

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 8 April 2024

Title: Long Term Plan for Towns Funding for Bexhill in 2024-25

Report of: Joe Powell, Head of Housing and Regeneration

Cabinet Member: Councillor Bayliss / Councillor Jeeawon

Ward(s): All Bexhill Wards

Decision Type: Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): **Recommendation to COUNCIL:** £14.936m (2024/2034) be added to the Capital Programme and phased in-line with the 10-year drawdown schedule, for the Long Term Plans for Towns. Additionally, £449,000 revenue funding for 2024/25 only.

AND

It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the receipt of £0.94m grant funding from the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Community's Long-Term Plan for Towns Fund in 2024/25 (detailed in Finance below), be approved;
- 2) the Councils' role as the accountable body for the Long-Term Plans for Towns and delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, for approval of the governance arrangements when finalised, be accepted; and
- 3) delegated authority be granted to the Head of Housing and Regeneration to enter into relevant agreements with third party entities, as agreed by the Long-Term Plans for Towns Board and for the purposes of delivering the programme, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance.

Reasons for

Recommendations: The Long-Term Plan for Towns grant funding needs to be formally received by the council and added to the Council's revenue and capital budgets. The funds will be provided to delivery organisations in-line with decisions made by the Bexhill Town Board.

Introduction

1. The Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) is a government initiative administered through the Department of Levelling Up and Communities (DLUHC). It is a regeneration initiative that aims to support improvements to UK towns, boosting

economic growth, improving infrastructure, enhancing social well-being and reducing disparities in areas most in need. The approach is one of empowering town communities to take a long term approach to creating change that will last (see [Our Long-Term Plan for Towns - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/long-term-plans)).

2. The LTPT has three high level funding themes:
 - Safety and Security
 - High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration
 - Transport and Connectivity
3. To achieve transformative impact in these areas, the LTPT will work through a 10-year commitment of government funding which is allocated on an endowment basis, enabling the draw down of spend in accordance with local plans and priorities, rather than being fixed by budget year.
4. The decision-making body for funding priorities will be a new local decision-making body – the Bexhill Town Board. The LTPT guidance states that the Town Board shall involve people from the local community, including businesses, working with central and local government representatives to identify and address regeneration priorities.
5. Whilst the Council will not be the decision-making body for the LTPT, it will be the accountable body for the spend as well as having a representative on the Town Board and is likely to become a delivery partner for some projects.

Overview

6. The funding will be released by DLUHC subject to a 10-year vision statement and 3-year investment plan. The Levelling Up Partnership Manager, supported by Council Senior Managers and Members will work with the Town Board to develop both the vision statement and the investment plan, drawing on learning from direct community engagement. The 10-year vision and 3-year, evidence-based, investment plan must have formal Town Board approval.
7. DLUHC has established a Towns Unit to function as a cross-cutting hub, working across other government departments to smooth over barriers and maximise opportunities for the best use of the funding. A High Streets and Towns Taskforce has been established to support towns to deliver on their priorities.
8. A Bexhill-specific data pack has been provided by the DLUHC. It is the first time this data has been collated at town level by Central Government and some of the data goes down to the level of Super Output Areas. Most of the data is from 2021. It does not, therefore, take account of recent impacts of the COVID-19 related lockdowns, nor of the impact of economic challenges on individuals, businesses and communities. Despite this, it provides some useful benchmarking from which to identify priorities and monitor progress. This data set will be complemented by the development of a more in-depth local evidence base to inform the Town Board vision and initial investment plan.

Immediate timescales and priorities

9. The timescale for establishing the Town Board's Terms of Reference (ToR) and wider governance structures is short. The DLUHC requires that by 1 April 2024,

the Town Board is established, with a Chair and Membership identified and with draft ToR developed for consideration by the Board.

10. The deadline for sending the 10-year vision and the 3-year investment plan is 1 August 2024.
11. DLUHC has provided specific guidance for Local Authorities and Town Boards¹, covering the establishment of the Town Boards, high level investment themes, initial information on evaluation and assurance and Town Board governance requirements.

Establishing the Town Board and Membership

12. The DLUHC guidance states that the Chair of the Town Board should be invited by the Local Authority, working closely with the local MP. The Chair should be either a local community leader or local businessperson and is responsible for ensuring that the Board is community-led and embedded in the local area. Elected representatives must not chair the Town Board.
13. Once appointed, the Chair should collaborate with the Local Authority to select Board Members. The default arrangement is that the Local Authority should function as Secretariat to the Board.
14. It is mandatory for the following to sit on the Town Board:
 - Parliamentary Representative(s).
 - A local Councillor from East Sussex County Council and from Rother District Council.
 - The Police and Crime Commissioner (or alternatively, a senior representative from Sussex Police).
15. Additionally, it may be decided that representatives of the following bodies sit on the Town Board:
 - Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council.

Other membership is at the Chair's discretion and should reflect a balance of:

- community partners (for example, community organisations, faith groups, neighbourhood forums, youth groups).
 - local businesses and social enterprises (key local employers/investors).
 - cultural, arts, heritage and sporting organisations; and
 - public agencies and anchor institutions (schools, colleges, higher education, Integrated Care Boards).
16. As Secretariat to the Town Board (see below), the Council will publish the Town Board membership and ToR on its website as soon as possible following the finalising of Board Members and not later than the end April 2024.

Capacity requirements

17. The programme places a requirement on Rother District Council (RDC) to:
 - i. support the Partnership of and around the Town Board.
 - ii. provide the Secretariat to the Town Board.

¹ Long Term Plan for Towns – Guidance for Local Authorities and Town Boards. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. December 23

- iii. manage grant agreements and monitor the performance of grant recipients with the Town Board; and
 - iv. provide other functions as the accountable body (financial, legal, procurement services for example).
18. The recently appointed Levelling Up Partnership Manager will support the Chair and the Membership and the meetings of the Town Board and any required sub-groups. They will also lead on community engagement (see below Communications), drawing in the expertise of colleagues and partners as appropriate.
19. The Levelling Up Partnership Manager is working with Legal, Finance and Procurement Services to scope out and develop estimated costings to inform approval from the Town Board to allocate the funding necessary to cover capacity costs.

Communications

20. An initial communications plan has been developed with the Marketing Communications Account Manager. This will be supplemented by a dedicated community engagement plan to both inform and involve our wider communities in developments. This will have a focus on inclusivity, directly seeking the views of groups that are traditionally marginalised in terms of representation (people of diverse faiths and ethnic backgrounds, younger people and those in the most deprived areas).

Economic Impact and Community Value

21. A full economic and social impact assessment will be undertaken for the Town Board programme alongside that for the Levelling Up Partnership projects funding (which is subject of a separate Cabinet paper of the same date). This will be completed by 1 August 2024 as part of developing the evidence based 3-year investment plan.
22. Whilst the vision and investment plan is still to be developed through the Town Board, it is evident that this programme, alongside the shorter term Levelling Up Partnership funding, will provide significant direct social benefit in terms of social capital development, community health and wellbeing, directly addressing poverty and lack of affordable housing. It will also contribute to long term business growth through business infrastructure development.

Finance

23. The total grant allocation over the 10-year period of Long-Term Plan for Towns is £19.510m across revenue and capital.
24. £50,000 revenue funding has been paid in 23/24 as initial capacity funding for the Council to do the work necessary to establish the Town Board by 1 April 2024.
25. The provisional revenue allocation for 24/25 is £449,000. The remaining £4,075,000 revenue funding is split across the budget years 2025/2034. This is to include capacity costs, including those relating to Town Board secretariat, community engagement, partnership development and support, legal and

procurement services, and financial services. These are in the process of being scoped as far as possible to anticipate costs.

26. The capital allocation totals £14.936m between 2024 and 2034, with exact spend to be decided through the Town Board.
27. Appendix A is an extract from DLUHC guidance showing breakdown of Capital and Revenue funding by year. The grant is allocated on an endowment basis, meaning that monies not spent in any one budget year can be carried forward. This enables long term planning and appropriate feasibility and business case preparation to make the best use of the funding.

Programme Governance

28. The LTPFT governance arrangements will need to provide the Council with a level of assurance that satisfies its position as accountable body for the grant and minimise financial risks to the Council. In addition, to the accountable body function the new partnership presents extensive community engagement responsibilities as well as the secretariat function. Members should note that the governance arrangements are subject to change as the Council collaborates with stakeholders to ensure that it is able to achieve the assurances it needs as the accountable body.
29. To support the governance arrangements, a ToR for the Town Board is required. Work is in progress to support the Town Board Chair as needed.

Conclusion

30. The commitment by DLUHC to more than £19m over 10 years for the levelling up of Bexhill represents much needed investment. It is a significant opportunity to transform the town in terms of its identity, its economic and social resilience and its shared prosperity alongside reduction in social and health inequalities.
31. It also represents a responsibility on all partners to work together in a constructive partnership to maximise the benefits of the opportunities presented and create a catalyst for positive community ownership in making the town fit for future generations.
32. Whilst RDC is not the decision-making body for how the funding has been allocated, it is the accountable body as well as being likely to be a project delivery partner. This makes the robustness and clarity of governance arrangements particularly important.
33. This is a fast moving initiative with complex relationship between its different elements. Regular updates will be provided.

Environmental Implications

34. The Long-Term Plan for Towns programme will be assessed through the new RDC Carbon and Co-Benefits Decision Support Tool as projects arise, and updated in terms of Environmental Implications through the update of the LTPT Project Initiation Document which will be regularly sighted by the Senior Leadership Team.

Equalities Impact

35. A full equalities impact assessment will be developed as part of the 3-year investment plan for the Town Board by 1 August 2021 in line with Equalities Act (2010 and updates) frameworks and in line with any specific requirements of the forthcoming DLUHC requirements. In addition, an assessment of the socio-economic impact will be developed as per the Council's recent commitment to do so. In the meantime, there are no negative equalities implications identified. Through grant agreements, all construction and public realm enhancement will be required to show consideration of equalities impact and compliance with Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and updates) and the Equality Act (2010 and updates).

Risk Management

36. A risk register has been initiated through the Project Initiation Document (PID) for this programme, which has been reported to the Corporate Programme Board. A risk workshop is planned for April 2024 with relevant RDC managers. We recommend to the Town Board that it conduct its own risk workshop to promote peer risk identification and mitigation. Specific risk management will form part of the performance monitoring of any LTPT related grant agreements. The Levelling Up Partnership Manager will hold an overall risk register, which will be updated regularly, informed by these in-depth risk assessment processes and in line with DLUHC's own requirements. It will be regularly reviewed by the Town Board Chair/membership to be agreed as well as by RDC Senior Leaders through updates and reporting of the Project Initiation Document.
37. Once the programme has been established the Internal Audit Manager will be invited to provide review and feedback on both the registers and the overarching risk management process. Risk management will form part of regular updates of the LTPT PID to RDC Senior Leaders through Senior Leadership Team.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	Yes	Consultation	No
Sustainability	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	Appendix A – Extract from DLUHC correspondence of 23 February 2024 showing breakdown and total of Long Term Plan for Towns Allocation
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None

Appendix A

Extract from DLUHC correspondence of 23 February 2024 showing breakdown and total of Long Term Plan for Towns Allocation²:

in 000's	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29	29-30	30-31	31-32	32-33	33-34	Total
Total RDEL per place	50	449	423	449	449	449	449	454	467	467	467	4,574
Total CDEL per place		491	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	14,936
Total amount per place												19,510

² Note: this is additional to the Levelling Up Partnership Funding of £18,303k allocated to Rother projects for 24.25 spend. This list of projects is currently embargoed pending a formal announcement from DLUHC now due April 2024.