

## Cabinet

<b>Report Title</b>	Levelling Up Partnership 6-monthly update
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Wednesday, 15 October 2025
<b>Report Author</b>	Rebecca Jenkins - Levelling Up Partnership Programme Manager
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Executive Director - Place
<b>Lead Cabinet Member(s)</b>	Leader of the Council
<b>Why is this a key decision?</b>	Not a key decision
<b>Wards Affected</b>	Friar Park; Wednesbury North; Wednesbury South;
<b>Identify exempt information and exemption category</b>	Open
<b>Is the report urgent?</b>	No
<b>Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)</b>	Not applicable
<b>Appendices (if any)</b>	Appendix 1 - WLUP Board Terms of Reference

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress delivering against the objectives of the Levelling Up Partnership and seeks approval to several updates to the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board Terms of Reference

### 2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Endorse progress to date on delivering the aims and objectives of the Levelling Up Partnership;

- 2.2 Approve the revised Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board Terms of reference as set out in appendix 1.

### **3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations**

- 3.1 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

- 3.2 Descriptions of the projects can be found in previous reports to Cabinet. Cabinet requested to receive a report on the performance of the Levelling Up Partnership Programme every 6 months. This report forms the fourth 6-monthly overview of performance. The report sets out a progress update on:

- LUP Delivery Overview
- Communication and Engagement
- Impact, Learning and Evaluation
- Legacy and preparation for programme close

#### **LUP Delivery Overview**

- 3.3 Across the LUP Programme, key achievements since the last report to Cabinet in March 2025 include the completion of:

- Phase 1 Green Spaces projects main work completion (Balls Hill, Lakeside and Norbury and Wyntor Lane Open Spaces) and publicity launch
- Community safety capital works (new and upgraded CCTV, business radio link, nuisance bike measures) and publicity launch
- Main phase of Public Realm works in Wednesbury Town Centre and publicity launch
- Development Partner appointment for Friar Park Urban Village project

- 3.4 Other achievements and milestones include:

- Planning approval granted for Hydes Road Pavilion demolition and rebuild
- Final stages of preparation for building improvement scheme, art/mural project, wayfinding, and further public realm works in Wednesbury Town Centre

- Final stages of preparation for start on site at Friar Park Millennium Centre
- 3.5 Details of project delivery progress, risks and issue are reported to the WLUP Board at each meeting. Over the period up to end August 2025, there are two projects with a significant level of risk, slippage and/or issues.
- 3.5.1 Friar Park Urban Village Land Remediation Project.
- Delivery progress is broadly in line with agreed milestones but there is a significant level of risk relating to delivery including risks around delays / issues in obtaining a licence from the Environment Agency, planning challenges and risk of increased costs. This is also raised as a programme level risk.
- 3.5.2 Green spaces: Hydes Road
- The project is highlighted due to the level of slippage on the Hydes Road project and budget risk. Slippage has occurred due to seasonal timing of ecological surveys, revisions to designs as a result of locations of mineshafts (impacting on planning permission submission date), and timescales for treatment of mineshafts. This has led to delays in commencing procurement for the pavilion building contractor. The current programme indicates a start on site date of October 2025 and completion in July 2026.
- The project budget risk relates to the risk that contractor prices and/or unforeseen costs on the site exceed the available project budget. Project budget estimates are based on market values for construction. A contingency amount of 6% is included in the project budget and the WLUP Board have agreed the retention of any programme level underspend to provide further contingency. Once prices are available from contractors, a review of the project budget will be undertaken. If contractor prices for demolition and pavilion construction exceed the available budget and contingency sums, options will be developed for WLUP Board consideration.

### **Communication and Engagement**

- 3.6 A programme level communication and engagement strategy was agreed by the WLUP Board in February 2024, and individual project communication and engagement plans received and updated as required. The WLUP Board have established a Communication and Engagement Sub-Group to provide regular input to communication and engagement activities across the programme.
- 3.7 Programme updates are provided to Wednesbury Elected Members through Ward Member participation in the WLUP Board, updates at each of the quarterly Wednesbury Members' meetings, circulation of key information and briefings, as required. Since the March update report to Cabinet, key

communication and engagement activity across the programme has included:

- [Video release of the Community Safety project including the launch of Business Scheme](#)
- Publicity on the completion of Wyntor Lane, Lakeside and Balls Hill Open Spaces
- Publicity on the completion of the Metro Area
- [Public Realm launch of main phase with planting in Ethelfleda Square with St Johns Primary School children](#)
- Announcement of development partner for Friar Park Urban Village Remediation
- Consultation around completed public realm works

3.8 Over the next quarter, planned communication and engagement activity includes:

- Publicity at the Millenium Centre with a spade in the ground ceremony
- Publicity at the Hydes Road Pavillion with a spade in the ground ceremony
- Publicity on the new name for Hydes Road Pavillion
- Communication materials to explain Friar Park Urban Village project

### **Impact, Learning and Evaluation**

3.9 In June 2025 the WLUP Board agreed the monitoring and evaluation framework for the LUP programme, which includes a set of activity indicators and outcome measures to track the success of individual projects and the programme overall. It outlines how progress will be assessed using both quantitative and qualitative data, across all projects of the LUP programme. The framework sets out expectations for regular reporting, stakeholder engagement, lessons learned, and post-project evaluation, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement throughout the delivery of the Wednesbury LUP.

3.10 An interim evaluation of the LUP community safety project was received by the WLUP Board in June 2025 drawing on mixed evaluation methods. This identified early indications of positive changes including:

- Improved detection, deterrence, and real-time response to crime and ASB incidents.
- Reduction in nuisance bike activity (over 50% reduction in nuisance bike ASB reports following installation of nuisance bike deterrents)
- Improved reporting of crime and ASB in town centre area
- Positive early impact in reducing crime in the Town Centre areas subject to LUP interventions (reduction in shoplifting (38%), drug-related offences (60%) and public order offences (59%)).

- Building trust and local ownership through reinforcing a visible commitment from the council to act on community concerns
- Improved intelligence sharing between businesses and enforcement teams
- Community feedback has highlighted increased feelings of safety and ownership of local greenspaces targeted for interventions

3.11 From June – end August 2025 consultation and engagement has been taking place to seek views on the public realm works completed to date. Findings are due to be reported to the WLUP Board at their meeting in September.

### **Legacy and preparation for programme close**

3.12 The LUP programme has reached many key delivery milestones and a number of projects are due to be fully completed by March 2026. Programme governance arrangements will start to transition into business as usual at this point.

3.13 In addition to their role overseeing the LUP programme, the WLUP Board have provided additional benefits to Wednesbury through bringing partners together to provide collective ownership and understanding of delivery challenges and shared resolution to any issues encountered. The Board have mapped community activities and assets, shaped communication and engagement approaches, extended reach into the community, assisted in identifying issues and harnessing a collective voice. Other strengths of the Board have been the inclusion of young people's voice throughout the programme through the active representation in the Board and participation of young people.

3.14 To recognise the value that the WLUP Board has brought as a place-based multi-agency space, consideration is being given to legacy arrangements for the Board beyond the life of the LUP programme. Options are being considered linked to the council's new Neighbourhood working model and existing governance in place at town level. Further details will be provided in future reports to Cabinet.

### **Annual Review of WLUP Board Membership**

3.15 As set out in the WLUP Board Terms of Reference, an annual review of Membership was undertaken in August 2025 and this considered: Board Positions available and positions appointed to, Board meeting attendance, Board Vacancies, and any Terms of Reference updates required. This review helps to ensure continuous improvement in the programme governance arrangements

3.16 Updates to the Board Terms of reference are proposed to Cabinet as set out in Appendix 1. The proposed updates ensure consistency with the Town Deal Boards' Terms of Reference and include provision for the Chair's appointment process. Areas of update are:

- Inclusion of Chair's responsibilities regarding meeting rescheduling
- Inclusion of process for Chair's appointment in the event of a vacancy
- Inclusion of provisions for sub-group and working groups
- References to DLUHC updated to MHCLG
- Inclusion of reference that the selection of Chair and Board Members was conducted by Sandwell Council.
- Additional provisions for the Vice Chair role
- Provision for interim Chair / Vice-Chair
- Inclusion of Board Legal Status
- Inclusion of position on voting rights for substitutes and advisors
- Removal of duplicate clauses on voting.
- Provision for ceasing membership
- Inclusion of section on values and behaviours
- Confidentiality clauses
- Communications, press and media protocol
- Update to Director titles
- Review of Board Membership

#### **4 Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1 The proposed updates to the WLUP Board Terms of Reference have been compiled as part of continuous improvement and ensuring consistency across the WLUP Board and other Regeneration Boards.

#### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The proposed changes to the WLUP Board Terms of Reference have been shared with WLUP Board members for input. No issues with the proposed changes have been raised. Consultation, engagement and communication activity across the programme is summarised in the main body of this report.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The full LUP grant of £20.05m capital and £0.35m revenue has been received by the Council.
- 6.2 Agreement is in place with MHCLG (formerly DLUHC) for the council to manage the grant within the council's overall capital programme to acknowledge that spend would be required beyond the initial March 2025 grant deadline. The availability of capital funding to meet all of the LUP requirements was confirmed in the 2024/2025 capital programme outturn.
- 6.3 Financial performance of the programme continues to be monitored through the Council's capital programme and a financial report is provided to the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board at each of their meetings.

- 6.4 Across the LUP programme, actual spend to date at Quarter 1 was £3.9m capital and £306K revenue. All projects are forecasting spend within their budgets or with a small amount of underspend. With the endorsement of the WLUP Board, this is being held to provide additional risk contingency across the programme.

## 7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 The governance model and scheme of delegation for the LUP programme was agreed by Cabinet in September 2023. The Council is the lead delivery organisation for all LUP projects. Delivery of projects is overseen by the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board. An internal LUP Project Group is in place as a mechanism for ensuring the council is fulfilling its role as Accountable Body and for resolving issues. Spend is monitored through the Council's Corporate Asset Management Board and a LUP programme manager has been appointed to oversee the programme.
- 7.2 As set out in the Board Terms of Reference, an annual review of Membership was undertaken in August 2025. The proposed updates reflect changes made to the Town Deal Boards' Terms of Reference as part of continuous improvement.
- 7.3 Since the last report to Cabinet, the Chair of the WLUP Board has resigned their position due to a conflict of interest. The Vice-Chair has assumed the position of Chair on an interim basis whilst recruitment is underway.
- 7.4 Monthly monitoring conversations are in place with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Internal governance consists of a LUP Project Group and progress reporting to the council's Leadership Team. Cabinet requested to receive 6-monthly progress updates. This report is the fourth 6-monthly programme update to Cabinet.

## 8. Risks

- 8.1 A programme level risk register and individual project risk registers are in place as part of risk management arrangements. Key risks are reported to the WLUP Board at each meeting and the full programme level risk register provided.
- 8.2 There is currently 1 programme level red risk relating to the delivery of the Friar Park Urban Village project as follows:

Risk Title and Description	Delivery of Friar Park Urban Village Project – Time and Cost
	Risk relates to delays in delivery of the project related to obtaining EA licenses and/or delays to developer partner procurement process and/or planning permissions and/or project cost increases

<b>Controls</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early engagement with EA has been undertaken and consultants (technical experts) procured to support the engagement process</li> <li>• Legal review of proposed approach has been undertaken</li> <li>• Full risk assessment conducted</li> <li>• Arrangements in place to manage capital spend beyond Mar 25</li> <li>• Ongoing joint work with WMCA through Joint Venture Agreement</li> <li>• Revised cost estimates received</li> <li>• Capital appraisal review complete</li> <li>• Procurement of developer partner underway</li> <li>• Consultant in place to assist with sports pitch mitigation strategy</li> <li>• Escalation of matters concerning EA permit through MHCLG and positive direction of travel.</li> </ul>
<b>Risk expected to reduce</b>	When EA permitting process concluded, delivery partner procured, and planning permission granted.

8.3 At programme level there is 1 red risks, 3 amber risks and 7 green risks. Since the last report to Cabinet in March 2025 1 risk has reduced, 7 risks remain the same and no risks have increased. 1 risks has been closed and 2 new risks added.

## 9. **Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)**

9.1 Through the project development process, consideration has been given to the impact on and improvements that can be made for residents with protected characteristics.

9.2 Equality Impact screenings and assessments have been conducted, as appropriate. No adverse impacts have been identified. Equality implications are included in reporting to the WLUP Board as part of any decisions.

## 10. **Other Relevant Implications**

10.1 **Corporate parenting** – The voice of the child is incorporated within the LUP governance arrangements through the inclusion of young people's representatives on the WLUP Board. Where consultation has been undertaken as part of the LUP Programme, young people's views and opinions have been sought.



- 10.2 **Social Value** – The LUP projects are being delivered in accordance with the council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules and will deliver social value in line with the council's requirements. Social Value achievements to date have included: works experience placement, improvements to fencing and shelving at a community venue, a community clean up event, a career talk at a school, a contractor funding road closures for Christmas Light switch on, a contractor funding the movement of historic troughs (planters) from the Town Centre to Brunswick Park, and maintenance of planting. Social value is included in reporting to the WLUP Board.
- 10.3 **Health and Wellbeing** – The underpinning objective of the LUP is to 'level up' and reduce inequalities. The LUP interventions focus on tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way and compliment public health programmes.
- 10.4 **Climate Change** - The LUP interventions include a range of improvements to the quality of green spaces and public spaces in Wednesbury, contributing 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 are being considered as part of the detailed design phase and procurement.
- 10.5 **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** – The early findings from the LUP community safety project are set out in section 3.6.2 of the report

## 11. **Background Documents**

None – all in public domain

## 12. **How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?**

- 12.1 This report will support the delivery of the following Strategic Themes:
- Growing up in Sandwell
  - Living in Sandwell
  - Healthy in Sandwell
  - Thriving Economy in Sandwell
  - One Council One Team Approach.
- 12.2 The formation of a Levelling Up Partnership and delivery of the interventions within the LUP will contribute to all strategic themes of the council plan through improving the quality and safety of public and green spaces, expanding a community centre and preparing land for housebuilding. The delivery of the LUP requires cross-Council working including input from key enabling services including finance, legal and procurement.

## Relevance Check

**Budget Reduction/Service Area:**

**Service Lead**

**Date:**

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No