

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 13 June 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Major Projects, Community Safety, Environment and Urban Renewal, Employment, Learning and Skills and Leisure, Community and Culture.

SUBJECT: Long term Plan for Towns, Funding for Runcorn.

WARD(S) Runcorn Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report sets out detail to date about the Long-Term Plan for Towns funding which was allocated to Runcorn in the Spring Budget 2024.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1. The Board accepts external grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) of £19.5m in relation to the Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT).**
- 2. Agree that the Council will act as Accountable Body for the LTPT Programme.**
- 3. The Executive Director, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, be authorised to amend the Towns Fund Board terms of reference and membership to reflect the criteria of the Long-Term Funding for Towns criteria.**
- 4. In consultation with the Town Deal Board, Deputy Leader and Member of Parliament for Runcorn and Helsby, authority be delegated to the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, to spend the £200,000 capacity funding to develop a ten-year Vision and three-year Investment Plan to submit to Government by 1st November 2024; and**
- 5. Delegate authority to the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration and the Section 151**

Officer, to agree and complete Funding Agreements with partners that will deliver the LTPT for Runcorn projects on behalf of the Council, as the Accountable Body for the Programme.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 In the 2024 Spring budget the Government announced Phase 2 of their Long-Term Plan for Towns programme which identified Runcorn as one of 20 additional towns across the country which would benefit from £19.5m “endowment-style” funding to invest over a 10-year period in local priorities.
- 3.2 Selection for funding allocation was undertaken by Government according to the Levelling Up Needs Index which considered metrics covering skills, pay, productivity, and health, as well as the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- 3.3 The Government’s intention is that the £20m endowment style funding (25% revenue/75% capital) over a 10-year period will provide long-term certainty to deliver a range of interventions within three broad investment themes:
1. Safety and Security
 2. High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration
 3. Transport and Connectivity
- 3.4 To access the funding Halton will need to produce a Long-Term Plan for Runcorn. The funding will be devolved directly to Halton and any annual underspend will be able to roll over into future years. Halton Borough Council will be the accountable body and will remain responsible for ensuring good use of public funds through the existing duties of the Section 151 officer.
- 3.5 The Government issued guidance on 1 October 2023 which required each town to establish a Town Board to oversee the development of the Long-Term Plan. On 18 December 2023, the DLUHC published further guidance which provided details on the membership and methodology for establishing new Town Boards, information on capacity funding, and the required content of the Long-Term Plan.
- 3.6 Halton proposes to repurpose its existing Towns Fund Board, in line with Government guidance to ensure compliance with this guidance and to avoid duplication. Board member names must be submitted to DLUHC by 1st June 2024.
- 3.7 The Terms of Reference for the Board will be based on learning from the Towns Fund Programme Governance model, adapting

arrangements from the existing Town Deal Board. The new Board will review and finalise the Terms of Reference at its first meeting in July 24.

- 3.8 The Long-Term Plan will include the ten-year Vision for Runcorn and a three-year Investment Plan, setting out how the funding will be allocated and spent, with the local authority as the body ultimately accountable for funding. The endowment approach means that funding is released over a 7-year period and local authorities have the flexibility to spend it over 10 years, with 'light touch' assurance from DLUHC.
- 3.9 DLUHC have released 50K of capacity funding to Halton Borough Council, to establish the Town Deal Board. A further £200k capacity funding will be issued to the local authority to develop the plan which is to be submitted by the 1 November 2024. Government expects this funding to be utilised for convening a Town Deal Board, community engagement, support to the Town Deal Board to develop the Long-Term Plan, and technical expertise for project development, including feasibility studies and business cases.
- 3.10 The Plan will need to include a vision statement, a strategic case for the future of the town, planned interventions across the three investment themes, evidence of community engagement, how the Board will attract additional investment and high-level milestones.
- 3.11 Government have provided a list of interventions which have already been assessed – **see Appendix 1** - as having a strong case for investment, value for money and benefit-to-cost ratio. Should the Board pursue these interventions, a business case will not be required as part of the assessment process. However, should the Board wish to pursue bespoke or 'off-menu' interventions an outline business will be required.
- 3.12 Government has advised there is scope to make representations to DLUHC to alter the Long-Term Plan investment boundary, where an amendment remains within the spirit of the programme and includes, as part of the revised area, the town that was originally selected and must remain contiguous. Any representation to amend the investment boundary need to be confirmed by 1 June 2024 and must be agreed by the Town Board.
- 3.13 A High Streets and Towns Task Force will provide bespoke support to individual places to assist with delivery of the Long-Term Plan.
- 3.14 Due to the challenging timescales, the Council may need to appoint consultancy services to provide the necessary expertise and support to the Board to help develop the Plan.

- 3.15 The Government guidance requires the Council to act as the Accountable Body for the programme and funding.
- 3.16 In accordance with the guidance the make-up of the Town Board should be comprised of:
- Public sector agencies (e.g. schools, police, and health sector) subject to local priorities. Police representation is expected to be the local Police and Crime Commissioner, although (subject to agreement from the Chairperson) a local senior representative can act as substitute; and,
 - The local Member of Parliament, a representative of the Mayoral or Combined Authority or Upper Tier Authority were relevant, and relevant local authority representatives. In terms of the local authority representation, the guidance limits elected Councillor representatives to two in order to promote community leadership.
- 3.17 Other membership should be tailored to local context and is at the Chairperson's discretion, but might comprise:
- Local businesses and social enterprises (including key local employers and investors).
 - Key cultural, arts, heritage and sporting organisations.
 - Community partners from community groups, faith groups, charities, neighbourhood forums and the local Council for Voluntary Service
- 3.18 The Council should invite a Chairperson for the Town Board, after considering who is "best placed to convene partners and is a respected figure in the community with an obvious passion for the place".

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The potential significant investment described in this report flows from the Council's strategic policies contained in the Local Plan, the Mersey Gateway Plus Regeneration Strategy, and the Local Transport Plan.
- 4.2 These strategic documents are supported at a more detailed level by documents that capture the Council's ambitions at a more focussed scale, for example the Runcorn Station Quarter Masterplan, Runcorn Vision documents and The Runcorn Town Investment Plan.
- 4.3 The vision for Runcorn in the Town Investment Plan is building on our strong local economy and strategic location, we will reconnect the Old Town to Runcorn and the wider region so that it becomes an attractive and vibrant place to work, live in and to visit.

- 4.4 The ambition for the Runcorn Old Town area is:
- Build a stronger town centre
 - Improve linkages, accessibility and movement
 - Utilise assets, waterways, culture and heritage
 - Grow the residential offer
 - Realise the full potential of the mainline station and
 - Connectivity to major cities.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Long-Term Plan when submitted on the 1 November 2024 will cover an initial three-year period of investment. The Long-Term Plan will then be reviewed after that three-year period and it may become necessary to prepare a revised plan, which could come at costs not dissimilar to the initial capacity funding provided by Government.

5.2 When the initial 3-year plan is finalised, the financial implications will be clearer. If applicable as part of the project proposals, they will be asked what the future (on-going) service costs are and how they will be funded.

6.0 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

The Long-Term Plan funding for Runcorn could support activities for our young people.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

In the long-term there are strong prospects of new job creation as a result of the potential projects bought forward by this funding.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The Long-Term Plan funding for Runcorn will support well-being and cultural activities for our communities. One of the key strands is High Street, Heritage & Regeneration.

6.4 A Safer Halton

The Long-term Plan funding programme will support a safer Halton. One of the key strands is Safety & Security.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The guiding principle for the LTPT funding programme is to meet local needs and attract further investment into the town. This will ensure social value through place making and job creation and support existing businesses. Projects in the Long-Term Plan will proactively support the provision of social value outcomes.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 With any funding and regeneration programme there are risks associated with uncertainty arising from various aspects of the process, such as securing further funding, material availability and fluctuating prices, severe weather, securing regulatory consents, environment factors and from unexpected issues when work starts (such as contamination, uncharted utilities). These risks are impossible to eradicate and are dealt with by the inclusion of contingencies to draw upon. Consequently, if any of these key risks arise in project delivery, the consequence usually translates into increased costs and extended programmes for completion of the works.

7.2 To mitigate these risks, detailed project planning and survey work is always undertaken.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 While the programme is foreseen to have significant and positive impact on people, the Long-Term Plan has not yet been developed. This report seeks approval for the Council to be the Accountable Body for the funding and this in itself does not have a direct impact on people. Equality and diversity implications will continue to be considered in the development of the Long-Term Plan and it's likely that Equality Impact Assessments will be part of the delivery stage.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The development of the Long-Term Plan and the initial three-year investment strategy will look to ensure that proposals make a positive contribution towards the Council's commitment to achieving "Net Zero" emissions, supporting the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Appendix 1

Safety and security interventions

S1: Design and management of the built and landscaped environment to 'design out crime'. This might include:

- promoting the active use of streets and public spaces throughout the daytime and evening
- improvements to streetlighting
- installation of new CCTV

S2: Engage with Police Force and together consider interventions to focus on visible crime prevention in defined areas places. Interventions could include:

- hotspot policing
- problem-oriented policing

S3: Measures to prevent anti-social behaviour, crime and reduce reoffending. These might include:

- sports programmes designed to prevent crime and reduce reoffending.
- mentoring
- police-led pre-charge diversion models for young offenders
- focused deterrence strategies
- halfway house programmes

S4: Measures to reduce repeat burglary. These might include:

- Neighbourhood Watch
- provision of crime prevention advice
- property marking
- target hardening (increasing the security of a property)
- cocoon watch (provision of crime prevention advice, support and guidance to neighbours and surrounding addresses of burgled properties)
- alley gating

High streets, heritage and regeneration interventions

H1: Funding for place-based regeneration and town centre and high street improvements, which could include better accessibility for disabled people, including capital spend and running costs. This might include:

- regenerating a town square or high street
- public realm improvements, for example street furniture or other decorative improvements
- the delivery of outreach, engagement and participatory programmes for community spaces, including youth centres and public libraries

H2: Funding for new or improvements to existing, community and neighbourhood infrastructure projects and assets including those that increase communities' resilience to natural hazards, such as flooding, and support for decarbonisation of facilities, energy efficiency audits, and installation of energy efficiency and renewable measures in community buildings (including capital spend and running costs). This might include:

- building new or updating existing defences to increase communities' resilience to natural hazards like flooding or coastal erosion.

H3: Creation of an improvement to local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments. Improvements to the natural environment and the incorporation of more of these natural features into wider public spaces. This might include:

- development of a new park, particularly in areas with the least access to greenspace
- development of a new park or community garden
- improvements to a canal towpath, particularly in more deprived neighbourhoods
- urban or riparian tree planting
- changes to management of green spaces and verges
- regeneration of existing parks or community gardens, particularly in areas with poor quality parks and gardens
- improving access to existing parks

H4: Enhanced support for arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities, projects and facilities and historic institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer. This might include:

- the delivery of events programmes for community spaces, including youth centres and public libraries
- the development, restoration or refurbishment of local natural, cultural and heritage assets and sites

H5: Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities. This might include:

- funding for maker spaces
- funding for local art galleries, museums, libraries for exhibitions
- support for displays for artists to showcase work.
- locally led music and theatre performances, tours, author events and film screenings
- funding for cultural, heritage and creative events
- support for outreach, engagement, participatory programmes as part of wider local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities.
- support for the establishment and development of cultural, heritage collaborative networks to share knowledge locally.

H6: Funding for the development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit and explore the local area. This might include:

- campaigns promoting the local area and its culture, heritage, leisure and visitor offer to residents and visitors.
- campaigns to encourage visitors from further afield to visit and stay in the region, collaborating with other places where appropriate.

H7: Funding for impactful volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places. This might include:

- funding for local volunteering groups, such as youth charities and carer's groups
- support for people to develop volunteering and social action projects locally.

H8: Funding for local sports facilities, tournaments, teams and leagues; to bring people together. This might include:

- renovation and maintenance of existing sports facilities
- support for community sports leagues.
- regeneration of an unused area to build sports facilities.
- creation of new 3G sports pitches and other sports facilities

H9: Investment in capacity building, resilience (which could include climate change resilience) and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. This might include:

- funding for community spaces, such as village halls, libraries or community centres for local civil society and community groups to use.

- support for people to develop volunteering and social action projects locally.

H10: Investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities.

H11: Investment in open markets and improvements to town centre retail and service sector infrastructure, with wrap around support for small businesses. This might include:

- funding to support the establishment and ongoing running of a new open-air market.
- business support activity for entrepreneurs

H12: Funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as local attractions, trails, tours and tourism products more generally. This might include:

- development of local visitor trails and tours
- grants for the development, promotion and upkeep of local tourist attractions
- development of other local visitor experiences based around the local offer.

H13: Grants to help places bid for and host international business events and conferences that support wider local growth sectors. This might include:

- grants to bid for, secure and hold a conference for a leading sector locally.