Briefing Note ahead of 17th January meeting
**PROPOSED APPROACH TO TOWN FUND STATUS**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to provide some outline detail on Dudley’s inclusion in the Town Fund initiative and consequences thereof.

This paper provides background for the benefit of Dudley Programme Board members ahead of the meeting scheduled for 9m on Friday, January 17th 2020 and hopefully creates the basis for constructive discussion during the meeting.

Timescales are tight and have been imposed by Government and so swift action is required in order to ensure a comprehensive, cogent, dynamic and ultimately successful investment plan is developed by summer.

**Background**

During September 2019, Dudley Town Centre was one of 100 centres invited by Government to bid for the £3.6billion Towns Fund. Government wishes to see the establishment of a Town Board to prioritise and drive investment and to seek long term economic and productivity growth through investment in connectivity, land use, skills and enterprise infrastructure.

A Prospectus was published by Government on November 1st 2019, setting out details of Governments expectations and awarding initial capacity funding of £173,029 to assist with the development of proposals. It is Governments intention that the resource be used in order to:-

* Convene a Town Deal Board
* Run business and wider community engagement events
* Develop Town Investment Plans
* Provide technical expertise for business case development

The prospectus sets out the first stage of the process of agreeing a Town Deal, with further guidance to be issued by Government in due course as to how Councils are to use their Town Investment Plans to build a business case for interventions.

**Government Requirement to establish a Town Board & it’s Responsibilities**

It is Governments expectation that a Town Deal Board be established by the end of January 2020 and that a Town Investment Plan is produced by Summer 2020.

Government state that the role of the Town Deal Board is to:-

* Develop and agree an evidence based Town Investment Plan
* Develop a clear programme of interventions
* Coordinate resources and influence stakeholders

Representation on the Board should include:

* Combined Authority
* Member(s) of Parliament
* Local Businesses and Investors
* Local Enterprise Partnerships

Additionally, other local ‘Anchor’ institutions may be included, for instance, local FE colleges.

There should be clear and effective processes for involving the Community in development of Investment plans. It is expected that the Chair of the board will be from the private sector.

**Role of the Council**

The role of the Council is to publish the Town Deal Board’s governance structure and ways of working, such as a statement for how the board will engage stakeholders and agree decisions over time.

Lead Councils should set out how capacity funding will be spent, and how that will support the process of developing a good Town Investment Plan.

Towns are expected to develop a well-evidenced Town Investment Plan, which sets out a clear understanding of the area, focusing on its assets, opportunities and challenges. The amount of investment from the Towns Fund will be determined based on the strength of the Towns Investment Plan amongst other relevant factors.

The Town Investment Plan should set out investment priorities that could drive economic growth, supported by clear evidence and targeting investment into the economic infrastructure listed around the objective of the fund, as well as making full use of existing powers, particularly in planning.

**Transition from Programme Board to Town Board**

Dudley is fortunate in that with so much investment planned / proposed during the next five years, we already have a lot of the required agencies and organisations around the table in the form of the Programme Board. Therefore, rather than to ‘re-invent the wheel’, it would seem logical to ‘transition’ the Programme Board into the Town Board by;

* Agreeing revised Terms of Reference
* Agreeing revised Membership
* Discussing how the work of developing the investment plan will progress
* Agreeing the priorities for investment in addition to proposals already in place / under development
* Continuing to ensure that synergy is created, projects are co-ordinated and duplication avoided in delivering the major programme of regeneration / development within Dudley.

**Additional Membership**

In addition to the existing Membership of the Programme board, Marco Longhi MP, in his role as elected representative for the Constituency containing Dudley, has already been invited to join the Board.

Appropriate Membership is required form the West Midlands Combined Authority and Black Country LEP. Also, as West Midlands Police are developing a new HQ in the Town and as key partners, consideration needs to be given to inviting the Area Commander to future meetings.

**Proposed Governance Arrangements and Consultation**

The purpose of the capacity funding of £173,000 is set out above. As this is allocated to the Council, delegated authority for approving expenditure has been granted to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration. However, it is intended that this authority will be used in accordance with the programme of interventions as agreed by the Board.

It is suggested that in order to ensure ‘good governance’, the Town Board develop Investment Plans and recommends them to Dudley’s Cabinet, in order to secure formal approval to utilise the Town Fund resources allocated for which Dudley Council will be ‘Accountable Body’.

In terms of consultation, the detail of engaging all sectors needs to be developed and consideration given to using the ‘Peoples Panel’, created as part of the ‘|Innovation in Democracy’ pilot of which Dudley is one of only three nationally.

**Next Steps**

It is suggested that during the meeting to be held on Friday, the following steps are taken;

1. The Programme Board formally resolve to transition to Dudley Town Board with immediate effect
2. Draft Terms of Reference are agreed for detailed consultation with fellow Board Members, for formal adoption at the next meeting of the Board
3. The Board agree revised Board Membership and Chair nominations
4. Discussion take place on Governance arrangements and working practices
5. A monthly schedule of meetings be agreed for Fridays (in order to facilitate attendance by MP etc).