

## **Minutes of Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board**

**15 October 2025 at 6.01pm at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Davies (Chair)

Councillors: Ashraf Gavan Gill Hackett Hemingway	Councillors: Jeffcoat Pall A Singh J Singh
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**Apologies:** No apologies received.

**Officers present:** Rebecca Jenkins (Levelling Up Partnership Programme Manager), Rina Rahim (Town Fund Programme Manager) and Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer).

**In attendance:** **Councillor Peter Hughes (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure)**

Meeting ended at 7.58pm.

### **27/25      Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **28/25      Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2025 are confirmed as a correct record.

### **29/25      Urgent Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider

## Town Fund Programme Update

On 2 September 2025, MHCLG advised Sandwell Council that several funding streams would be consolidated into a single Local Regeneration Fund. For Sandwell, this affected the Levelling Up Fund, Levelling Up Partnership and Town Deal. Key changes included the consolidation of outputs for reporting purposes, an extension to March 2028 for project delivery and spend, delegated authority to the S151 Officer to make decisions on change requests, underspend to be utilised on new projects subject to delivery taking place prior to March 2028 and funding could now be moved between programmes – i.e. Levelling UP Fund to Towns Fund.

Members were provided with an update in relation to the progress achieved across several projects:-

- The New West Bromwich Indoor Market project had been completed in July 2025 before opening officially to public on 27 August 2025;
- the restoration works at West Bromwich Town Hall and Central Library had been completed;
- recognising the restored Grade II listed buildings, the Victorian Society's Birmingham & West Midlands Group had awarded its tenth annual Conservation Award to Sandwell Council;
- the Midland Met Learning Campus construction had progressed positively; a learner story event was held in May 2025;
- the Blackheath Bus Interchange and Public Realm project had commenced on-site works at the end of March 2025 with an expected completion date of November 2025;
- the Sons of Rest Community Centre, an element within the Rowley Regis Park Improvements project had completed refurbishment and opened publicly on 20 September;
- works had been completed on-site to replace the deck of Wrights Bridge via the Canal Network Connectivity Project in May 2025; and
- the Rowley Regis Connected Project had commenced Phase 3 – Cradley Heath and Phase 4 Wrights Lane on site in Summer 2025.

Following further discussion, it was confirmed that flexibility was now in place to deal with any delays or changes to projects now that project deadlines could be extended until March 2028. However, it was highlighted that projects beginning after March 2026 would still be required to adhere to the March 2028 deadline. It was also identified that different approaches may have been considered in the past with several projects if Officers had been aware that a future extension would be provided.

It was noted that no underspend had been forecasted in the majority of schemes in place and that only the Rowley Regis Programme could have potentially seen an underspend of circa £200,000. It was confirmed that any underspend could be allocated to different programmes.

Questions were raised on the composition of the Smethwick Plan for Neighbourhoods Board and whether or not it was adequate to serve and

reflect the opinions of Sandwell's younger residents. As such members requested measures to ensure that the membership of the board encompassed a diverse age-range.

**Resolved** that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure is requested to consider contacting the Smethwick Plan for Neighbourhoods Board to request that they explore measures to ensure that the Board's membership covers a broad and diverse age-range with a revolving and ever-changing membership so that the views of younger people are captured appropriately.

31/25

### **Levelling Up Partnership Update**

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). LUPs were designed as targeted interventions to identify practical, tangible actions to support priority places to 'level up' and to help government develop a more holistic understanding of place. The government's intention was to work closely with each of the selected places in partnership around levelling up challenges. Sandwell was one of the areas selected to form a Levelling Up Partnership.

In September 2023, Cabinet determined to establish governance arrangements and to approve the target geography as Wednesbury. As such, the following projects were confirmed:-

- Friar Park Urban Village.
- Preparing the land at Friar Park Urban Village ready to build new homes Wednesbury Community Safety Scheme.
- Helping partners tackle crime and antisocial behaviour with new and improved CCTV, engaging with residents and businesses and making changes in green spaces to tackle nuisance bike activity
- Wednesbury Town Centre Improvements.
- Making it greener with new trees and planting, and create a longterm vision through a masterplan to tackle derelict sites and keep the town thriving.
- Wednesbury Greenspaces Improvements.
- Improving green spaces at Hydes Road Playing Fields, Balls Hill Open Space, Wyntor Lane Open Space, Lakeside and Norbury Open Space.
- Friar Park Millennium Centre expansion.
- Expanding the Friar Park Millennium Centre to accommodate a wider range of services enabling people to improve skills and access better jobs.

The Board was updated on the major achievements achieved to date which included the appointment of a development partner for Friar Park Urban Village Project, the completion of capital spend within the community safety project, completion and launch of the main phase of public realm work as well as progress on the site of the Millennium Centre project.

Additionally, there had been a reduction in shoplifting, drug-related offenses, public order offenses and a 50% reduction in nuisance bike reports in 2024-2025 when compared to 2023-2024.

Following questions from members, it was noted that Officers had been working with the Environment Agency to ensure that any plans, submitted in relation to the Friar Park Urban Village project, were well informed. As such, it was reported that no “showstoppers” had been identified with the plans.

It was clarified that further funding under the Pride in Place programme would soon be available however, it was noted that this was separate to the Levelling Up Partnership and Levelling Up Fund. As such members were keen on further information non the Pride in Place funding and requested that members be involved in the process.

In relation to question around the legacy of community champions and Council partners who had assisted or benefitted from the Levelling Up Partnership, it was confirmed that discussions were in place to provide clear options in terms of a continuation of services following the end of the Levelling Up Partnership. Officers stated that restrictions around resources were in place and therefore, some partnerships may not have been possible to continue.

**Resolved** that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure is requested to communicate with Councillors the current timeframes and options regarding the Pride in Place funding and that Councillors are engaged with on the allocation of the funding.

32/25

### **Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2025-2026**

The Board noted the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2025-2026.