

Report to Cabinet

13 March 2024

Subject:	Levelling up Partnership
Cabinet Member:	Leader Councillor Kerrie Carmichael
Director:	Assistant Director Spatial Planning and Growth Tammy Stokes
Key Decision:	No
Contact Officer:	Levelling Up Partnership Programme Manager Rebecca Jenkins rebecca_jenkins@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Cabinet receive the progress update on the delivery of the Levelling Up Partnership;
- 1.2 That Cabinet receive a further progress update in 6 months.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 In September 2023, details of the Levelling Up Partnership (£20.4m) were formally announced by Government. This followed a set of Cabinet approvals in September to establish governance arrangements, approve the target geography as Wednesbury, and to agree the set of projects as follows:
 - Friar Park Urban Village
 - Wednesbury Community Safety Scheme
 - Wednesbury Town Centre Improvements
 - Wednesbury Greenspaces Improvements
 - Friar Park Millennium Centre expansion



2.2 Cabinet requested to receive a report on the performance of the Levelling Up Partnership Programme after 6 months. This report provides an overview of performance.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

The formation of a Levelling Up Partnership and delivery of the interventions within the LUP will contribute to all objectives of the corporate plan

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People</p> <p>Opportunities for children and young people will be strengthened through an extended offer at Millennium Centre, Friar Park; a significant number of new homes and improved quality and safety of public spaces and greenspaces in Wednesbury.</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well</p> <p>The interventions proposed for inclusion within the LUP will strengthen the quality and safety of greenspaces and public spaces in Wednesbury; encouraging physical activity. The interventions will enable a significant number of new quality homes.</p>
	<p>Strong Resilient Communities</p> <p>The interventions proposed for inclusion within the LUP will strengthen the deterrents for crime and ASB in Wednesbury.</p>
	<p>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods</p> <p>The interventions proposed for inclusion within the LUP will enable a significant number of new homes to be delivered and will improve the quality of neighbourhoods through improvements and enhanced safety measures in green spaces and public spaces.</p>



	<p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy</p> <p>The interventions proposed for inclusion within the LUP will increase the adult skills offer in Wednesbury and will improve the quality of public spaces in Wednesbury Town Centre; helping the town to thrive and retain and attract businesses.</p>
	<p>A Connected and Accessible Sandwell</p> <p>The interventions proposed for inclusion within the LUP will enable better connections through green spaces for walking and cycling and improvements to routes between Wednesbury Town Centre and the Metro.</p>

4. Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 In March 2023, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that Sandwell was one of 20 places to be invited to form a Levelling Up Partnership (LUP).
- 4.2 Levelling Up Partnerships are targeted interventions designed to identify practical, tangible actions to support priority places to ‘level up’ and to help government develop a more holistic understanding of place. Sandwell and Hull were the first of 20 areas selected to form a Levelling Up Partnership.
- 4.3 In September, the details of the Levelling Up Partnership (£20.4m) were formally announced by Government. This followed a set of Cabinet approvals in September to establish governance arrangements, approve the target geography as Wednesbury, and to agree the set of projects below. Further details are provided in Appendix 1.
- Friar Park Urban Village
 - Wednesbury Community Safety Scheme
 - Wednesbury Town Centre Improvements
 - Wednesbury Greenspaces Improvements
 - Friar Park Millennium Centre expansion



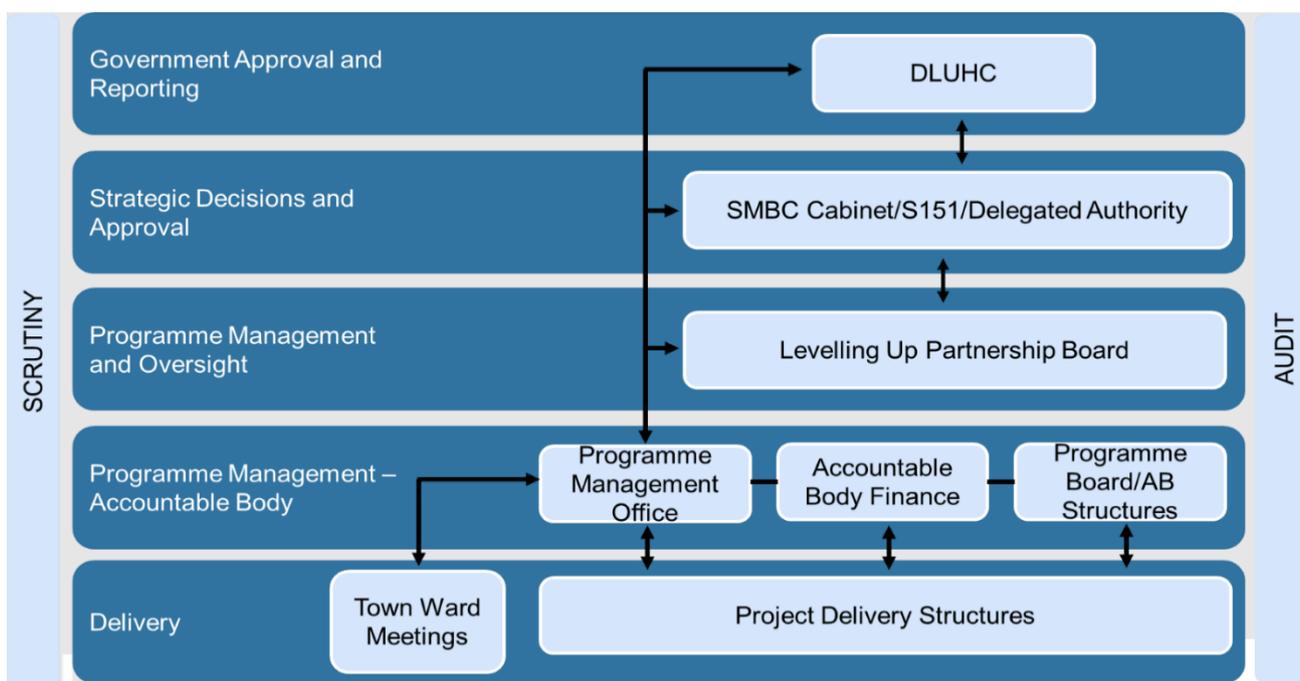
4.4 A grant determination letter was issued in October 2023 for the first financial allocation of £15m capital and £250K revenue. A second allocation of £5m capital and £50K revenue will be made at the start of next financial year. The grant determination letter received in October 2023 sets out that spend must be made by March 2025 which presents a significant challenge for the council to deliver at pace.

4.5 The remainder of this report sets out a progress update on:

- Governance Arrangements and Reporting
- Project Delivery Progress
- Risk Management
- Communication and Engagement

Governance Arrangements and Reporting

4.6 The governance model for the programme was agreed by Cabinet in September 2023. It is modelled on the Towns Fund governance model and is set out below:



4.7 The Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board has been established to oversee the programme. It brings together Councillors, MPs,



representatives of the voluntary sector, the business community, faith group representatives, and partners. Positions have been appointed to and the Board held its first meeting in December 2023. The Board is scheduled to meet every other month with the next meeting due to take place in February 2024.

- 4.8 Monthly monitoring conversations are in place with the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities.
- 4.9 Internal governance consists of a LUP Project Group and progress reporting to the Council's Leadership Team. The LUP Project Group brings together project Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) for the LUP projects and key enabling services (procurement and finance) to review programme and project progress, issues and risks.
- 4.10 Programme progress reports are made to Leadership Team on a quarterly basis and monthly by exception. This is the first 6-monthly programme update to Cabinet following Cabinet's approval in September 2023.
- 4.11 All LUP projects are scheduled to undergo a capital appraisal as part of the Council's internal assurance arrangements. The first round of capital appraisals (for 3 of 6 LUP projects) took place in November and project spend has been authorised subject to panel recommendations being met.
- 4.12 In October, Council granted approval for an exemption to Financial Regulations which enables project spend to commence ahead of a capital appraisal being conducted. Project spend ahead of an appraisal has been agreed by the S151 Officer.

Project Delivery Update

- 4.13 A summary of project delivery as at end January 2024 is provided below. Further detail is contained in Appendix 2.



Project	Progress Summary
1. Masterplan – Wednesbury Town Centre	Capital Appraisal approved Consultants appointed Risk around timescales for approval but no impact on spend deadline
2. Community Safety	Capital Appraisal approved CCTV installation due to commence
3. Public Realm	Public Consultation launched (closing 11 March)
4. Friar Park Urban Village	In expression of interest phase for Developer Partner Risk around timescales. Escalated to programme risk register
5. Millennium Centre	Initial designs produced and being reviewed Risk around timescales and costs. Options under review.
6. Greenspaces	Capital appraisal approved subject to recommendations In procurement for first 3 greenspaces schemes Initial design work underway for Hydes Road Risk around costs – controls in place to review project budget following procurement phase
Financial position at end January 2024	
£37K spend to date All projects forecasting within budget	

Risk Management

4.14 A programme level risk register is in place and this is reviewed monthly by the LUP Project Group. Project level red risks have been identified and are reported to the LUP Project Group and the WLUP Board. The programme risk register is provided at Appendix 3.

4.15 At project level, a risk register is in place for each project and this will be maintained throughout the project lifecycle. The project risk registers are reviewed as part of the capital appraisal for each project.

4.16 There are 2 programme red risks as follows:

4.17



<p>Risk Title and Description</p>	<p>Grant Conditions: Delivery Timeline & S151 project sign-off</p> <p>If programme delivery cannot be completed by 2024-25 financial year (March 2025) and/or there are concerns around project delivery from S151 assurance, there is a risk of grant clawback, reputational damage and missed opportunities to deliver the benefits of the programme</p>
<p>Controls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeking clarification from DLUHC around grant clawback position and parameters for second year grant allocation - Regular reporting on progress of project delivery and spend is in place - Capital appraisal to be completed for all projects - S151 sign-off of spend in advance of capital appraisal
<p>Risk expected to reduce</p>	<p>When clarification is received from DLUHC around the clawback position and/or carry forward position</p>

<p>Risk Title and Description</p>	<p>Delivery of Friar Park Urban Village Project</p> <p>Risk relates to delivery of project within March 2025 deadline due to risk of delays to obtaining EA licenses and/or delays to developer partner procurement process</p>
<p>Controls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early engagement with EA has been undertaken and consultants (technical experts) procured to support the engagement process - Legal review of proposed approach has been undertaken - Full risk assessment to take place to understand issues from proposed approach - Capital appraisal review underway - Seeking clarification from DLUHC around grant clawback position, carry forward to 2025-2026, and parameters for second year grant allocation



Risk expected to reduce	When EA permitting process concluded and delivery partner is procured And/or When clarification is received from DLUHC around the clawback position and/or carry forward position
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Communication and Engagement

4.18 A programme level communication and engagement strategy is in development based on initial input from the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership (WLUP) Board. The draft strategy is attached as appendix 4.

4.19 The strategy and individual project communication and engagement plans will be considered by the WLUP Board in February 2024.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 This report provides an overview of progress of the Levelling Up Partnership Programme. It was requested by Cabinet to provide assurance on delivery progress. Alternative options would be for Cabinet to receive progress reporting through the Council’s performance management framework rather than a bespoke report.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>The LUP presents a £20.4m opportunity for Sandwell with a challenging delivery time constraint.</p> <p>All LUP projects will undergo a capital appraisal. The first round (3 of 6 projects) were approved end November 2023.</p> <p>Council granted approval for an exemption to Financial Regulations which enables project spend to commence ahead of a capital appraisal being conducted. Project spend ahead of an appraisal has been agreed on a case-by-case basis by the S151 Officer.</p>
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	<p>A grant determination letter was issued in October 2023 for the first financial allocation of £15m capital and £250K revenue. A second allocation of £5m capital and £50K revenue will be made at the start of next financial year.</p> <p>All LUP projects are forecasting to deliver within budget.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The Council is the lead delivery organisation for all LUP projects.</p> <p>Delivery of the projects is being overseen by the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board. An internal LUP Project Group is in place as an internal mechanism for ensuring the council is fulfilling its role as Accountable Body and for resolving issues. Spend will be monitored through the Council's Corporate Asset Management Board. A LUP programme manager has been appointed to oversee the programme.</p> <p>Legal agreements/MoUs may be required to deliver specific projects and will follow standard council process</p> <p>Legal advice has been commissioned for the Friar Park Urban Village project.</p> <p>All LUP projects will undergo a subsidy control screening and assessment as required. Specific subsidy advice is being sought around the Friar Park Urban Village project. It is not expected that there will be any subsidy matters applicable to the other LUP projects.</p>



	The Levelling up Partnership is being managed as a programme. The Wednesbury Levelling up Partnership Board is in place to oversee the programme.
Risk:	<p>A programme level risk register is in place and this is reviewed monthly by the LUP Project Group. Project level red risks have been identified and are reported to the LUP Project Group.</p> <p>Project level risk registers are in place and will be maintained throughout the project lifecycle. The project risk registers are being reviewed as part of the capital appraisal for each project.</p> <p>Red risks are reported to Leadership Team as part of quarterly reporting (and monthly by exception).</p>
Equality:	Through the project development process, consideration is being given to the impact on and improvements that can be made for residents with protected characteristics. Equality Impact screenings and EqlAs will be conducted, as appropriate. Equality implications are included in reporting to the WLUP Board.
Health and Wellbeing:	The underpinning objective of the LUP is to ‘level up’ and reduce inequalities. The proposed interventions focus on tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way and compliment public health programmes.
Social Value:	The proposed interventions will be delivered in accordance with the Council’s Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules and will deliver social value in line with the council’s requirements.
Climate Change:	The proposed interventions include a range of improvements to the quality of green spaces and public spaces in Wednesbury; making a contribution to biodiversity.



	Proposals will also enable the delivery of a significant number of new homes and a range of construction work. Options for energy efficiency measures and reducing carbon through the construction process will be considered as part of the detailed design phase and procurement.
Corporate Parenting:	<p>The voice of the child is incorporated within the LUP governance arrangements through the inclusion of young people’s representative on the WLUP Board. Where consultation is being undertaken as part of the LUP Programme, young people’s views and opinions will be sought.</p> <p>The intervention focusing on the extension of the Friar Park Millennium Centre will include consideration of youth opportunities.</p>

7. Appendices

1. Levelling Up Partnership Scope and Intervention Descriptions
2. Summary of LUP Project Delivery
3. Levelling Up Partnership Programme Risk Register
4. Draft LUP Communication and Engagement Strategy

8. Background Papers

[Agenda, Reports and Draft Minutes of Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board 18 December 2023](#)

[Agenda and Reports of Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board 29 February 2024](#)

