

Budget balance, and approval of the capacity funding (existing and new allocation)

Purpose

As part of the submission to the Government detailing the Board chair and membership details, the Board is also requested to provide an outline of capacity funding expenditures to date and plans for additional spending.

Detailed proposals for the original £250k were agreed by the Board in July 2024, and variations to this, and an outline for the additional £200k capacity funding,(for 2025/26) were discussed (pending the new guidance) by the Board in December 2024.

Following the publication of the guidance for the Plan for Neighbourhoods, this paper now sets out proposals for the use of this funding for the Board's consideration

Recommendations for the Board

- 1. To note the current budget position, expenditures, and commitments to date.**
- 2. To consider the proposed amendments to the original capacity funding budget (£250k) and the outline for the additional capacity funding (£200k).**
- 3. To approve the final budget for submission to the Government.**

Background

Delivery funding for the Plan for Neighbourhoods will be released from the beginning of the 2026/27 financial year. Ahead of this, an additional £200,000 of capacity funding will be released to the local authority (as the accountable body) giving the Board the time and space to embed the necessary governance structures, grow their presence within the local area and build local capacity and capability to be ready to hit the ground running in 2026/27.

MHCLG guidance states that the local authorities should consult Neighbourhood Boards on their preference for using the capacity money, which could include:

- establishing and running the Neighbourhood Board, including any process to establish the board as a charity, community interest company, or other bottom-up organisational model, to sustain long-term investment.

- performing community engagement, which could include passporting money directly to voluntary and community sector groups to assist with engagement.
- developing Regeneration Plans.
- securing advice and expertise for Neighbourhood Boards for the technical elements of plan development and delivery.
- ensuring capital and infrastructure interventions can hit the ground running, for example, by kickstarting the planning application process, securing architectural plans and obtaining legal advice, or any other activity that councils and boards consider will progress their plans

The guidance states that support is available from the MHCLG and notes the guidance to curb public sector use of consultants. However, on enquiry to MHCLG, the previous expert support offered through the High Street Accelerator programme (which has been particularly successful in engaging and inspiring the Board in Harwich) the Levelling Up Fund, or through the earlier Towns Fund, no longer appears to be on offer, so support is minimal.

The capacity funding builds on the previous £250,000 grants provided to local authorities to establish (then) Town Boards and begin community engagement as part of the previous administration's Long-Term Plan for Towns programme.

Budget spend to date

In July 2024 the Board approved the following Activities from 2024/25 – 2026/27

- Town Centre Improvements: £46,000.
- New Website and Comms Activity: £30,000 for publicity and community engagement support.
- Consultations & Engagement (community, businesses & visitors): £50,000.
- Remaining Budget: £124,000 allocated for ongoing capacity from 2025/26 (including the Town Centre Manager), board secretariat, plus contingencies.

£127,539 (out of £250,000) is currently spent or committed/contracted. However, due to the delays in the programme, the consultations (businesses, visitors, etc) were put on hold and some of the intended town centre clean-up programmes have not progressed as envisaged.

A breakdown of the original budget and spend and commitments to date are outlined in Annexe1.

Revised and Additional Budget Overview

Following the publication of the new Plan for Neighbourhood prospectus and accompanying guidance, the Board is requested to consider the following budget proposals:

1. Consultation Budget:

- In light of the revised emphasis, it is proposed to increase the consultation budget. This adjustment will facilitate a more extended process and deeper engagement with stakeholders.
- 2. **Capacity Budget:**
 - It is recommended to enhance the capacity budget to support the development of the Regeneration Plan. This may include external resources to assist with drafting the plan, facilitating workshops, and testing funding prioritisation mechanisms.
- 3. **Town Centre Manager and Communications Support:**
 - The Town Centre Manager's budget has been reduced to three days per week, with the remaining two days per week funded separately for work elsewhere in the District. To ensure continuous and effective communication, it is proposed to include a Communications Support Officer. This role will maintain the website, social media, feedback from consultations, and other communications, ensuring ongoing two-way dialogue with the community and businesses regarding the Plan for Neighbourhoods.
- 4. **Enforcement Support Pilot:**
 - As discussed in the previous Board meeting, it is proposed to allocate a portion of the budget to pilot additional enforcement support. The impact of this initiative will be measured, and successful outcomes will inform future funding decisions. This approach may have a more sustainable impact compared to the original clean-up proposals and will complement the new grants for shop fronts funded through the Community Regeneration Partnership. Additionally, the Town Centre Manager will have a small budget to support pride-in-place activities, such as volunteer-led clean-ups and encouraging businesses and landlords to take greater responsibility.
- 5. **Project Development and Surveys:**
 - It is proposed to retain a portion of the budget for the development of projects, conducting surveys (e.g., car parking), and supporting additional work arising from the masterplan (funded through the Community Regeneration Partnership), the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan, or other relevant studies, which will be brought back to the Board for further discussion.

Conclusion: The Board is requested to review and approve the proposed budget adjustments to ensure the successful implementation of the new prospectus and guidance.

Annexe 1

Original Budget Approved July 2024 (with subsequent approved amendment to line 3)

Clean up event & Clacton Town engagement	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total	Spent/ Committed	Balance
1. Shop wrapping	20000			20000	11860	8140
2. Increased Street Cleaning	17000			17000		17000
3. Decorative Street Banners	11000			11000	10500	500
4. Graffiti Removal	1000			1000		1000
5. Website & comms	20000	5000	5000	30000	11554	18446
6. Engagement	30000	10000	10000	50000	18625	31375
Capacity - e.g.Town Centre Mngr		50000	50000	100000	60000	40000
Board & Secretariat Costs	5000	5000	5000	15000	15000	0
Contingency	0	3000	3000	6000		6000
Total	104000	73000	73000	250000	127539	122461

Proposed Revised Budget £250k

Budget	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total
Website & Comms	11,554	5,000	5,000	21,554
Engagement (community, business, young people, visitors)	9,630	38,995	10,000	58,625
Surveys, project preparation		30,000		30,000
Town Centre Manager (TCM)		30,000	30,000	60,000
TCM Budget*	22,360	20,000	20,000	62,360
Contingency		2,461		2,461
Board & secretariat	5,000	5,000	5,000	15,000
Total	48,544	131,456	70,000	250,000

Proposed Additional £200k

Budget	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total
Website & Comms (inc Comms officer)		25,000	25,000	50,000
Regeneration Plan Coordination		40,000		40,000
Top-up surveys, project preparation		10,000		10,000
Enforcement Capacity Pilot		50,000	50,000	100,000
Total		125,000	75,000	200,000