

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 30 December 2025

PRESENT – Councillors McGill (Chair), Cossins, Coe, Mrs Culley, Keir, Mahmud, M Nicholson, Snedker and Walters

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Garner (Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Amy Wennington (Assistant Director, Law and Governance), Seth Pearson (Partnership Director), Mike Poulter (Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

CLS13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS14 PRIDE IN PLACE

A report (previously circulated) was submitted following the receipt of a ‘call-in’ from Cabinet held on 2 December 2025 (Minute C54/Dec/25) in relation to its decision in respect of Pride in Place. The ‘Call-in’ was taken in accordance with the Council’s Constitution and had been signed by three Members of this Council.

The Chair invited those Members who had signed the documentation and who had requested that the decision be ‘called-in’ to outline their reasons for that decision and, in doing so, raised questions and sought clarification to understand the make-up and skills of an unelected board who will be responsible for disposing of ~£20M of public funding; to establish how council elected members will have scrutiny and oversight of ~£20m of public money spend; to determine if the current arrangements obviate the democratic process in respect to ~£20M public funding given to DBC; to understand how the decisions, laid out in the agenda, were made and if indeed the current proposal decisions are valid; to understand why this has been pushed through Cabinet so quickly with no member involvement other than cabinet; and how Cabinet satisfied itself that the paper had to be considered at this meeting and not deferred until a future date, given a ward benefiting from the proposals was under purdah rules due a live by-election.

Members were provided with clarity regarding the Government’s Pride in Place programme, with Members noting that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was the grant funding body and set out the rules for managing the grant. Members were advised that a Neighbourhood Board had been established to lead the programme and would act as the main decision-making body and that the Council’s role was as the accountable body.

In relation to the makeup of the Neighbourhood Board that had been established, Members were advised that guidance from the MHCLG was clear regarding membership and that where a Towns Fund already existed, this would be the basis of the Neighbourhood Board; that membership included representatives from the voluntary and community sector and Membership had been approved by the MHCLG. Members were satisfied that there was an

appropriate range of skill level across the Board.

In relation to the scrutiny and oversight of the funds and the arrangements for allocating the funds, Members raised concern regarding a lack of understanding of the process for investing the funds and the lack of involvement of all Councillors in the process. Members were assured that the MHCLG had provided strict guidance regarding the governance arrangements; that regular updates had been reported to full Council via the Stronger Communities Portfolio reports and membership of the Board included the Leader of the Council and the Stronger Communities portfolio holder. Members were advised that the Council was the accountable body with funds signed off by the S151 officer. Members were informed that representatives from the MHCLG sat on the Neighbourhood Board and that all minutes from these meetings were available to the public, but Officers acknowledged that these could be made more accessible on the Council's website.

Members entered into a discussion regarding the direct costs of management and delivery of the funds and financial liability. Members were assured that Council officers who were members of the board (including the Assistant Director Resources) would ensure that there were no unsustainable residual costs to the Council for any funding allocated.

Members sought clarification regarding independent scrutiny and were advised by Officers that this was still in development and noted that the MHCLG were independently audited. In relation to stakeholder engagement, it was stated that Board representatives were duty bound to engage with their communities and further work was being undertaken to build on local community engagement.

The majority of Members were satisfied following the discussion held on scrutiny and oversight.

Members held a discussion regarding the decisions that led to the five communities being chosen to receive funding; Members were informed that the Board made their decisions based on the data analysis of indices of deprivation and that the guidance from the MHCLG was clear that funds should be focussed on left behind neighbourhoods. Members also discussed the responses to the community engagement exercise, noting the spread of responses across the town.

In relation to the timing of the Pride in Place report to Cabinet, Members noted that to ensure deadlines for application processes were met, the governance arrangements for the Board were required to be in place by 28 November; that Cabinet sought advice from the Assistant Director Law and Governance who confirmed that purdah did not prevent Cabinet from discharging its normal business and the report did not affect public support for a particular political party. It was also stated that the Council did not undertake any publicity in relation to this cabinet report during the pre-election period.

Members were also informed that if the report had been deferred to a later Cabinet meeting, the Board would not have been in a position to move forward with a specific project.

RESOLVED – That, having considered and heard all the information presented to and at this meeting, the majority of this Scrutiny Committee is satisfied with the decision of Cabinet at Minute C54/Dec/25, in relation to all points raised in the Quad of Aims and that no further action in relation to the call-in is required.

