



Halifax Town Development Board Meeting
Minutes of the meeting held 15th October 2024
Meeting Held by Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Councillor Tim Swift (Chair)
Councillor Sarah Courtney
Councillor Colin Hutchinson
Councillor Geraldine Carter
Councillor Abigail White
Councillor Kelly Thornham
Tracy Harvey
Jason Gregg
Claire Bradshaw
Hilary Barber
Lee Kenny
Natalie Shaw

Other in attendance

Helen Gibson
Caroline Grosvenor
Andrew Hewitt
Shelagh O'Neill
Kate McNicholas
Mohammed Shah
Janet Whitlow
Mehrunnisa Javed
Rob Shipway
Zakariya Ali

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies received from Cllr Thompson.

a. Confirmation of quorum

The meeting was declared quorate.

b. Declaration of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

Approved as a true record.

a. Matters Arising

KM confirmed that the meeting to brief new board members is underway, information around public health has been shared, and other actions on the agenda today.

3. Together Housing Update

CG and HG presented on Together Housing's strategy for Calderdale's high-rise stock, which is a priority for Together Housing, working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Homes England. CG also outlined the work progressing on the high-rise blocks in Halifax town centre, where significant building safety and internal investment works are required. Surveys showed that permanent relocation of residents, primarily older tenants, would be necessary. Together Housing has begun relocating 130 households to permanent accommodation, with most preferring to stay within Calderdale. Additional staff have been assigned to support the process, and a rehousing strategy prioritising vulnerable residents is in place. The moves are expected to take around 18 months.

Councillor Carter asked about the one person who owns their property. HG replied that the team looks at market values and assist owners to find a new home if required.

Councillor Thornham thanked CG and HG for the meeting with ward councillors and the flow of information. She asked about how many households have found alternative accommodation. Six have moved so far with 70 properties held available.

Councillor Hutchinson raised concerns about the impact on the overall availability of social housing in the borough. He asked about any noticeable effects and what mitigations could be put in place to reduce disadvantages for others seeking social tenancies. CG confirmed that Together Housing is working closely with the Council's Housing Options team to explore alternative properties for direct lets. This approach aims to support temporary accommodation efforts and reduce the burden on B&Bs and hostels. CG also highlighted that turnover rates for tenancies have significantly slowed.

Compared to five years ago when turnover was around 10%, it has now halved. This is due to factors such as private landlords exiting the market and fewer people moving on to buy properties because of high mortgage rates, which has reduced the availability of rented accommodation. Together Housing is doing its best to prepare homes for re-letting as quickly as possible through their repairs team. They are also in discussions with the Council and other social housing providers in Calderdale to identify additional measures that could ease the pressures being felt, particularly regarding homelessness or those at risk of homelessness.

Councillor Carter asked at what point it would be determined whether the necessary works could be completed, or if demolition would be the only alternative. HG responded by explaining that a review is currently underway and will progress through the Together Housing governance structure. Once

the process is complete and based on the survey results, they will communicate the outcome to customers and provide further updates. The Chair acknowledged that the review could influence the timing of future discussions and thanked the team for their time.

Action: ZA to share the slides

Action: The Chair to liaise with KM and RS to bring a housing update in the next 12 months.

4. **A629 Phase 2 Update**

AH provided an update on the A629 Western corridor project, which is part of a broader programme involving three corridors (Western, Eastern, and Central). He presented details on the key junctions under construction: Prescott St, Skircoat Rd, Bull Green, Cow Green, Orange St, and Northgate.

- **Prescott Street/ Skircoat Road:** Work started in May, with significant progress on tarmacking and curbing. Pedestrian and traffic management is coordinated with the nearby Halifax Building refurbishment.
- **Bull Green:** Design revisions addressed drainage issues, with tree pit excavation and groundwork for car parking underway.
- **Cow Green:** Kerbs for a new bus turn lane have been installed. The planter has been removed, and safety measures for pedestrians are in place. Uncharted gas valves have been found, requiring design adjustments.
- **Orange Street:** Temporary signals are in place, with work completed on the Southwestern footpath. Steel ducts have been installed for future traffic signals.
- **Northgate:** Existing traffic islands have been removed, widening the road to accommodate ongoing lane closures. Vodafone utility works are under review, with potential time savings.

Additionally, Phase 2B element, which includes footpath work outside the bus station has been reprogrammed. However, to maintain progress, work has moved to Phase 2C, just across the road from the former Timeform building, ahead of schedule. This will not affect the overall programme timeline. The leasing issue has been resolved, and work in that area will begin within the next few days. Coordination with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the bus station is underway to remove fencing for construction access. Regular project updates are provided through weekly bulletins sent out every Friday.

Action: ZA to share the slides.

Councillor Carter asked what the length of this programme is. MS replied it will be a 4 year programme. Councillor White added that there is distribution caused when traffic lights break down and the temporary lights cause queuing. MS highlighted that works have been done to reduce disruption as much as possible. Councillor White added that we do not want the town to come to a standstill when there are events hosted, and flagged the use of the shuttle bus, and the importance of communication.

Councillor Hutchinson asked about the replacement of flags with tarmac on Skircoat Road. In response, Mohammed Shah clarified that the existing flags

are generally being maintained unless specific constraints arise, such as issues with depth or kerbs. The team is working with both planning and highway colleagues to address these challenges, particularly where utilities in the old town centre are problematic. He assured that any left-over access at the end of the project would be retained and used for future highway improvements, recognising they bring character to Halifax.

Councillor Hutchinson also inquired about the impact of the Yorkshire Ambulance Service on the traffic signals at the Broad Street and Orange Street junction. MS confirmed that tests had been conducted, and no interference was detected.

TH expressed concerns about the ongoing disruption in the town centre, acknowledging the efforts of contractors. She noted that communication had improved but highlighted significant parking issues, particularly with the loss of key car parks like Bull Green, Lister Lane, and the one behind the Halifax Swimming Baths, all occupied by contractor vehicles. Additionally, she pointed out the near-empty High Street Car Park, currently used for NHS workers, and stressed the need to reopen it for shoppers, especially with the Christmas season approaching. TH also shared footfall figures, revealing a 15% year-on-year increase in Southgate precinct but a 10-15% drop on Commercial Street, emphasizing the parking and access challenges affecting businesses in the area. She concluded by requesting feedback on the uptake of the town shuttle bus service, noting that while the council had focused on publicity, customer response appeared limited.

MS replied to TH regarding the shuttle service, stating that the feedback received so far has been largely positive, with both drop-in sessions and the BID (Business Improvement District) also reflecting satisfaction. He mentioned that the shuttle service is procured through the Combined Authority, which oversees buses and metro services, and they too have reported favourable responses.

Action: MS to provide further information on the shuttle service usage.

On the issue of the High Street Car Park, MS informed the group that work is in progress to reopen it for public use. The Project Team is working to finalise the necessary adjustments to the equipment in the car park to ensure it is fit for use, with the goal of reopening it by early November, if not by late October — well before the Christmas season. He emphasised that while the Project Team is working closely with Parking Services and other departments to minimise the disruption, a scheme of this scale was bound to cause some inconvenience.

MS expressed satisfaction that communication about the project has been well-received, highlighting the team's efforts to keep the public informed throughout the process, including via the stall at Borough Market.

Councillor Thornham asked about the impact of bus rerouting to the top of town. She noted that the shuttle bus has helped address this. However, feedback from the BID indicated that some people perceive the shuttle as an access bus for individuals with disabilities, which may deter use. It would be beneficial to improve communications to clarify that it's for everyone. MS replied the team are working on encouraging usage of the shuttle, and bus drivers have been supportive in promoting it. Regarding First Bus, they operate

commercially, and they are being cooperative where possible. As we move forward, franchising will offer us different options to manage services better. Regarding different impacts in different parts of the town, JG has seen a reversal in footfall and have had an increase of 5%. Councillor Carter suggested the shuttle bus is not accessible from some entry points into the town.

LK offered the inclusion of information in his next publication.

Action: MS to take this to the Communications Team and discuss LK's offer.

Cllr Carter asked about the Handmade Parade. NS clarified an announcement will follow, and it will be coming to Halifax on 30th November. It will start from the town Hall and finish at George Square, with a focus on the top of town to encourage footfall there.

Cllr Courtney expressed enthusiasm that the works will lead to a great looking town centre and a better flow of traffic. She confirmed the value of talking up the town and the businesses in it.

5. Future High Street Fund update

JW shared an update. The focus is on enhancing George Square to create a high-quality public realm and a green gateway from the top of town, along with an events area. This will connect well with the upcoming Handmade Parade in the future.

Regarding progress, RIBA Stage 3 has been completed, with detailed design set to finish next month. The Phase 2 team is incorporating this project to improve connectivity with the top of town and the work being carried out there within that project. The public toilets are scheduled for demolition at the end of October, marking a significant first step.

In Borough Market, the scaffolding has come down, revealing a refreshed look with the new glass roofing, painted ironwork and lighting. The central 'under the clock' has been refurbished, with work on the base continuing where new cast iron planters are being installed for greenery. Albany Arcade is being refurbished to create an event space that can operate independently, with gates being developed for events when the main market is closed.

The work on Victoria Theatre is nearing completion, a key output is improved accessibility with new lifts and facilities which will enhance the experience for more users. The ticket office has been relocated and the wide entrance area will now provide a café bar area to encourage daytime use of the theatre and new visitors. The scope of the improvements extended following strip out to include new glazing on the frontage of the theatre to future proof the building.

The Art and About trail is progressing well, featuring 20 points of interest to encourage visitors to explore Halifax. Local artists and businesses are involved in creating the 9 new installations, with the first launch planned for early 2025.

Action: ZA to share the slides

Cllr Carter looked forward to the unveiling of the clock in Borough Market.

6. Terms of Reference Review

KM provided an update on the revised draft terms of reference review to the Board, which take forward the suggestions from the previous Board meeting. The terms of reference attached in the papers addresses this proposal and highlights the changes in yellow. It recommends that the membership include three Town Ward Members and an Elected Member from the other political parties that have more than 10% of elected representatives in the borough. Additionally, two more elements are included in the revised terms of reference: moving Board Meetings to a quarterly schedule, which was approved previously, and incorporating a reference to the Board's role in guiding the Ambition for Towns funds, as raised in earlier discussions.

A question was raised regarding Portfolio Holder Board Membership, and it was clarified that the Portfolio Holder is included in the terms of reference as a member. The Leader may attend as required.

LK expressed concern about the number of Calderdale Council attendees. KM reassured that while agenda items do require officers to attend to update on programmes and projects, there is an understanding of their role in supporting but not dominating the meeting.

The revised terms of reference were **approved**.

Action: Cllr Swift to follow up with group leaders to implement the revised terms of reference.

Action: ZA to upload the revised terms of reference to the Halifax Town Board website.

7. Any Other Business

Action: CB / NS to share any information on Christmas activities.

8. Date of next meeting

TBC