

UK GOVERNMENT LEVELLING-UP PROGRAMME: DUMFRIES LONG-TERM TOWN PLAN

REPORT APPROVED BY HEAD OF ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Reason for Report

This report follows a report to the Economy and Resources Committee meeting of 24 November 2023 that referred to the announcement by the UK Government of the inclusion of Dumfries in its 'Long-Term Plan for Towns', a part of its Levelling-Up programme. At that time limited details were available. Further guidance was however published from the Department of Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities on the 18 December 2023 thereby allowing this further report to be brought to Committee on the details and next-steps required.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

2.1 note the information contained in section 4 of the report regarding the UK Government's announcement of its 'Long-Term Plan for Towns' for which Dumfries will benefit from £20 million of funding over 10-years from 2024/25;

2.2 note the requirement and timescales to appoint a Chair, establish a Town Board and prepare a Long-Term Plan for Dumfries, as set out in paragraphs 4.4 to 4.8;

2.3 agree to officers consulting with political groups to draw up a longlist of individuals to be considered for the role of independent Chair of the Town Board, to consultation on that appointment with the local MPs and MSPs for Dumfries and to make a recommendation on this appointment to Full Council at its meeting on 27th February 2024 as set out in paragraphs 4.4.1 and 4.4.5;

2.4 agree the nomination of two Elected Members and nominated substitutes to represent Dumfries and Galloway Council on the Town Board, as set out in paragraph 4.4.5; and

2.5 agree to the establishment of an additional officer to be based within the Economy and Development Place Team to support the Board Chair, provide the secretariat requirement and associated liaison requirements between the Town Board and Dumfries and Galloway Council, as set out in paragraph 4.8.3.

3. Executive Summary (What is the report about?)

3.1 In September 2023 the UK Government launched its 'Long-Term Plan for Towns', supporting 55 towns including seven in Scotland as part of the Levelling-Up programme. Dumfries has been selected and will receive £20 million in endowment-style funding from 2024/25. Detailed guidance was published in December 2023 on the process for establishing a Town Board to develop and deliver a Long-Term Plan for each town.

3.2 The Town Board is to be independently Chaired and be formed to represent community interests, business perspectives and public organisations. The Plan they will develop must include a 10-year vision, and an initial 3-year investment plan. The guidance is clear that where existing partnerships, strategies and action plans exist that they do not need to be reinvented but can be adapted to suit this new purpose.

3.3 The UK Government has defined the areas that the Long-Term Plan should focus on with themes of Safety and Security; High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration; and Transport and Connectivity. They emphasise the importance of co-design of the Plan with communities and stakeholders and also the potential for identifying how the Plan can bring in additional resources from private investment, philanthropy and other public sector sources. Our Council will be the accountable body for funding and for executing plans.

3.4 Timescales for actions have been set –

- In December 2023 an initial capacity fund was given to our Council to enable initial steps and set up of the Town Board.
- As early as possible the Council must appoint a Chair for the Town Board in consultation with local MPs.
- The Council must work with the Chair to form the Town Board, it must have met by 1 April 2024 at the latest.
- Addition capacity funding will be released to support the Town Board form its Plan
- The Long-Term Plan for Dumfries should be submitted to the UK Government by 1 August 2024.
- On approval the initial investment funds will be released to the Council.

4. Detail and Analysis

4.1 In September 2023 the UK Government launched its 'Long-Term Plan for Towns', as part of the Levelling-Up programme. This programme intends to invest £1.1 billion in 55 towns over ten years. Dumfries has been selected among seven in Scotland and will receive £20 million in endowment-style funding from 2024/25. Funding will be released over a 7-year period to be invested over a 10-year period and will be split 25% revenue, 75% capital.

4.2 In establishing how this funding is to be invested the UK Government is taking a distinct approach by requiring the establishment of Town Boards as new decision-making bodies. These are to bring together residents, business and community leaders to devise and agree a shared vision for the future and to develop entrepreneurial, creative and forward-looking initiatives for each town. Dumfries and Galloway Council will remain the accountable body for funding and for executing plans.

4.3 On 18 December 2023 the UK Government released its detailed guidance on the delivery of the programme. This includes how a Town Board is to be established, how the Long-Term Plan is to be developed, the process for approval of that plan and associated investment programmes, further details on the investment themes and eligible

interventions and how the government will conduct monitoring and evaluation. The full guidance document is available on the Government website at [Long-term-plan-for-towns-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-town-boards](#). Key aspects of the guidance are set out below.

4.4 Establishing a Town Board

4.4.1 The Town Board must be independently chaired with that chair to be appointed by the Council. This individual must be a local community leader or businessperson, respected in the place and in a position to be able to convene partners to form the Board. The local MPs should be engaged in this process. The guidance allows for situations where existing partnership structures already exist in a town for that forum to act as the Town Board, for example an appropriate subset of the Community Planning Partnership. If that is the case the Chair and local authority should ensure that the right people are around the table to fully reflect the priorities of the town, this may require additional appointments.

4.4.2 The guidance prescribes the following representation on the Town Board –

- Local MPs and MSPs
- Two local councillors
- A senior representative from the police

4.4.3 Further membership should be tailored to local context and is at the Chair's discretion but can comprise of –

- Community partners
- Local businesses and social enterprises
- Cultural, arts, heritage and sporting organisations
- Public agencies and anchor institutions

4.4.4 The size of membership has to be considered to balance representation with the expectations of delivering actions and investments. The guidance suggests working groups could be convened to facilitate wider engagement on the themes of the Long-Term Plan for Towns.

4.4.5 It is therefore recommended that Committee agree to officers consulting with political groups to draw up a longlist of individuals to be considered for the role of independent Chair of the Town Board and to consult on that appointment with the local MPs and MSPs for Dumfries. A final recommendation on the appointment will be made to Full Council at its meeting on 27th February 2024. Furthermore it is recommended that Committee agree the nomination of two Elected Members to represent Dumfries and Galloway Council on the Town Board. To ensure the Council's regular representation on the Town Board is maintained it is advised and recommended that substitutes are also nominated.

4.5 Setting a strategy

4.5.1 The Town Board will be responsible for developing the Long-Term Plan. It should build on any existing plans or strategies for the town that align with the Long-Term Plan for Towns' objectives. The plan should comprise a 10-year vision which clearly identifies the long-term priorities for the town and a 3-year investment plan as an annex. The plan should confirm the area that will be covered. It will set out the strategic case for change with the outcomes and objectives that the town is trying to achieve grounded by the priorities of the local community. The priorities of local communities need to be reflected in the Plan and so the plan must be co-designed with communities, businesses and residents.

4.5.2 The 3-year investment plan will set out –

- The interventions the Town Board wishes to use over the 3 years for each investment theme.
- How the town Board will use the interventions locally and how much they will cost.
- How the interventions will address the outcomes set out in the 10-year vision.

4.5.3 Dumfries and Galloway Council will receive the investment to fund the Town Board's investment plan. Town Boards are encouraged to work with partners to consider how additional funding can be attracted with the guidance mentioning new private investment, philanthropy or other public funding. Local authorities will be engaged throughout the development of the plan to discuss the interventions and investments being considered.

4.5.4 The guidance lists potential interventions that they consider having a strong case for investment, value for money and benefit-to-cost ration. Should a Town Board wish to consider one of these interventions a business case will not be required as part of the Government's assessment process of the investment plan. Any alternative interventions to respond to local needs can be considered but will require the preparation of an outline business case and agreement of the Council to underwrite the risk.

4.6 The investment themes

4.6.1 The UK Government's expectation is that Town Plans will bring forward improvements under three broad investment themes (with examples from published guidance):

- Safety and security e.g. new and improved security infrastructure such as CCTV and streetlighting, additional hotspot policing and local authority wardens.
- High Streets, Heritage, and Regeneration e.g. preserving and improving heritage sites in the town, creating and maintaining parks and green spaces and establishing Business Improvement Districts.
- Transport and Connectivity e.g. making the town centre more walkable and accessible, programmes to encourage cycling and road/junction improvements.

4.7 High Streets and Towns Taskforce and further support

4.7.1 The towns involved in the Long-Term Plan for Towns programme will be able to access consultancy-style support through a new UK Government High Streets and Towns Taskforce (HSTTF). The HSTTF is about hands-on place making assistance to deliver on the Long-Term Plan. Once established Town Boards can engage directly with the HSTTF.

4.7.2 A Towns Unit has also been set up within the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to act as a cross-cutting hub that will work with other government departments to help Town Boards use every lever and tool at their disposal. They will also supply each town with a data pack, a policy toolkit and provide dedicated support through the Scotland DLUHC team.

4.8 Timescale requirements, capacity funding and project co-ordination

4.8.1 The UK Government has confirmed the following expectations on timescales:

- By 1 April 2024 – local authorities to have appointed the Town Board Chair and to have brought local partners together to form the Board and start the process of setting out the Long-Term Plan.
- By 1 August 2024 at the latest – Town Board's should submit their Long-Term Plans to DLUHC, who will conduct an assessment and when approved release investment funding.

4.8.2 As lead local authority Dumfries and Galloway Council have received in advance £50,000 in capacity funding to support upfront costs of setting up a Town Board. Once Town Boards are established a further £200,000 will be released at the start of financial year 2024/25. These year-one revenue funds can be used to support activities that will inform the development of the Long-Term Plan e.g. run community engagement, commission technical expertise in project development.

4.8.3 Committee members will be aware that this new fund came at the direction of the UK Government and was not anticipated in the forward planning of Economy and Development Service. In order to fully support the establishment and running of the Town Board it is recommended that Members agree to the appointment of an additional member of staff to work within the Economy and Development Place Team to support the Board Chair, act as the co-ordinating point between the Board and the Council and to provide the secretariat functions for the Board. It is proposed that funding for this post is drawn from the capacity funding referred to in paragraph 4.8.2 above and then on an ongoing basis from the revenue element of the Government funding. If agreed a job specification and grade will be confirmed for recruitment alongside the set up of the Town Board.

5. Council Plan Outcomes and Principles (How do the proposals contribute to the delivery of the Council's strategic outcomes and impact the principles as published?) [Themes and Strategic Outcomes](#)

The Long-Term Plan for Towns investment for Dumfries can support our Council Plan outcomes. At this early stage there appear to be alignments of purpose in delivering –

Economy – Investment in the region benefits communities and the local economy.

Travel, Connectivity and Infrastructure - Roads, paths, cycling and walking networks in the region are improved.

Health and Wellbeing - Help is provided to tackle the causes and effects of poverty, inequality and increased cost of living.

In addition, the delivery of the investment via a Town Board aligns to the direction of our Council in supporting our citizens, supporting our communities and being a responsive Council; key principles set out in our Council Plan.

6. Implications and Risk

Financial: (what resources are required/is it budgeted for?)

The Long-Term Plan for Towns programme is part of the UK Government Levelling-Up Fund. It is a capital and revenue fund with revenue making up 25% of the £20 million award. There is therefore limited financial risk in establishing the Town Board. It should be noted that, as detailed in paragraph 4.5.4, interventions developed within the Long-Term Plan can come from a set of UK Government pre-approved interventions, but should a bespoke local intervention be proposed this will require to be underwritten by our Council.

Legal: (are there legal implications to be considered?)

None.

Workforce: (do the proposals have any implications for or impact upon employees?)

As referred to in paragraph 4.8.2 it is recommended that part of the revenue funding awarded through this programme is utilised to recruit a officer to support the Town Board providing secretariat and liaison functions as part of the Council's support for the Town Board.

Impact Assessment: (is the proposal such that an [impact assessment](#) is required?)

The report does not propose a change in policy, the formal adoption of a plan, policy or strategy or propose a service change and it is therefore not necessary to complete an impact assessment.

7. Governance Assurance

The Council Management Team have been consulted during the preparation of this report of this report and are in agreement with it contents.

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Approved by

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Appendices – None

Background Papers and Relevant Committee Decisions

Report to Economy and Resources Committee, 21 November 2023 - [DUMFRIES TOWN PLAN](#)

UK Government Guidance, 18 December 2023 - [Long-term-plan-for-towns-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-town-boards](#)