

## **Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel**

**Thursday 6 January 2022 at 1.00pm**

### **Present:**

Councillor Harpreet Uppal (Chair)  
Councillor Gwen Lowe  
Councillor John Taylor  
Councillor Robert Iredale  
Councillor Martyn Bolt

### **Co-optees:**

Andrew Bird (Co-optee)  
Chris Friend (Co-optee)

### **In Attendance:**

Councillor Peter McBride, Cabinet Member for Regeneration  
Councillor Eric Firth, Cabinet Member, Town Centres  
Simon Taylor, Head of Town Centre Programmes  
Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director, Development  
Edward Highfield, Service Director of Skills and Regeneration, Growth & Regeneration

### **Observers:**

Councillor Elizabeth Smaje

### **Apologies:**

Councillor Yusra Hussain

#### **1. Membership of the Committee**

Apologies were received from Councillor Yusra Hussain.

#### **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 30 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **3. Interests**

No Interests were declared.

#### **4. Admission of the Public**

All items were considered in the public session.

#### **5. Deputations/Petitions**

No deputation or petitions were received.

#### **6. Public Question Time**

No questions were received from the public.

## 7. Small Centres Update

The Panel received an update on Small Centres Programme from Simon Taylor, Head of Town Centre Programmes, which provided information on:

- Background and recommendation to Cabinet in March 2021
- Progress on engagement through place standard exercise
- Progress on Master/Investment planning
- Anticipated Next Steps

The Panel noted that in March 2021 Cabinet considered a report which proposed investing in town and village centres outside of Huddersfield and Dewsbury. The report was based upon an initial investment of £10m across the district. The initial Cabinet report proposed that 4 key centres – Batley, Cleckheaton, Heckmondwike and Holmfirth be the focus for the initial round of investment, each being allocated £1.5m.

The proposal was matched with clear processes to follow. The key elements were:

- Ward Members at the heart of the programme
- Place Standard exercise to be undertaken
- Investment/Master plan to be prepared for each centre with sign off by Strategic Director and portfolio holder
- Projects to a value of £1.5m were to be agreed.

In addition, the report set out the types of projects that could be funded. This included:

- Supporting retail, employment, community and local centre activity
- Sustainable travel and climate change measures
- Improved community safety
- Culture, art and leisure activities
- Public realm/landscaping, heritage, conservation and better design.

Simon Taylor informed the Panel that part of the process to assemble a programme of investment for each of the identified small centres was to undertake a stage of community engagement. To ensure this was consistent across all four centres the place standards tool had been utilised. The questions used were to help build up a picture across a number of themes which ranged from moving around, play and recreation, feeling safe and social contact.

The Panel was informed that as part of the process of developing projects and delivering the Small Centres Programme, Cabinet required master/investment plans to be developed for each of the four identified small centres and two sets of consultants had been appointed to take the process forward. Once the masterplan was completed it needed to be agreed by the Strategic Director and lead Cabinet portfolio holder.

The anticipated next steps were:

- To continue dialogue with Ward Members
- Complete Place Standard reports
- Develop and agree the investment/master plans
- Develop project ideas
- Move to Delivery phases
- Agree the approach for phase 2 funding

Simon Taylor explained that the other remaining £4m would be available to deliver changes in other town and village centres and a further Cabinet report would be required to outline how this would be administered.

The Panel noted that engagement through the place standard was a helpful tool in identifying priorities at a local level. However, in respect of the percentage of responses received from residents, and the quality of the engagement, the Panel raised concerns that the response rate was too low to be considered viable as a consultation. It was agreed that a recommendation be made by the Panel that requested a minimum threshold for consultations/engagement to be deemed of an acceptable standard.

Simon Taylor advised that a low response rate had been received partly due to Covid-19 restrictions and the way some of the exercises had taken place, and partly due to other approaches that had been taken in town centres. Simon Taylor confirmed that he was guided by the Citizens Engagement Team and would raise the concerns of low percentages, along with the comments received from the place standard exercise, with the Citizens Engagement Team.

Councillor Peter McBride, Cabinet Member for Regeneration responded to agree with Panel Members concerns about the engagement, commenting that the response rate was unsatisfactory and rendered it meaningless. It was highlighted that this was partly indicative of the Covid-19 pandemic but also indicative of the real need to improve the approach to public consultation going forwards.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the cost of the consultants appointed, Simon Taylor advised that a tendering process had taken place and the cost was competitive. It was explained that he did not have the exact costings of the additional resources at the meeting but was able to provide the panel with the information at a later date.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding signing off the master/investment plans and who this would involve, Simon Taylor advised that the Cabinet report in March 2021 had set out how the investment plans would be signed off.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding milestones and how this could be set out, Simon Taylor advised that he required a team to work on the project and was in the process of recruiting staff, a Team Leader had so far been recruited and when they were in place a more tangible program could be put in place.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the 14 themes from the Place Standard exercise and an understanding of all the themes, Simon Taylor advised that he would speak with the Engagement Team and liaise with Andrew Bird separately to go through all the technical details.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding Ward Members being part of the decision making, Simon Taylor advised that Ward Members were a valuable source of information in their own communities and would be instrumental in helping to progress projects that were selected. Simon Taylor was confident that communities and Ward Members were listened to and that the plan put forward for sign off was right for all involved.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the panel noted the update and thanked officers and Cabinet Members involved in the process. It was also agreed that:

1. The continued involvement of Ward Councillors be ensured through out the process.
2. Simon Taylor would liaise with Andrew Bird, Panel Member Co-optee, on the technical details of the 14 themes of the Place Standard Exercise
3. Simon Taylor would liaise with the Citizens Engagement Team regarding the Place Standard exercise. This maybe an area that the Committee does further scrutiny on.
4. A rational and definition of the places agreed for small town funding be provided to the Panel.
5. Work should be undertaken to set a standard that should be met to ensure effective and meaningful engagement/consultation with the public such as the possibility of setting a minimum threshold for the number and quality of responses.
6. That an update to scrutiny (prior to next the Cabinet date) and a project milestone programme be provided to the Panel.
7. That the costings of the additional resources (e.g., consultant costings) be provided to the Panel.

#### **8. Work Programme 2020/21**

The Panel considered the work programme for 2020/21 municipal year.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the work programme for the 2020/21 municipal year be noted.