

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**8 February 2024 at 6.01pm
in the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Taylor (Chair);
Councillors Akpoteni, Ashraf, Davies, Dhatt,
Hemingway, Rahman and J Singh.

Officers: Rina Rahim (Town Fund Programme Manager);
Alexander Oxley (Capital Projects Manager); Alex
Goddard (Scrutiny Lead Officer) and Anthony Lloyd
(Democratic Services Officer).

1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors
Hussain, Kordala and Owen.

2/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

3/24 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 8
November 2023 are confirmed as a correct record.

4/24 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

5/23 **Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations**

The Board noted the status of actions and recommendations it had made. Further updates would be reported to future meetings of the Board.

6/24 **Cabinet Forward Plan and Board Work Programme**

The Board received the Cabinet Forward Plan and Board Work Programme.

Members requested that a revisit of bin collection data and any related concerns be added to the Board's work programme.

The Council's approach to consultation was also a topic of interest for Board members and, noting that it was within the terms of reference for the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, members requested that this be considered by that Board.

Resolved that the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board consider is requested to consider adding a review into the Council's consultation process onto its work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

7/24 **Towns Fund Programme Update**

Further to its meeting on 3 October 2023 (minute no. 32/23 refers), the Board received a further update on the Towns Fund Programme.

Members were reassured that no slippage exceeding the 40% threshold had occurred and therefore, no audit reviews from central government were required.

West Bromwich Town Fund Update

The Towns Fund Programme for West Bromwich aimed to deliver a number of outcomes including the renovation of heritage buildings, provision of new green spaces, improved floor space and rehabilitated land, the introduction of new cycle ways, pedestrian paths, improved roads and multiple full-time and temporary jobs.

The digital den project had been completed and was delivering outputs by supporting learners. Additionally, capital elements in relation to the Urban Greening project had been completed with pocket parks, seating, and the upgrading of the High Street now finalised.

Phase 3 of the West Bromwich Connected Scheme was due to start however, mixed responses had been received from the consultation process. Spend was on target and progress was being made.

Delays had been experienced in relation to the Town Hall Quarter project due to the need of a detailed review of the final cost plan. Works had begun on site with the aim for completion in November 2024.

Smethwick Town Fund Update

In relation to the Midland Met Learning Campus, cost inflation pressures had been experienced due to the aim of delivering zero carbon building. As a result, the project had applied for additional match-funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Delays were also in place due to issues with obtaining planning permission. If match funding was agreed, works were expected to take place in May 2024.

In relation to the Grove Lane Regeneration project, Significant delays had been encountered regarding delivery and spend due to the delay in acquiring the site required within the 2023-2024 financial year. Despite this, Cabinet had approved the Council to explore the use of compulsory purchase orders (CPO) to obtain the site.

Smethwick Connected project aimed to create cycle and pedestrian links from two railway stations to the town centre and local hospital to achieve uplift in the number of people using active travel modes within Smethwick, the wider borough and region to assist in reducing congestion, poor air quality and other health inequalities. This project was on target and being delivered as planned.

The Ron Davis Centre expansion had been completed and the IT infrastructure had been installed.

The date for the Rolfe Street Canalside Regeneration project to commence had been moved back in order for further financial matters to be considered. Additionally, an objection had been received from Historic England following the planning application. Negotiations were taking place with Historic England to discuss the issues.

Rowley Regis Town Fund

A tendering process for both the planned changing rooms and Skate Park at Britannia Park Greenspace and Community Hub had been completed however, several planned aspects of the project had been delayed into the next financial year.

90% of the works to the Old Mainline within the Canal Network Connectivity project had been completed and further works were due to take place in the summer months.

Following public consultation and feedback, a redesign of the Blackheath Bus Interchange and Public Realm scheme was planned to take place.

Works on the Rowley Regis Connected project were on target and making good progress.

Following questions from members, the following clarifications and points were made:-

- Slippage on projects was much higher in Smethwick due to the vast scale of some of the schemes, legal processes and the delays around match funding;

- a redesign of the Blackheath Bus Exchange was making progress and an additional consultation was scheduled for March 2024 so that plans could be finalised;
- it was confirmed that a “descope” was the process of reducing or re-designing a project to fit financial constraints.

7/24(a) **Exclusion of Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting. This is to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to the financial or business affairs of any person, including the authority holding that information.

7/24(b) **Towns Fund Programme Update**

Further to minute no. 7/24, the Board received a detailed update on the financial aspects of some of the planned Town Fund Programme projects.

Members were minded that in relation to the poor ground conditions that could be found across the borough, site investigations were taking place to ensure that projects were constantly monitored and that appropriate actions could take place if needed.

The project team working on the re-location of the West Bromwich Indoor Market had created a revised plan that officers were hopeful could be delivered with the support of the Council.

The following points were also highlighted to the Board:-

- Any underspend would be utilised to implement front ramp access to the West Bromwich Town Hall after the initial internal refurbishment was completed;
- if projects were to experience long delays or become no longer viable, the Department for Housing, Levelling

Up and Communities would allow projects to be changed or amended as long as similar and effective outputs were delivered;

- some initial budgets were not sufficient as they were arranged before the sharp increase in inflation which had impacted construction costs;
- Cradley Heath Skill Centre was being delivered within the financial scope with no concerns as of February 2024.
- all projects contained at least a 10-15% costing contingency. Costs were reviewed on a regular basis.

Officers were thanked for the update.

Resolved that future updates to the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board on the Towns Fund Programme include further detail on consultation and input from stakeholders, especially young people.

Meeting ended at 7.11pm following an adjournment between 6.17pm to 6.18pm

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