investment opportunities to building on the endowment-style funding granted.

As part of this UK Government will extend the current High Streets Task Force, to provide each selected town with bespoke, hands-on support from place-making experts. It will work flexibly and collaboratively with Town Boards, delivering tangible outputs and outcomes on their behalf.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

5.1 Three investment themes

Towns will receive funding and support of £20 million to provide a range of interventions across the investment themes and will have ten years to deliver these, providing long-term certainty to deliver significant improvements in their towns.

5.1.1 Safety and Security

- Following the launch of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Action Plan this year in England and Wales, towns will now be able to use this funding to reduce crime and improve safety in their local area.
- Interventions could include new and improved security infrastructure, such as CCTV and street lighting; providing additional hotspot policing and local authority wardens; as well as diversionary activity through ASB awareness courses and support for community outreach facilities.

5.1.2 High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration

- Towns would be able to use this funding to enhance their town centres, making them and their buildings more attractive and accessible to residents, businesses, and visitors in a post Covid environment.
- Interventions could include remediating and repurposing vacant department stores – including converting these to high quality housing; preserving and improving heritage sites in the town; creating and maintaining parks and green spaces; supporting high street cleaning projects; new markets/high street days; establishing Business Improvement Districts; running high street rental auctions; supporting skills and community development so local people can take up opportunities that emerge from business-led regeneration.

5.1.3 Transport and Connectivity

- Investment will need to be used alongside other themes, particularly safety and security, to ensure that transport options are seen as attractive and safe. But used well, this funding could make towns more connected - increasing footfall and viability – to high streets and local shopping centres, and accessibility to local employment opportunities.
- Interventions could include new infrastructure schemes; road improvements; new programmes to encourage cycling; and making the town centre more walkable and accessible.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

6.1 Long Term Plan

Each town's Long-Term Plan should be produced no later than Summer 2024.

We will expect these Long-Term Plans to include:

- A clear articulation, evidenced by local engagement, of the priorities of town residents;
- A plan for how the £20 million endowment-style funding and support will be deployed in line with investment themes to support these priorities;
- How local authorities, community groups and businesses are using their existing assets and resources to support these priorities;
- How the Town Board intends to attract additional private and philanthropic investment to support these priorities;
- How members of the Town Board are using their existing powers and flexibilities – including but not limited to those in the Toolkit – to support these priorities.
- From Summer 2024, we will provide the first year of funding to support the interventions set out in the Long-Term Plan. This will be subject to assessment of the Plan by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
- We will work with selected towns to discuss the details of this assessment and full expectations of Long-Term Plans.
- The allocation of funding will be non-competitive, and we expect to work collaboratively with places through the Towns Taskforce and existing local relationships to develop Plans.
- Further details on next steps will follow in engagement with selected towns.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 Towns Boards - Each town will have a Long-Term Plan drawn up by a new Towns Board.

7.2 The Boards will comprise a group of local organisations, including:

- 7.2.1 Community partners. Such as community groups, faith groups and local charities, the neighbourhood forum, the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS).
- 7.2.2 Local businesses and social enterprises. Such as the chair or board members for the Business Improvement District (BID), key local employers or investors in the town.
- 7.2.3 Key cultural, arts, heritage and sporting organisations.
- 7.2.4 Public sector agencies such as representatives from schools or police subject to local priorities.
- 7.2.5 The local MP, relevant local authorities, including the parish or town council, where one exists, and a representative of the Mayoral, Combined or Upper Tier Authority where relevant.

7.3 Town Boards to be chaired by a businessperson or a local community leader, to ensure that the board fully reflects the priorities of the town. Where the town already has a Town Deal Board in place, they will be able to repurpose the Board. In doing so, they should use the opportunity to make sure that they have the right members

round the table to drive forward their priorities, including community partners, public sector agencies and cultural organisations.

7.4 Town Boards will be responsible for:

- Identifying the issues and priorities to focus on for the Long-Term Plan, including supporting a process of ongoing community engagement.
- Working with the local authority to develop the Long-Term Plan for their town, setting out how local partners will use their knowledge, powers, assets and new funding to deliver for their communities.
- Identifying opportunities for Board members to utilise specific powers, such as neighbourhood planning, to drive forward their Long-Term Plan.
- Identifying opportunities to bring in additional philanthropic or private investment to support the Long-Term Plan for their town.
- Overseeing the delivery of projects set out in their Long-Term Plan.

7.5 Boards will make sure the priorities within the Plan are underpinned by a shared vision with local people:

- A process of meaningful engagement should help Boards define the key issues to tackle, identify strengths and resources within the community and test potential projects.
- This might include engaging local people through events, community workshops, online consultations, and surveys.
- Board members will draw on relationships with other community leaders and community groups to make sure the engagement is diverse and representative of the whole community.
- Boards might choose to establish subcommittees to focus on particular investment strategies or projects, or to drive forward particular themes, such as community engagement.

7.6 Powers and levers

- Town Boards, through their constituent members, have access to a range of levers and flexibilities to drive improvement and unlock barriers to regeneration and development. The UK Government will expect Long-Term Plans to demonstrate that they are convening the full range of powers available to them to achieve the best possible outcomes for their places in line with their investment priorities.
- The UK Government will develop a toolkit, building on the powers identified below, in partnership with local authorities, including identifying opportunities for extending and strengthening powers in the future and helping local authorities to make full use of new powers shortly coming into force. The UK Government will also look at where local authorities can be granted more flexibility over exercising these powers without requiring central government approvals.

7.7 Expected timelines:

- By April 2024 – local authorities to bring local partners together to form Town Boards, or expand existing Town Deal Boards where these exist, and start the process of setting out a long-term vision based on local priorities.

- Spring 2024 – Once a Town Board has been set up, capacity funding will be released to support the development of investment plans, including additional community engagement activities. Ongoing engagement will be available from the Towns Taskforce.
- From Summer 2024 – Submission of Long-Term Plans and release of year one funding. We will be in touch with the local authorities in these 55 towns to provide further guidance and discuss next steps.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 This report considers the long-term plan for towns. As such, this will strengthen how we deliver our Wellbeing Objective ‘A Safe & Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil’ (We will support how our economy recovers and grows).

ALYN OWEN
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COUNCILLOR MICHELLE SYMONDS
CABINET MEMBER FOR
REGENERATION, HOUSING AND
PUBLIC PROTECTION

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No