

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 10th July 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Deputy Leader

SUBJECT: Plan for Neighbourhoods Fund, Runcorn

WARD(S) Runcorn Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Plan for Neighbourhoods (PfN) funding programme; this programme was formerly called Long Term Plan for Towns and was originally allocated to Runcorn in the Spring Budget 2024.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board

- 1. Acknowledge the new name of the Board – Runcorn Town Neighbourhood Board as directed by MHCLG/central Government;**
- 2. Note the updated Terms of Reference to reflect the change of name and requirements of the new Plan for Neighbourhoods directive;**
- 3. Note the updated list of interventions (funding themes); and**
- 4. Note the timeline for submission of key documents to MHCLG and for delivery.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 In the 2024 Spring budget the then 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 an allocation of £19.5m to invest over a 10-year period in local priorities.
- 3.2 Selection for the funding allocation was undertaken by then 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 (IMD).

- 3.3 In March 2025 the Long Term Plan for Towns was renamed Plan for Neighbourhoods (PfN) by the new Government administration and the timeline for commencing delivery was pushed back to April 2026. The intention remains that the £19.5m funding (25% revenue/75% capital) over a 10-year period will provide long-term certainty to deliver a range of interventions.
- 3.4 These interventions have been updated under the following headings:
- Regeneration, High Streets, Heritage
 - Housing
 - Work, Productivity and Skills
 - Cohesion
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Transport
 - Safety and Security
 - Education and Opportunity
- 3.5 A full list, including Sub-Interventions is provided at Appendix 1.
- 3.6 The list of interventions have been assessed 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, but a robust assessment process for determining which projects are taken forward will need to be developed. This will be undertaken by a sub-panel of the Board alongside HBC officers. Should the Board wish to pursue bespoke or 'off-menu' interventions, an outline business will be required.
- 3.7 To access the funding Halton will need to produce a Regeneration Plan for the agreed area by the end of November 2025, along with a four year investment plan. The funding will be devolved directly to Halton Borough Council.
- 3.8 The Council will be the accountable body and will remain responsible for ensuring good use of public funds through the Programmes Office and the Section 151 officer.
- 3.9 MHCLG has directed that the name of the Board be revised to a Neighbourhood Board and that the Terms of Reference be updated to reflect this.
- 3.10 In April 2025 an extraordinary meeting of the Board was held to receive and approve the new directives, including change of Board name, new interventions, updated Terms of Reference etc.
- 3.11 The updated arrangements include a further £200k capacity funding in 2025-26 and £150k in 2026-27 to undertake further consultation and feasibility work. The capacity funding is to support the board's ability to engage the local community and build the capacity of the

board and local voluntary and community sector, to support the development of the Regeneration Plan or the technical elements of plan development and delivery. It can also be used towards the management costs and for branding and publicity activity.

- 3.12 Key roles and responsibilities in the delivery of the programme include:
Officer lead – Director EEP
Member lead – Deputy Leader
Secretariat for Board – Programmes Office, HBC
Monitoring and Compliance – Programmes Office, HBC
Project Delivery – Regeneration Team, plus partners
Project shortlist/decision-making – Sub-panel of Board/HBC officers
Communications and Publicity, including Reconnecting Runcorn website - Vivid
- 3.13 Board Membership:
Chairs should work with the local authority to consider the wider membership of the Neighbourhood Board, ensuring an inclusive and representative selection of people from across the local community.
- 3.14 Places may have set up ‘Town Boards’ to deliver the previous administration’s Long-Term Plan for Towns programme, with an existing board membership. Should the chair agree, the membership can be rolled over fully to act as the Neighbourhood Board. However, to ensure the board can deliver on the strategic objectives of the programme and the widened scope of interventions, broadening the membership to bring in additional relevant expertise may be considered.
- 3.15 Neighbourhood Boards must include the following members:
- The relevant local MPs, for example, MPs whose constituencies sit within the boundary of the place must sit on the board
 - Two local councillors
 - Police and Crime Commissioner
- 3.16 The Board should comprise representatives from a cross-section of the local community to promote community leadership, and boards should ensure there is greater representation from non-elected members than elected, in line with the ‘community-first’ principle of the programme. Council officers may provide secretariat support and can sit as an observer to the board discussions if agreed with the chair.
- 3.17 The Chair, supported by the local authority, must ensure the right people are around the table to fully reflect the priorities of the place. Chairs will want to consider the following groups:
- 3.18 Community partners, such as:

- community groups
 - faith groups
 - local charities
 - neighbourhood forums, neighbourhood watch or local tenancy groups
 - youth groups
 - local councils for voluntary service (CVS) in England, Third Sector Interface (TSI) in Scotland, or Third Sector Trustee Network in Northern Ireland
 - workplace representatives, for example trade unions
- 3.19 Local businesses and social enterprises, such as:
- the chair or board members for the local Chambers of Commerce or Business Improvement District (BID) where these exist
 - key local employers or investors in the place
 - registered social housing providers
- 3.20 Cultural, arts, heritage and sporting organisations, such as:
- local sports club directors or fan representatives
 - local heritage groups
 - director of a local museum
- 3.21 Public agencies and anchor institutions, such as:
- local schools, higher education and further education institutions
 - mayors of combined authorities or their representatives
 - relevant government agencies for that area, for example, Integrated Care Boards or Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland
 - relevant health care providers, for example GPs from local practices or senior NHS staff
 - relevant senior local authority officers, for example, a Director for Economic Development to ensure coordination with wider plans
 - a representative from other relevant local agencies
- 3.22 The Board membership is currently representative of the above; a number of new members were invited to join the Board when the Long Term Plan for Towns was originally announced.
- 3.23 Board Chair:
Each Neighbourhood Board will be led by an independent chair, appointed by the local authority acting as accountable body, following consultation with the local MP. The chair should act as a champion for the place and provide leadership for the board, ensuring it is community-led and embedded within the local area. The chair should be someone who holds a prominent role in the community and has a passion for the place.

- 3.24 Having set up 'Town Boards' to deliver the previous administration's 'Long-Term Plan for Towns,' many places will have an incumbent chair. Subject to consulting the respective local MP, the local authority may seek to retain that individual as the chair for the Neighbourhood Board
- 3.25 The Board has approved a co-chair set up of the head of Halton Chamber of Commerce and the Head of Cultivate/Director of A Place for Us, a local youth theatre company.
- 3.26 Document development and Timelines:
- 3.27 A Regeneration Plan must be submitted to HMCLG by 28 November 2025. This Plan must be underpinned by evidence of engagement to reflect local investment priorities for the short, medium and long-term. The plan must be reviewed and approved by the Neighbourhood Board. The Chief Finance officer must also review the plan, however there is no requirement by MHCLG for sign off by elected members. The Combined Authority and MP also need to be consulted during the development of the plan.
- 3.28 The programme will be divided into 3 investment periods with a formalised progress review at the end of each investment period.
- 3.29 These periods are:
Period 1 financial year 2026/27 to financial year 2029/30 (4 years)
Period 2 financial year 2030/31 to financial year 2032/33 (3 years)
Period 3 financial year 2033/34 to financial year 2035/36 (3 years)
- 3.30 The review will allow MHCLG to consider whether the programmes strategic objectives are being delivered. Further guidance on this will be available in summer 2025.
- 3.31 Each period will have an investment plan developed in consultation with the community. This will detail the priorities and the interventions that the Board in consultation with the community wishes to pursue and how these fit with the delivery of the 10 year vision as well as outline the funding spend. Boards are strongly encouraged to explore opportunities to access additional funding.
- 3.32 There is a wealth of experience now in terms of developing and operating a Board, establishing a governance model and documentation, agreeing a project pipeline and delivering that pipeline; this experience and lessons learned can be utilised in relation to the emergence of the Widnes Strategic Board.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The potential significant investment described in this report will align with the Council's strategic policies contained in the Local Plan, the

Mersey Gateway Plus Regeneration Strategy, The Cultural 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 focused 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 Plan for Neighbourhoods Regeneration Plan when submitted in November 2025, will cover an initial four year period of investment. This Plan will be reviewed after that four year period and it may become necessary to prepare a revised plan.

5.2 When the initial 4-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.

5.3 There is no match funding requirement; however, opportunities for drawing in additional funding should be considered to add value.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

The Plan for Neighbourhoods interventions include Health and Wellbeing and the programme of projects has the opportunity to support a range of activities which meet this theme to the benefit of local communities.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The Plan for Neighbourhoods interventions include Work, Productivity and Skills and in the long-term there are strong prospects of new job creation as a result of the potential projects brought forward by this funding, in particular as the funding comprises 25% revenue.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The Plan for Neighbourhoods interventions include Education and Opportunity which could support a range of activities targeted at children and young people.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

There is no specific intervention covering inequality; however, there are a range of sub interventions aimed at supporting those most in need, including tackling homelessness and poverty-related inequalities.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

There is no specific intervention covering environmental or climate change; however, a number of sub-interventions cover this area, including; creating and improving green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments in the local area, along with incorporating natural features into wider public spaces; support for non-domestic energy efficiency measures and decarbonisation in local businesses, high streets, and community infrastructure; provide healthy and climate-resilient homes support locally; reducing vehicle emissions

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

The guiding principle for the Plan for Neighbourhoods 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 and will proactively support the provision of social value outcomes. One of the interventions for funding is Regeneration, High Streets and Heritage.

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, environmental factors and from unexpected issues when work starts (such as contamination, uncharted utilities) and delays in recruitment. These risks are impossible to eradicate and are dealt with by the inclusion of contingencies to draw upon. 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 Plan for Neighbourhoods Regeneration Plan has not yet been developed. Equality and diversity implications will continue to be considered in the development of the Regeneration

Plan, and it is likely that Equality Impact Assessments will be part of the delivery stage.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The development of the Regeneration Plan and the initial four 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

'None under the meaning of the Act.'

Appendix 1: Plan for Neighbourhoods Interventions

Appendix 2: Plan for Neighbourhoods Term of Reference

Appendix 3: List of organisations/roles represented on the Board