# Smethwick Partnership Board Engagement and Funding Subgroup Meeting Notes

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| **Meeting details** | 31 July 2026 |
| **Attendees** | Z Hussain (Chair), C Padda, G Josan, K Patel, R Lake, W Ali |
| **Apologies received** | A Taylor, J Thompson, M Sibi |
| **Support officers** | A Fuidge, E Pate, E Parkes, L Firth and R Rahim |

## 1. Welcome and apologies

1.1. Z Hussain welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies received were reported to members present.

## 2. Declarations of interest raised

2.1. C Padda – Declared interest of existing relationships with organisations connected to submitted applications through his elected member capacity (surgeries held at St Albans, Brasshouse community Centre and the Baba Sang Centre and that occasionally, hot and cold drinks are provided)

2.2. G Josan – Declared interest with regards to the Expression of Interest submission from Holly Lodge High School. G Josan is a Governor at the school and is a trustee at Victora Park Primary Academy.

2.3. Both members were instructed to not participate in discussions relating to the relevant Expression of Interest Form.

## 3. Oversubscription of funding

3.1. Before reviewing the Expressions of Interest received, members were advised that revenue funding requests had exceeded the funding available.

3.2. Clarification was sought regarding the purpose of the EOI stage. It was confirmed that the subgroup's role at this stage was to determine whether applications meet the eligibility criteria, that they fit within the programme themes and should proceed to full application. Members were reminded that progression to full application did not constitute a funding decision and that detailed assessment would take place at a later stage.

3.3. A discussion took place regarding applications submitted by organisations based outside Smethwick. Members considered the importance of ensuring that Pride in Place funding generates maximum benefit within Smethwick,

including through local employment, procurement and service delivery. At the same time, it was acknowledged that organisations based elsewhere may still provide valuable services and outcomes for Smethwick residents.

3.4. The subgroup discussed balancing support for local organisations with ensuring that projects demonstrate the greatest potential benefit for the area. Concerns were raised about funding being used predominantly for travel and overhead costs rather than direct local benefit.

3.5. Questions were raised regarding the financial position of some applicants, particularly where funding requests appeared to exceed existing organisational income. It was clarified that financial viability and value for money considerations would be explored in greater detail during the full application stage rather than at the EOI stage. Members also expressed an interest in understanding beneficiary numbers and impact measures, which would also be assessed through the next phase of the process.

3.6. Following discussion, members agreed that, due to the level of oversubscription, organisations registered within Smethwick should be prioritised during this first funding round. The Chair invited members to formally vote and asked members to raise any objections. No objections were raised.

3.7. **Agreed: To update the eligibility criteria for the current funding round to only allow applications from organisations registered within the investment boundary.**

3.8. **Action: Officers to email all Board members to notify them of the updated eligibility criteria and update funding programme guidance documents and website pages.**

## 4. Smethwick Pride in Place Expression of Interests

4.1. An update was provided on the EOI process. A total of 32 EOIs had been received, with 28 presented to the subgroup for consideration. The remaining four applications had not been included because applicants had not completed the required engagement process with the Neighbourhood Development Officer (NDO) before submission.

4.2. Members were advised that applicants had been provided with a queries log where additional information or clarification was required. While it was recognised that significantly more detail would be requested at full application stage, some EOIs had been submitted without key information necessary for an initial review.

4.3. The subgroup heard that the volume of submissions had created significant capacity pressures as deadlines approached. As a result, it was proposed that,

for future funding rounds, dedicated time would be protected immediately before application deadlines to allow EOIs to be reviewed and applicants supported more effectively. It was also proposed that applicants wishing to complete forms independently should be encouraged to arrange a review meeting with the NDO before submission. This would allow queries to be resolved and applications to be checked for completeness before being formally accepted.

4.4. Members noted that many applications proposed similar activities, and in some instances were targeting the same communities, venues or beneficiary groups. Members recognised opportunities for greater coordination and potential collaboration between applicants.

4.5. Regarding Expression of Interests, the Subgroup agreed which applications would progress to full application stage, and which ones required clarification.

4.6. The Chair sought assurance that all submitted applications had been screened against the eligibility criteria. It was confirmed that this had been completed prior to the meeting.

4.7. Members discussed the volume and detail of paperwork presented to the subgroup. Whilst recognising the value of comprehensive information, concerns were raised about the practicality of reviewing large numbers of applications individually at every meeting. There was support for exploring a more strategic approach moving forward, including alternative presentation formats and summary reports that would allow members to focus on key issues, themes and decisions rather than reviewing extensive documentation in full.

4.8. The discussion then moved to applications submitted by the Sandwell Council. Members acknowledged the positive impact of some council-run services and projects, particularly within libraries and community facilities. However, there was a strong view that the primary purpose of the programme was to support community and voluntary sector organisations. Members felt that council-led projects should generally be progressed through alternative commissioning or delivery routes rather than competing directly alongside community organisations within the grants programme. It was recognised that supporting council projects in place of community organisations could create reputational challenges, particularly where smaller local groups were unsuccessful.

4.9. There was broad agreement that local authority applications should not form part of the current grants process, except where specifically commissioned by the Board through separate arrangements.

4.10. An update was provided regarding external support arrangements by the Neighbourhood Development Officer, including support from SCVO to assist

applicants with policy documents. A declaration of interest was raised by K Patel in relation to SCVO as they sit on the SCVO Board. K Patel did not take part in this discussion.

4.11. Throughout the discussion, members recognised that the current grants process had been designed and agreed by the Board to provide a fair, transparent and proportionate method for assessing applications. Given the high levels of interest and oversubscription experienced in the first funding round, members agreed there would inevitably be lessons learned. These would be reviewed and used to strengthen future funding rounds, improve application processes, enhance support for applicants and help shape a more strategic approach to future investment.

4.12. The Subgroup then agreed which applications would and would not progress to full application stage.

4.13. **Agreed: Local authority-led applications should not form part of the current grants process except where directly commissioned by the Board.**

4.14. **Agreed: Organisations registered within the investment boundary will be prioritised during this funding round due to the level of oversubscription, and applications from those registered outside of the boundary will not be considered.**

4.15. **Agreed: To not accept the two applications from Sandwell Council in the current funding round to prioritise community organisations.**

4.16. **Agreed: To not accept 14 applications from organisations that are not registered within the investment boundary area.**

4.17. **Agreed: Agreed to invite the following applications to full application stage:**

4.17.1. **Brushstrokes**
4.17.2. **Steppingstones in the community**
4.17.3. **Gurdwara Baba Sang Ji**
4.17.4. **Care Link West Midlands**
4.17.5. **Smethwick Heritage Centre**
4.17.6. **Hindu Cultural Resource Centre Sandwell**
4.17.7. **North Smethwick Development Trust**
4.17.8. **Chance Heritage Trust**
4.17.9. **St Albans Community Association**
4.17.10. **Heart in the Stand CIC**
4.17.11. **Pathway Progress CIC**
4.17.12. **Black Country Touring**
4.17.13. **Avery Football Club CIC**
4.17.14. **Holly Lodge High School**

## 5. Any Other Business

5.1. None raised

## 6. Summary of actions and agreements

### 6.1. Actions

6.1.1. Officers to email all Board members to notify them of the updated eligibility criteria and update funding programme guidance documents and website pages.

### 6.2. Agreements

6.2.1. To update the eligibility criteria for the current funding round to only allow applications from organisations registered within the investment boundary. Board members to be informed via email.

6.2.2. Local authority-led applications should not form part of the current grants process except where directly commissioned by the Board.

6.2.3. Organisations registered within the investment boundary will be prioritised during this funding round due to the level of oversubscription, and applications from those registered outside of the boundary will not be considered.

6.2.4. To invite 14 applicants to full application stage (listed in section 4.17).