

## **TOWN CENTRE CAPITAL FUND 2019/20 - GUIDANCE NOTE**

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this note is to provide local authorities with guidance on the aims and allocation of the ring-fenced £50m Town Centre Fund distributed through the local authority capital settlement.

### **Aims**

2. The aim of the Town Centre Fund 2019-20 is to enable local authorities to stimulate and support place based economic investments which encourage town centres to diversify and flourish, creating footfall through local improvements and partnerships. Specifically, this fund will contribute to transformative investments which drive local economic activities and re-purpose town centres to become more diverse, successful and sustainable.
3. In particular, the grant will fund a wide range of investments which deliver against the themes of the Town Centre Action Plan including town centre living and supporting town centres to be vibrant, accessible and enterprising places. This could include re-purposing buildings for housing, retail, business, social and community enterprise, services, leisure, and culture, tourism and heritage; and, improving access and infrastructure.

### **Wider expectations and support**

4. It is expected that local authorities make investment decisions in the context of national and local commitments to town centres including the Town Centre First Principle and the Town Centre Action Plan; and more recently, the Place Principle. As such, it is expected that investment decisions are based on approaches which are collaborative and place based with a shared purpose; and, make use of tools and support developed by the Scottish Government, Scotland's Towns Partnership and other key partners.

### **National and local commitments**

5. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting town centres face the challenge of changing and evolving retail patterns; and, is investing in town and neighbourhood centres so that they can be sustainable and thriving places for communities to live, work and enjoy.
6. This investment is in addition to the 26% of capital funding share which is the current agreed baseline between the Scottish Government and Local Government. It is part of a wider boost to the economy by providing over £5 billion of capital investment to grow and modernise Scotland's infrastructure; and, a wider package to support businesses, including maintaining a competitive business rates package.

## Town Centre Action Plan and Town Centre First Principle

7. The Town Centre Action Plan published in 2013 was the Scottish Government's response to the National Town Centre Review. It focused on national and local solutions, encouraging action across public, private and community sectors. The Scottish Government and local government subsequently agreed the Town Centre First Principle which requested that government, local authorities, the wider public sector, businesses and communities put the health of town centres at the heart of proportionate and best value decision making, seeking to deliver the best local outcomes regarding investment and de-investment decisions, alignment of policies, targeting of available resources to priority town centre sites, and encouraging vibrancy, equality and diversity. It committed to a collaborative approach which understands and underpins the long term plan for each town centre.
8. The aim of the fund is to deliver against the themes of the Town Centre Action Plan. Those themes include:
  - **Town Centre Living** – footfall is key to achieving thriving, successful towns centre; and, the best footfall is residential for people who will use shops, services, and will care for its safety and security in the evenings
  - **Vibrant Local Economies** – creating a supportive business environment including the involvement of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and other local partnerships
  - **Enterprising Communities** – social enterprise, services, arts and events; and, community empowerment and community based activities which increase the health, wealth and wellbeing of town centres
  - **Accessible Public Services** – creating and accessing public facilities and services, supported by economic, service and transport hubs
  - **Digital Towns** – exploiting digital technology and promoting Wifi infrastructure to enable access to information, data analytics, marketing opportunities, branding, and communication with the wider world
  - **Proactive Planning** – land reform and supporting the creation of sustainable, low-carbon and connected places which promote natural and cultural assets, designed in partnership with local communities and key stakeholders.

## Scotland's Towns Partnership

9. The Scottish Government funds Scotland's Towns Partnership to provide information, support and services which contribute to the vibrancy, vitality and viability of our town centres and neighbourhoods; and, to support the development of partnerships including Business Improvement Districts.
10. There are a range of tools and resources to support how partners can understand, audit, plan, and improve their town centres. It is expected that local authorities will use a range of tools and approaches to ensure investment decisions are based on an understanding of town centre performance and ownership; shared visions and plans with local communities, partnership and stakeholders fully engaged; and, identification of physical infrastructure changes that will contribute to maximisation of investments and achievement of those visions.

## Tools and resources

- [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP): a unique and dynamic online tool which shows how every town in Scotland with a population of 1,000 or more is interacting with its surrounding settlements and performing against a range of indicators and inter/dependency relationships.
- [USP Your Town Audit](#): add to USP a six-day study which provides the standard benchmark for measuring the health of a Scottish town.
- [Place Standard](#): a framework designed to support communities, public, private and third sectors to work efficiently together to assess the quality of a place.
- [Town Centre Toolkit](#): guidance on designing and planning town centres to be attractive, accessible and active, focusing on urban design, quality, sustainability and use of town assets.

## Support

11. The Town Centre Fund provides an opportunity to build on work by local authorities to develop and implement town centre action plans; and, to realise transformative ambitions arising from those plans. Scotland's Town's Partnership will continue to support local authorities and other key partners in this. However, additional support is offered by Scotland's Towns Partnership in partnership with other key organisations such as: Scottish Futures Trust; Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, or South of Scotland Economic Partnership; and, Architecture and Design Scotland to support the development of investment decisions or work with local authorities individually or across neighbouring or regional authorities, to build momentum, share learning, and, to maximise funding.
12. Local authorities will have their own good practice in terms of monitoring and evaluating the benefits, impacts and outcomes of investment as part of relevant strategies and programmes; and, to ensure that they meet their duty to achieve Best Value. Additional support could also be offered to discuss how best to identify and collect data; assess impact; and, share formats that could contribute to consistent and wider learning.