

REPORT TO: WECA COMMITTEE

DATE: 30th NOVEMBER 2018

REPORT TITLE: LOVE OUR HIGH STREETS

DIRECTOR: JESSICA LEE, HEAD OF STRATEGY & POLICY

**AUTHOR: LYNDA BIRD, HEAD OF PERFORMANCE, PLANNING
& PROJECTS**

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report sets out a proposal to establish a new fund targeted at supporting regeneration in local high streets and to trial this approach through three pilot projects.

Background / Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Royal Society for Public Health's 2018 Report [Heath on the High Street: Running on Empty](#) reports a proliferation of empty shops, clustered in deprived areas, leading to a negative impact on community wellbeing. The report notes an 11% high street vacancy rate in 2017, up from below 7% in 2007.
- 2.2 This issue is nationally recognised and the Chancellor's November 2018 budget includes a [Plan for the High Street](#) that will see a reduction in business rates by a third for up to 90% of retail properties and will set up a £675M Future High Streets Fund.
- 2.3 WECA and the Authorities anticipate bidding for future match from the Government £675m Future High Streets Fund.
- 2.4 The decline in High Streets can be attributed to a large number of factors including:
 - A historic reliance on a retail offer which is vulnerable to changing consumer habits such as opportunities for online shopping, out of town retail.
 - A built environment often dominated by roads and cars rather than pedestrian focused
 - Often complex land ownership issues that make interventions challenging

The resulting vacant units, low end retail occupiers and areas of decline combined to make high streets a less attractive investment propositions.

- 2.5 It is proposed WECA establishes a fund of up to £10M to support high streets to meet the needs of their communities in the digital age through securing funding and expertise to support businesses, community activities, services and homes.
- 2.6 To explore the potential application of this fund, three pilot projects have been identified, one in each of the Constituent Authority areas. These pilot projects will provide a test-bed to inform the development of a longer-term programme which will

align with the Joint Spatial Plan Urban Living theme and focus on delivery longer-term economic uplift in line with WECA's operating framework.

- 2.7 WECA and the authorities recognise the urgency of progressing these pilots, with early deliverables to be achieved as quickly as possible. WECA will work closely with the Authorities to agree detailed plans and outcomes for each of the pilot projects.
- 2.8 Each pilot project will be required to follow a similar phased approach to ensure that the evaluation and learning from these pilot projects can be used to inform the development of the wider programme. This is illustrated in the diagram below.

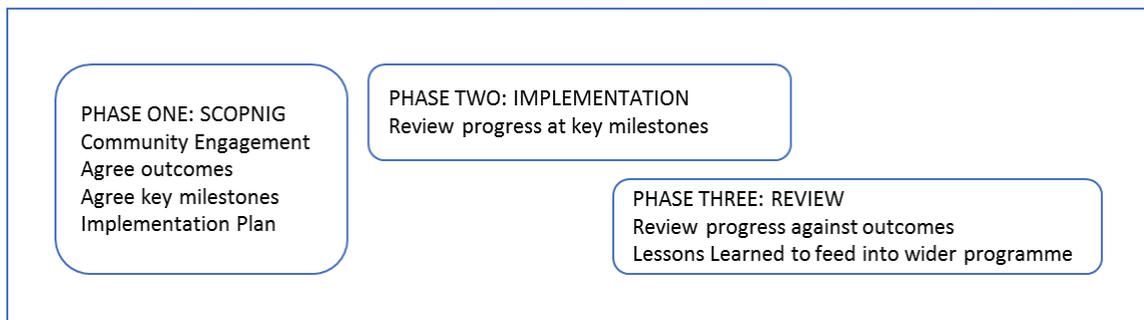


Diagram One: Project Approach

Pilot Projects

2.9 Bath & North East Somerset: Pilot High Streets Programme

2.9.1 Three proposed B&NES High Street projects have been identified under one High Streets pilot programme, as follows:

- Midsomer Norton Town Centre – Project Concept: Creating a 21st Century Market Town
- Bath City Centre North – Project Concept: Animating the city centre – ‘north-south axis’
- Local High Street Initiative – Project Concept: Local High Street vitality Healthcheck and Twerton High Street community led-investment pilot

2.9.2 A single programme with three pilot locations will encourage communities across Bath & North East Somerset to work together and will bring additional opportunities in terms of co-funding, investment, collaboration and innovation. WECA project delivery programmes are anticipated to be relatively short, and pilots in three areas will also allow for projects to be developed in parallel and outcomes delivered in an accelerated way. A pilot in one area would simply not be able to deliver as much benefit, as quickly, to our High Streets. This pilot model also allows the authority to gear up towards future funding bids from the Government's Future High Streets fund for multiple locations (Expressions of Interest in Spring 2019).

2.10 Bristol: Bedminster High Street Regeneration

2.10.1 The project will support the development of currently underutilised or vacant spaces located in and around Bedminster High Street. Our focus will be on bringing new types of uses into the area, strengthening and diversifying the current High Street offer. Attracting businesses within the creative and digital sectors will be a priority.

2.10.2 The project will provide grants and support to property owners and business/community based occupiers. Support will include helping to identify other sources of funding or complementary support, potential developers and occupiers. If successful the project will safeguard and enhance the High Street environment, increase the number of businesses and jobs in the area with a focus on providing opportunities for residents in adjacent communities, provide new homes, generate additional Business Rates or Council Tax income

2.11 South Gloucestershire: Kingswood High Street Regeneration

2.11.1 The Kingswood High Street regeneration proposal has been submitted as an outline business case with a view to the full business case being completed in the new year. This is an ambitious programme geared to delivering long-term transformation of the experience of Kingswood High Street. The pilot project will provide funding for some short-term investment in the street scene, partly delivered by the Authority and partly delivered by the community and this will support a pilot project led by the Council and already underway, amounting to a significant match-funding contribution.

2.11.2 The programme will invest in the development of a Makerspace Studio, providing access to digital training and equipment for the local community. Investment will also be set aside for the significant community and heritage opportunity offered by the Grade-1 listed Whitfield Tabernacle. To support a sustainable long-term urban centre, the project will also provide the revenue funding required to comprehensively masterplan the town centre, providing new housing and employment opportunities, but also delivering strategies for the future of the heritage, green space and public realm offers

2.11.3 The project scoping and business case development will identify where funds may be available from other sources.

Wider Programme

2.12 It is anticipated that a second phase of activity will commence in approximately six months' time and WECA will establish a process to assess future proposals, noting that all allocations from the £10M fund will be subject to agreement of business cases through WECA's existing governance using the Directors and Chief Executives.

2.13 As part of the longer term programme WECA will put in place a process to monitor and manage the overall programme and to explore external funding sources and support access to the Government's recently announced Future High Streets Fund.

Consultation

3 This proposal has been discussed with the Directors and Chief Executives of the Constituent Authorities, and with the WECA Members.

Other Options Considered

4 None.

Risk Management/Assessment

- 5 This recommendation aims to pilot approaches to address the ongoing decline in local high streets that is nationally recognised. By identifying ways to address this issue WECA can support economic growth in some of the more economically deprived areas in the region.

Key success criteria will be identified for each of the pilot projects and rigorous assessment will be undertaken to understand whether these criteria have been met, to ensure that the WECA Investment Fund is allocated appropriately.

Public Sector Equality Duties

- 6 The public-sector equality duty created under the Equality Act 2010 means that public authorities must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 6.1 The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

- 6.2 The general equality duty therefore requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services, including policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.

- 6.3 There are no equalities implications arising as a direct result of this report. Each pilot project will complete an Equality and Diversity assessment and a cumulative assessment will be undertaken on the resulting programme.

Finance Implications, including economic impact assessment where appropriate:

- 7 The allocation of up to £10m will be facilitated through review, and prioritisation, of the Investment Fund. Spending will be drawn down on an individual business case basis – requiring demonstration of the value of the investment either in terms of outcomes, through regenerating high streets, and/or financial benefits achievable.

- 7.1 The three initial pilots, as detailed in this report, will help to refine the evaluation criteria to be used for future financial draw down against the fund.

-
- 7.2 Individual West of England authorities will be responsible for ensuring that spend is fully compliant with the conditions of the financial draw-down and planned outcomes are delivered as detailed within approved business cases.

Advice given by: Malcolm Coe, Director of Investment and Corporate Services

Legal Implications:

- 8 Criteria for accessing funding needs to be clearly identified so that applications can be prioritised

Advice given by: Shahzia Daya, Director of Legal

Land/property implications

- 9 None for WECA – Constituent Authorities must satisfy themselves of any land/property issues that arise from the projects on their estates.

Advice given by: David Carter, Director of Infrastructure

Human Resources Implications:

- 10 Development of the longer-term programme will require co-ordination from within WECA. We would in the first instance look at available resource within WECA or the Constituent Authorities with knowledge and experience of regeneration programmes. Initial funding for this resource would need to come from the £10m allocation, with the aspiration that this becomes self-funded in the longer term.

Advice given by: Alex Holly, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the West of England Combined Authority agrees:

- 1 To allocate a total of up to £10M from the WECA Investment Fund to establish a 'Love our High Streets' fund as set out in paragraphs 2.5, 2.12 and 2.13 of this report
- 2 To agree to proceed with the three pilot projects identified in sections 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11 of this report, to be funded from the Love our High Streets Fund
- 3 To delegate to the West of England Combined Authority Chief Executive, in consultation with the West of England Chief Executives, authority to make all necessary arrangements for the allocation and application of this funding in accordance with the objectives set out in this report.
- 4 To request a report is brought back to WECA upon completion of the pilot projects setting out the outcomes and making recommendations to inform further funding awards.
- 5 To delegate to the Section 151 Officer to make all necessary amendments to the

WECA and Mayoral Budgets as appropriate to reflect the approved allocation of investment funding

Background papers:

Royal Society for Public Health: [Heath on the High Street: Running on Empty](#), 2018

HM Treasury: [Our Plan for the High Street: Budget 2018](#), 2018

West of England Combined Authority Contact:

Any person seeking background information relating to this item should seek the assistance of the contact officer for the meeting who is Ian Hird / Tim Milgate on 0117 332 1486; or by writing to West of England Combined Authority, 3 Rivergate, Temple Way, Bristol BS1 6ER; email: democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk